



Funny Girl: Exploring The Impact of Teaching and Learning Humour in English Language GCSE.

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Abstract

It is known that girls' confidence declines during secondary school. Meanwhile, using humour in writing and speech has been shown to enhance persuasive skills and create confident speakers; the ability to use humour has also been linked to progression for women in the workplace. However, there has been little research into the effect on teenage girls learning to use humour in the English classroom.

This study examines which factors appear to prevent girls from using humour and whether particular teaching strategies might encourage it. The question of whether learning humour can aid academic risk-taking in the English classroom is also investigated. Surveys, semi-structured interviews with teachers and pupils, and the creation and testing of teaching interventions are employed in the investigation.

Findings suggest that using simplified tasks and exemplars can successfully encourage girls to use humour. Additionally, there appears to be a range of reasons that may prevent this, such as lack of both confidence and preparation time. The willingness to take academic risks in the classroom transpires to be highly significant, especially with a Year 10 girls-only cohort when social anxiety is at peak levels.

The small-scale study concludes that encouraging girls to use humour in their English Language GCSE could improve their ability to produce sophisticated persuasive content, and promote confidence. This can be achieved by allowing girls

to experiment and iterate, providing multiple opportunities to use humour in English across their school career.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

I became curious about the topic of humour during my first year of study on the MSc in Learning and Teaching. As an English teacher and Head of Department, I spend a large amount of time teaching pupils to analyse comedic texts such as *Much Ado About Nothing* (Shakespeare, 1600) and the satirical *Pride and Prejudice* (Austen, 1813) but do little in terms of teaching how to write comedy; in short, we teach pupils to be the receivers, rather than the agents, of comedy. I was interested in discovering whether humour could be learnt and what the effects on pupils, specifically teenage girls, might be, both academically and personally.

I found a small body of academic research that supported the promotion of humour writing in the classroom. This research has led to grassroots development in pedagogy, mostly in the United States of America where, notably, according to Goebel (2011, p15) 'Humour is virtually banned from the classroom'. Indeed, in Britain too, there seems to be a fear around the idea of using fun to engage students, perhaps due to the high-stake pressure around the General Certificates of Secondary Education (GCSEs). In the English classroom especially, as well as reading, speaking and writing, our subject tackles cultural issues like racism, misogyny, classism. Humour may not be a suitable mode through which to teach such important and sensitive subjects. However, I also found more positive examples of how humour could aid memory and

performance, whilst creating strong relationships between pupil and pupil, and pupil and teacher. In further US research, Edmondson (1999) and her colleagues found that psychological safety (the belief that we will not be punished or ridiculed when we make a mistake) makes us resilient and persistent. In short, when we feel safe enough to make light of our mistakes, we gain the strength needed to take on larger and riskier intellectual ideas.

Humour has already been used as a successful way to generate more creative and challenging ideas in the corporate world. During his tenure as Head of Apple's Creative Design Studio, Hiroki Asia used humour as a critical catalyst for creative thinking, deploying humour as part of work culture. Humour, he said, 'chased fear from the system, allowing people to think more freely, speak more openly and entertain new scenarios and approaches' (Aaker and Bagdonas, 2021, P142). I found this approach to be radical and exciting; it would effectively counteract schools' focus on increasingly formulaic and convergent thinking, arguably in response to GCSEs that favour that mode of thought (OCR and Clarke, C. 2024). In opposition to this, the commercial world appears to be awake to the importance of creative and divergent thinking. I was curious to find out whether fostering a culture of levity in certain aspects of English could affect intellectual risk-taking and help students become more equipped for an AI future where original thinking, communication and creativity will be paramount.

I was also curious to see if there was research that focused exclusively on girls using humour as I work in an all-girls' school; I know from research that girls' confidence plummets during teenage and that humour can create more confident communicators.

During my review of the literature, I found that there was little to no research on how humour can be taught in single-sex classrooms, be them male or female, which further piqued my interest in the potential benefits to girls, who are traditionally less prone to risk-taking. I was interested to know whether girls might be encouraged to do so if we reframed humour as a persuasive technique and taught them how to deploy it.

Whilst there was no specific pedagogical research on how best to teach girls humour, the critical study of comedy has become increasingly popular in the United States, with an acknowledgement that, more than providing entertainment for audiences, comedy can play a crucial role in understanding and debunking societal pressures and constraints Weaver (2023). Comedy is a serious business, especially when it comes to gender roles and expectations. I felt that everyone involved in girl-centred education should have a broad understanding of the potential power of the genre for this group.

Looking further ahead, I also considered the potential value of this research project to young women entering the workplace. Warner (2007) acknowledges that several Feminist theoretical linguists - Lakoff (2004) and Cameron (2007) included - observe that women use speech in a very different way to men in the workplace, in both the language they use and the way that language is spoken. Baxter (2010) concurs when he suggests that women are often less persuasive and confrontational than their male colleagues. Also of interest to me was the lack of confidence that women feel in the workplace when it comes to discussion (Cameron, 2007) and how using humour has been shown to not only lower cortisol which leads to more productivity in the workplace but that 'the presence of humour in team interactions predicted more functional communication and higher team

performances both in the moment and over time.’ (Aaker and Bagdonas, 2021, p36). If schools are failing to teach young women to use humour and rhetoric to communicate their point of view, then at which point is this knowledge taught? Could teaching humour act as both a performative tool but also one that aids girls (and teachers’) propensity for resilience and ability to take more risks?

Three questions began to come into view and warranted closer consideration through a review of the literature:

- What benefits could girls gain from learning to use humour?

- Is there a connection between academic risk-taking and humour?

- What is the link between the classroom environment, teacher, and girls’ ability to learn this skill?

I made the decision to investigate these questions by examining how learning to use humour could positively affect girls, and the factors that could affect this learning in the classroom. I also wanted to ascertain the importance of cognitive load theory in the preparation of the materials considering the potentially difficult nature of the subject matter.

These questions were especially interesting to me because of the aforementioned reasons, but also because as the current Head of Department for English at an independent all-girls school with 360 students situated in rural Wiltshire, I felt this research could have a

palpable impact on not only the girls' academic lives, including reducing perfectionist tendencies of this social group, but also on their future lives and careers. The research project could also be affecting for girls at other schools nationwide, and I began my research project with a full review of any literature that could help me unearth the headline themes and define and shape my research.

But would that be enough to turn the tide of misogyny in the boardroom? How does Shakespeare's Beatrice from *Much Ado About Nothing* conquer the stifling and murderous patriarchy, albeit in Elizabethan England? By using humour.

Chapter Two: The Literature Review

Introduction to humour

One of my main concerns with the literature review was ensuring that the sources gave me a wide enough take on what was a relatively unusual subject for educational research. I knew that humour in the classroom was important to pupils from the research of Goebel (2011), who reports that when students are asked to list the most important characteristics of an effective teacher, having a sense of humour consistently ranks highly. Humour appears to be an important aspect of the classroom for pupils; I was curious to gain teachers' perspectives on this subject, as well as whether they believed it was actually possible to teach humour to students. I was also interested in how humour and laughing had been shown to lead to a plethora of positive health benefits,

including improving the body's immune system, circulation, tolerance of pain, as well as stress reduction. These findings seemed highly relevant for a generation of children who, over the past two decades, have been reported as experiencing growing mental health difficulties (Strong & Sesma-Vazquez, 2015). From a British context, several reports and studies have been published that indicate a rapid upswing in the number of young people experiencing emotional disorders (NHS Digital, 2020), a trend I was clearly aware of being that I teach at a secondary school. I was curious about the role humour could play in helping young people to reframe their outlook and possibly increase confidence and well being.

Indeed, beyond the physiological benefits, humour has been discussed in connection with stronger mental health by a number of research studies, including Kher et al (1999), Goebel (2001), Martin (2007) and Morrison (2012). Kher et al (1999) posit the idea that humour greatly reduces the anxiety generated by test situations or when learning difficult material in class, whereas Goebel (2001) concludes that shared humour in the classroom can lead to a greater bond between classmates irrespective of differences. Martin (2007) also suggests that positive (as opposed to demeaning) humour can lead to a greater sense of well-being, perceptions of mastery and control, and a reduction in anxiety, depression, and anger' (2007). Furthermore, Morrison (2007) suggests that humour is more about 'seeing funny, than being funny', suggesting humour is possible for everybody in the classroom, irrelevant of perceived ability to be an amusing person, linking to Dweck's Growth Mindset theory.

Martin's (2007) idea around humour creating an immediacy, and therefore a more trusted relationship, between teacher and student is also fascinating. The arguments for including humour in the classroom seem to be numerous, dependent on careful usage. It is crucial that rules are established when humour is used in this environment, for example, pupils are encouraged to punch up and use subversive humour to name injustice, rather than punching down on more vulnerable and disenfranchised groups (Goebel, 2011). With careful planning, humour in the classroom could add a rich seam to teaching and learning.

Humour and Academic Risk-Taking

In my Year 1 study, I found anxiety around using humour in both students and teachers. The results also pointed to a reticence in trying styles of writing that involved risk-taking; it is well-documented that girls tend to learn differently to boys, being more concerned with mastering the subject (Kenney-Benson, Pomerania, Ryan & Patrick, 2006). Girls want to make sure they really understand the material before committing and if so, these nuances of learning need to be planned for. Students would need to feel supported and entirely confident before they take on larger pieces of humour writing.

Overall, the strongest themes for not wanting to try humour writing were linked to fear of failure.

The Role of Teacher-Pupil Relationship

In my Year 2 project, one of my research questions was focused on the importance of classroom environment and it was crucial to understand the variables at work when considering how to most effectively teach humour to girls. I wanted to understand whether it would be more effective to focus on a more didactic approach in the teacher-pupil relationship, bearing in mind the unusual nature of the content for the audience.

To begin with, I looked at Vgotsky (1962, 1978) who focused on dialogue between adults and children with a strong focus on how best to transmit knowledge. Alongside this literature, I studied Bakhtin (1981) who was more interested in the constructive collaboration of meaning both with and between pupils, considering both monologic and dialogic talk. Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) proposed that the typical initiation, response, feedback scenario (Mercer, 1995) went to make up a significant amount of teacher-pupil discussion but actually, Wolf, Crosson and Resnick (2006) show that deeper levels of understanding are possible when pupils are asked to go into more detail and expand on their answers more.

Essentially, the literature includes many studies to show how improved learning occurs when teachers engage in more dialogic discussion with their students – i.e. when conversations are interactive. Bearing in mind the novel subject of humour, dialogic content would benefit the process of learning how to use humour, as well as create more time for pupil-pupil and teacher-pupil discussion which, as Hattie (2012)

highlights, only accounts for less than five per cent of class time, with teacher talk dominating. Bearing in mind the fact that humour is gendered and not perceived as natural terrain for women (Hitchens, 2007), the teacher-pupil relationship and discussion arguably becomes even more important.

Finally, the role of the teacher within the relationship when teaching humour is key, not only to develop higher-order skills of reasoning and analysis but also to allow scaffolded learning (Bruner, 1983). Teacher guidance through dialogue is also important to pupil's development of metacognition and self-regulation, as Digneth, Buettner and Langfield (2008) showed in their meta-analysis of self-regulation strategies in primary schools in Germany. Teachers can model how to navigate and utilise humour in their writing so that pupils can emulate this during group work (Webb, Nemer and Ing, 2006).

The Role of Pupil-Pupil Relationship

The literature points to the importance of pair work or group work with Saloman (1993) arguing that cognition does not exist in isolation but collectively between individuals and therefore knowledge is a collaborative construction, building on Vgotsky's (1978) idea that language is a cultural tool. Smith et al.'s (2009) assertion that the group achieved more than the pupils could do working individually is supported by the research of Laughlin et al. (2006) who found that a group can perform with greater success than the best member of that group. Certainly, group discussion allows more exploration to take place as Barnes (2010) advises, and in the context of learning to use humour, pupils will

need to think out loud, moot ideas, organise thoughts and suggest solutions without fear of embarrassment or offense. However, a meta-analysis of collaborative learning by Murphy et al. (2009) found that not all group work led to significant progress in learning with pupil discussion not necessarily resulting in comprehension, critical thinking or reasoning. Mercer (2013) corroborates this view with his assertion that that 'much of the group work that goes on in classrooms has little educational value' (p158). In contrast to this though, is the difference that humour itself can make to relationships, with Goebel (2011) emphasising the personal bonds that are forged through humour per se, and Cornett (2001) highlighting the connectedness and rapport that is built by laughing together.

Humour and Confidence

Various research studies explore how confidence can be engendered in class and I was keen to understand whether humour could play a part in cultivating that quality, and the best mode to teach it in. In Thompson's (2007) study, teachers reported how pupils enjoyed learning, developed greater confidence and felt motivated and excited by lessons where talk was the predominate mode of expression, with the teachers giving reasons for this, such as pupils could 'make mistakes in a safe environment' (p.59). Jones (2010) takes this further by stating that in the classroom, pupils gain confidence by participating in a range of activities where interaction is required (p.62). To underpin this, Hattie (2012) reflects on his study of 800 meta-analyses stating that when the theme of confidence reoccurs, it is the 'most powerful precursor and outcome of schooling'.

The literature suggested that creating an environment where talk was given dominance

over writing, where students were able to talk through their ideas without committing them to paper, bred confidence.

With a more specific focus on the part humour could play within that development of confidence, Goebel (2011) refers to the young adult novel, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (Alexie, 2007) where the narrator says that he takes his drawing of humorous cartoons seriously because..... 'I use them to understand the world. I use them to make fun of the world.' (p95). I was curious to know whether the skills of humour could aid a satirical or ironic perception of the world, and therefore enable girls to make fun and become agentic in a world that seeks to objectify and reduce them. However, despite Thompson's suggestion that children were more likely to feel confident and motivated in classes where talk was the primary mode of expression, when learning humour for the first time, I questioned whether writing would be a safer place to start.

Developing Humour in English Learning and Teaching

Introduction

As I am an English teacher and Head of Department, it was important for to investigate literature that focuses on the role of humour within the teaching and learning of my subject. The researcher that placed most importance on this was Goebel (2011) who highlights the importance of English as a key player in preparing students for a

lifelong love of reading. Humour can play a central role in the English classroom by introducing students to humorous wit in novels and books, a trait much admired by many teenagers. Therefore, whilst many areas of the subject are not appealing for students – for example, see the current iteration of GCSE English Language, a subject that OCR claim should be ‘redesigned as a matter of urgency’ - humour ‘almost always gets an enthusiastic reception.’ (p16). Moreover, this is key because, according to Cornett, students’ interest in particular reading material accounts ‘for 30 times the variance in reading success, and humour provokes interest.’ Therefore, providing humorous texts to dormant or lapsed readers could arguably go towards stemming the serious decline in reading.

Humour in English Learning and Teaching

Several researchers highlight the benefits of promoting humour in English teaching.

Shade (1999) argues that because much of humour requires careful attention to, and a deftness with, language, gifted students are often adept in the reading and producing of humorous texts. The close relationship between humour and creativity 'allows an individual to 'jump the track' or 'think outside the box' more successfully' and to be more receptive to the kinds of risk that bright students need if they are to feel intellectually challenged.' (p45) At the same time, humour is equally attractive to those pupils who may struggle with the subject. By minimising anxiety and creating trust between teacher and other classmates, humour, states Goebel (2011), invites 'language sharing and experimentation', creating a low anxiety and high confidence classroom (p17).

Goebel (2011) also explains humour as a writerly decision one makes with language, presenting it as nothing other than the careful and effective use of language. This demystifies the genre as a fixed territory for those with a natural predilection for comedy that prevents so many girls from attempting to use it.

Indeed, much humour relies on figurative language and wordplay which are deemed to be a natural part of the subject. Humour, then, could be seen as very much part of the English classroom, with Ziv (1998) mooted that research shows that student performance increases by nearly 10 percent when teachers judiciously use humour (a few times per class) in a way specifically related to key points in the lesson.' (p5) In my own teaching, I have found that humour can help to break down barriers, further communication and empathy, and aid students in mastering wit and rhetoric in both their English writing, appreciation of plays in literature, and in Speaking and Listening. However, it should be said that there are no large-scale research studies to fully support these claims.

Developing Girls' Ability to Use Humour

Introduction

The review of the literature on the benefits of learning humour with regards to increased academic risk-taking and confidence relates to both male and female students with little

mention of the potential pit falls, other than that of offending others. The literature specifically on the subject of girls using humour is especially sparse. I discovered no study on the how girls use humour in the English classroom, or any subject classroom, which only increased my reasons for focusing my research on an all-girls' school. Therefore, I drew on some research that examined very recent data on girls' confidence; girls' learning behaviours in the classroom; the way girls and young women may use humour; and then linked it to the benefits to women in the workplace.

The literature suggested that since the beginning of the 21st century, there had been growing concern about the growth of mental health problems in young people across the world, (Strong & Sesma-Vazquez, 2015) with teenage girls providing much of the debate in both media and academic circles. Pressures from society, parents and school to conform to a particular ideal, both physically, emotionally and psychologically – in addition to the biological juncture of puberty - have created the perfect storm in relation to girls' mental health.

With regards to mental health, the desire for perfection may be higher in all girls boarding school than average but regardless of schooling, girls' confidence in taking risks reduces significantly in later teenage years. For example, in upper primary school, 48% of girls have the confidence to take risks, and this increases to 67% of girls by lower secondary school but then falls back to 48% by the end of Year 11 (GDST report, 2022). Additionally, the social conditioning of girls and young women to seek male protection creates a cautious and risk-averse psychology, hence my interest in whether learning to use humour could remedy this mindset.

Characteristics of Female Humour and its Implications for Learning

Miran-Spektar et al (2023) looked closely at female speakers of 2,400 TED talks, as well as more than 200 start-up pitches, and found that female speakers who used humour were more popular and perceived as more influential than both less-funny women and comparably funny men.

Humour communicates both warmth and competence and therefore liberates women from the stereotype of 'warmth-competence double bind' that prevents women in power from exerting influence in work situations. This research is clearly targeted at women rather than girls. However, in the absence of any research on the characteristics of girls' humour and its implications for learning, it was interesting to consider. The study also found that women tended not to use the same sort of material as their male counterparts: their humour tended to be unique to them as individuals, personal and based on their experiences, i.e. more authentic. This research study demonstrates the power that humour can wield to overcome bias, helping girls and women to succeed in the public domain.

Girls' Use of Humour and Classroom Relationships

Goebels (2011) warns that because humour intentionally transgresses boundaries and often uses people as the target of jokes, it presents a potential danger for the secondary classroom. Clearly, students should not be ridiculing each other, their

teachers, staff, or administrators, but teaching pupils to use satire and irony could yet prove to be a potentially positive and empowering prospect for teenage girls.

However, it is important to note how significant friendship groups are at this juncture, with Cruddas and Haddock (2003) investigating the impact of friendship groups on girls' learning. They found that girls felt they learned well when they were learning collaboratively and therefore, the literature underlines how crucial it is that the tone and direction of any humour be pointed towards culture and stereotypes for instance, rather than each other, with Goebels suggesting that 'no humour shared in class may target specific individuals in this school area, with the exception of your being allowed to make fun of yourself.' (2011, p21). Despite the consideration of getting the tone and direction of humour right, the benefits, including its ability to create personal bonds between students and teachers, and between students of differing backgrounds, cannot be overlooked (Cornett, 2001)

Girls' Use of Humour in Relation to Confidence and Academic Risk-Taking

At present, critical studies of humour do not include a gendered framework that solely focuses on teenage girls. At its most specific, research has been completed on how women per se are impacted by humour. For example, Inger-Lise Kalviknes Bore (2010) asks how and why women have been constructed as unfunny. She argues that "these gendered constructions [of women as unfunny] can be related to a patriarchal opposition between comedy and appropriate feminine behaviour" (p65). Ultimately, in a VUCA

(Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous) world (Bennis et al, 1985), young women know what they need to thrive in the future, and they have every right to expect that from their education: 'What they need are strong minds, up to the challenge of coping with the complexities of twenty-first century-life' (Claxton, 2009, p66). This idea is developed further by McAuliffe (2013, p53):

'When girls and young women dare to be funny, they are bucking pressure to accept society as it is. Instead of passively accepting norms set by a patriarchal society as it is, they make observations about all that is absurd and unjust in the world around them.'

The generation known as 'snowflakes' show a good understanding that the future is going to bring change and challenge and that they need to be equipped to deal with whatever those challenges are. According to recent reports (GDST, 2022), girls and young women know they need to grow the requisite skills to face whatever challenges come from a world exacerbated by negative environmental and societal issues, and perhaps levity, ironically, is the way to do just that.

Girls' Use of Humour and Women in the Workplace

Looking to the workplace, it is clear the gender gap prevails across many professions in the UK (Global Gender Gap Report 2023). Despite girls still outranking boys at GCSE and A Level (Joint Council of Qualifications, 2023), more boys go on to attain First Class degrees at university (Higher Education Policy Institute, 2023) and then go on to leadership positions in their preferred careers. Women are still not reaching parity with their male

counterparts and, whilst mitigating issues like childcare, domestic arrangements and emotional labour are sadly still a factor, a lack of agency and ability to take calculated risks whilst feeling safe are seen as significant.

Traditional roles of leadership are under scrutiny from 11-18 year old girls as they reject the male model of patriarchal leadership structures and move more towards a collaborative style of leadership (GDST 2022). Girls and young women arguably need to learn how to persuade and manage conversations with men in a confident and masterful way to bridge the gender gap and step into play, and humour is an important part of that relational strategy. Interestingly for my study, Baxter (2010) suggests that girls have not been given the opportunity to learn a 'public voice' that is more competitive and adversarial (p87). She suggests this is important because it means that women may not be able to be effective in the workplace either with men or managers' (p.89), where they may need to 'deploy the skills of discussion, argument and persuasion with larger, and unfamiliar groups of people' (p90). How can schools help to nurture a more robust and braver girl?

Promoting Humour in the Classroom

Introduction

The potential benefits of humour to teenage girls are clear. The literature, albeit light on specific humour references, highlights ways that teachers can promote subjects that involve more academic risk-taking than others with themes falling into two main categories: firstly, how to create a classroom environment where academic risk-taking

can be promoted to girls and secondly, appropriate strategies that could encourage girls to experiment with humour in written or verbal responses.

The Creation of a Suitable Girls' Classroom Environment to Learn Humour

Jones (2010) points to the importance of the 'tenor or interpersonal ambience of the classroom' (p64). Creating the right atmosphere for learning a high-risk genre like humour would be key and Jones shows how teachers can do this by varying the language she uses, with pupils taking more central or distant roles in the classroom dependent on different lessons phases so that they are able to engage 'collectively, critically and constructively with one another'. The creation of distinct phases of interaction enables pupils to collaborate when they feel ready.

The concept of a 'dialogic classroom' (Alexander, 2008) would also be crucial for learning how to create and respond to a more high-risk genre like humour for teenage girls, including his recommendations for collective learning, where pupils complete tasks together, and reciprocal activities, where teacher and pupils listen to each other's ideas and discuss them, moving towards possible alternatives. This workshop ambience seems a positive idea for the subject in hand, where both teachers and students will be similarly unused to the genre and an atmosphere of failing forwards can be established.

Jones (2007) emphasises that metacognition takes place through a complex process and careful planning by the teacher is crucial. She also states that pupils need time during

lessons 'to think carefully about their thinking and to articulate their learning'. It is clear therefore that peer-to-peer dialogue plays a significant role in promoting metacognition in the classroom and perhaps, more than other normalised subjects, teachers are going to have to work harder on creating a comfortable 'interpersonal ambience' in the classroom (2010, p64) when teaching humour.

Understanding the current thinking on girl-friendly pedagogy was crucial to the conceptualisation of lessons and approaches that would work best to teach and motivate the girls.

Teaching Strategies Designed to Promote Humour

The literature includes many teaching strategies that could be implemented in order to promote humour within English Language if we take high-risk academic activities as a proxy for humour, bearing in mind the dearth of existing research. Perhaps the closest activity to humour in terms of risk-taking for girls is oracy, where the fear of making errors in a public way and appearing vulnerable to the group is paramount (Wagner, 2015).

Alexander's (2003) study suggests that whole class discussions are effective in promoting oracy, with extension being crucial, see also Barnes (2010), who recommends the same. The process involves asking individual pupils to explain or expand on their answers as well

as ensuring sufficient thinking time is provided for pupils when formulating responses. In addition to this, group discussion between pupils is cited as an effective way to promote cognition and metacognition, transforming individual thinking via incremental activity (Mercer, 2013).

The novelty of learning to use humour, despite it being discussed as a persuasive skill and therefore not unfamiliar, means that Sweller's Cognitive Load Theory (1988) is a crucial teaching strategy to consider.

Due to the challenging and intricate nature of the subject matter, humour demands greater cognitive effort (Kalyuga et al., 2003); learning how to use a skill like humour writing will entail high intrinsic load which will pose challenges. There are several other reasons for considering CLT specifically in reference to learning humour: the methods of delivery and classroom environment can influence processing and the ability to retain information (Paas et al., 2003). Furthermore, the range of learning styles in our school's English sets, will further exacerbate cognitive load and prevent the materials being understood effectively. Additionally, there are little to no existing learning resources in libraries which can contribute to heightened extraneous load and diminish learning outcomes (Brünken et al., 2003). What is clear is that passive instructional approaches may restrict understanding, however, bearing in mind the unique nature of the subject matter, some form of memorising or rote learning will arguably be necessary to engage and succeed with the techniques themselves.

Teaching Strategies Designed to Promote Humour in English lessons for Teenage girls

As referenced, there is no specific research on teaching humour to girls in English learning and teaching, however, there are some useful studies to suggest the best pedagogical strategies specifically designed around girls' learning styles.

Varied activities, using all senses.

Relatively recent neuroscience research (Goswami and Bryant, 2007) demonstrates that learning depends on the development of multi-sensory networks of neurons distributed across the entire brain. The result of this is for classes to feature a variety of activities with multi-sensory approaches (GDST, 2022)

Learning as a social activity

The central role of learning from others is highlighted by Vygotsky's research, which indicates how much further a pupil can go when learning with the support of a teacher, parent, carer or peer; such interactions need language, challenge, and activity. Our all-female department will live-write their own articles and scaffold students work, providing effective modelling for the classes.

Growth Mind Set

Dweck's research (1986, 1999) argues that teachers should praise effort rather than performance. As Dweck has shown, children who believe that their intelligence - or ability to be humorous - is fixed are less likely to make an effort to learn, whereas those who believe they have an ability to amuse can grow and will try harder. (GDST, 2022)

Collaborative Learning

Collaborative learning has been clearly demonstrated by research from more than one line of enquiry (Howe and Mercer, 2007). In particular, encouraging children to pursue joint goals, explain their understanding, express different points of view and attempt to reach consensus through discussion have all been found to help learning and understanding. At points during the Scheme of Work there will be moments of group and solo work, with group work providing support to those girls in need of reassurance.

Peer Interaction:

Productive peer interaction depends on the nature of the talk among pupils in their groups, and in particular the achievement of what Barnes and Mercer call 'exploratory talk' (Barnes and Hodgkinson, 2008), such that children may 'talk themselves into understanding', hence the importance of pair and group work in the SoW.

Emerging Research Questions

Despite the lack of specific research studies on the benefits of humour to teenage girls, the literature suggested that there were interesting and powerful possibilities if they were able to learn how to use humour as a persuasive skill. Aside from improving the English Language work itself, it could aid with academic risk-taking and develop confidence, with the latter being, as clearly emerges from the literature, of clear importance for this group, positively impacting their future career chances and lives overall.

Therefore, the following research questions emerged from the literature:

- 1. Which teaching strategies might encourage girls to use humour in GCSE English Language?**
- 2. Which factors appear to prevent girls from choosing to leverage humour as a persuasive skill?**
- 3. To what extent does the encouragement of humour in English Language improve teenage girls' propensity for academic risk-taking and confidence?**

Chapter Three - Research Plan and Schedule

Research Methodology

Introduction

My investigation was established on whether it was possible to teach humour as a persuasive skill to teenage girls and the consequential effects this might have on confidence and academic risk-taking.

The reasons for choosing this project were manifold but included the following reasons. Firstly, the literature indicated the topic I had chosen was worthwhile investigating; it was an area that had garnered a limited amount of previous research, but it could lead to improvements and development within my own practice. The study would also be collaborative with the department and give us interesting and original findings to use at our own school, as well as potentially share with teachers at single-sex schools across the country.

I chose to use practitioner research methodology in order to understand and work on problems arising from my own professional practice and conduct the research in a way that made the research as easy as possible to replicate and improve upon. My aim was also to make the findings as theoretically rigorous as possible.

I made the decision to use mostly qualitative methods for research as these would provide the deepest, richest insights into the effects of humour and teenage girls' perceptions.

The interventions were designed to allow me to examine which factors might prevent pupils from using humour in their English Language work; which teaching strategies could help them to use humour more often; and, importantly, allow me to assess the extent to which promoting the use of humour in English Language lessons improved both their confidence and academic risk-taking.

The Research Design

Design Outline

Details of participants included in the research:

The Year 10 GCSE teachers of which there are four. To ensure anonymity, I have given the four teachers pseudonyms that are reflective of their gender and ethnicity: Olivia; Kristy; Eleanor; Gillian.

Year 10 as a year group of which there are 60. This year group were chosen as they would be mature enough to understand expectations around behaviours and able to understand the benefits of using humour in their work from an academic perspective, if they wished to experiment with it.

My own Year 10 class of which there are 12. One pupil has Special Educational Needs, and there are none with English as an Additional Language. This group was used as a smaller sample of the Year 10 student population to provide some indicative findings for exploring the research questions, although would not be a true representation for the entire cohort (Check & Schutt, 2012).

I designed two interventions in total:

- 1) The English Dept took part in a Comedy Workshop with a professional comedian

- 2) The whole of Year 10 was taught a Scheme of Work: the objective was to teach them how to use humour in their GCSE English Language Spoken Endorsement if they so wished to.

By Year 10, girls' confidence has already begun to slide, with the biological event of puberty making a significant difference, although expectations around behaviours and the added pressure of GCSEs also making an impact. By focusing in on the Year 10 group and their GCSE Spoken Endorsement, I could ensure that any learning on humour be taken on board as a serious endeavour and hope to make a significant impact, although I had to ensure that it was clear to candidates that they did not have to use humour in their Spoken Endorsement if they did not wish to and it would make no difference to their marks.

The GCSE Year 10 teachers took part in a discussion with semi-structured questions in the main department meeting, and I then later met up with them individually, using field notes throughout.

My Year 10 class were interviewed at two points – after they had been taught the SoW ahead of writing their Spoken Endorsement and after they had written a later essay, at the end of the process.

I decided to use mainly group interviews when designing my research – with both teachers and pupils.

However, at the front of the process, I used a survey to the entire Year 10 cohort for speed and ease so I could garner an overview of what they perceived to be important in the 21st century for women, as well as other more specific questions on using humour.

Data Gathering and Materials Used

In order to provide a broad view of the research, I chose to gather both quantitative and qualitative information (Gorard and Taylor, 2004; Cresswell and Clark, 2007) from the three different groups, with the project mostly being qualitative based.

The Use of Surveys

I decided to conduct the first stage of my research using a survey for a variety of reasons. Firstly, Cohen et al (2018) points out that questionnaires are a quick and easy way to

collect valid and reliable data from a larger sample or population. Additionally, Dornyei (2007) emphasises how quick and simple it is to analyse questionnaires. Moreover, the pupils were comfortable with Microsoft Forms which meant they were easy to distribute, a key consideration for researchers according to Edwards and Talbot (1994). The attraction of the method was therefore clear in relation to this investigation as it allowed for generalisations to be suggested about the way in which students perceive:

- 1) What skills the girls perceived to be important to them in a 21st century world
- 2) How learning to use humour may stand them in good stead, not only in the English Language GCSE but also for the workplace.

It made sense for me to use this method for the quantitative element of the research although I was aware that the responses of the pupils that responded to the survey wouldn't necessarily reflect the whole year group.

In terms of delivery, the student questionnaires (Appendix 1) were emailed to 62 pupils by way of Microsoft forms, with 46 returning them. Year 10 teachers were encouraged to remind their groups to fill them out in Reading Time at the start of the class to avoid taking up learning time in this important year. Students could opt out if they wished to. By not being present during completion, any pressure Year 10 may have felt was minimised. Sedgwick (2015) points out the dangers of the controlling party potentially affecting results, but my remote arrangements potentially increased the validity of the responses.

However, although I chose a survey to start the project off, there were many drawbacks. For example, where interviews allow for a much more nuanced read of an individual's knowledge, likes and dislikes, beliefs etc (Cohen et al., 2001, p411), questionnaires can only deliver a flat read as such. Cohen et al. also highlight that questionnaires can mean that respondents interpret the same words in multiple ways, citing this as the 'heart of the problem with questionnaires' (p384) and clearly, surveys do not allow the flexibility for any follow-on discussion that can occur in semi-structured interviews. Despite these limitations, I chose the initial survey because it worked well in introducing the project to the girls. For example, using broader style questions at the start allowed me to address more generic but important questions on perceptions on what skill the girls felt were going to be important for women in the 21st century, before moving onto the more specific questions on humour. My aim here was to signpost a potential link between the two that girls might be able to perceive.

Clearly, there are drawbacks with surveys - pupils may still perceive them as an institutional tool and answered in a way that they felt was expected - but I felt a mix of survey questions was appropriate in gaining a broad understanding of how the Year 10 pupils viewed the subject matter. I intended to triangulate the responses with those of the GCSE teachers to assess any overlapping themes that might be a helpful starting point for the following interviews with my own class; semi-structured interviews were the method that played the largest part in my research design due to their ability to garner rich and deep responses.

The Use of Interviews

I chose to use interviews as the main method of collecting data for my research project in order to provide richer and more nuanced data. Although I felt the survey would be useful for collecting a snapshot of Year 10's perceptions, the benefits of using interviews to collect data are multiple according to Walford (2001), Cohen et al (2011) and Thomas (2012).

Cohen (2011) reports that one of the benefits of the class interview would be to track conversations as a detached observer. I would also get more 'authentic.....rich contextual data, first-hand data, what people do may be different from what they say they do' whilst being able to acquire a large amount of data over a relatively short space of time (Walford, 2001). Walford (2001) additionally goes on to emphasise the immediacy and direct focus on the approach. However, there were drawbacks. One of the caveats is that anything said will be of course co-created by the group, and that individuals are likely to be affected by a numerous amount of factors on the day, e.g. external events. Walford also points to the fact that whatever the interviewee says on the day is opinion and perception relative to that point in time and could be dishonest or inaccurate (p90).

Ultimately though, Kvale (1996) posits that this is the whole point of the activity: the co-construction of knowledge by the group, similarly to Cohen et al (2011) who emphasises that knowledge should be constructed by the group.

Like the teacher's interviews, I elected for semi-structured conversations, perhaps even more relevant when you are dealing with teenagers and need to guide 'the direction of the interview to enable them to communicate what was relevant' (Bryman, 2004).

However, I was also cognisant of the fact that the students 'have been socialised to say and write what they think those in authority expect (Cook-Sather, 2002) and therefore it was best to minimise input into the conversation. Regardless of my decisions to be as recessive as possible, my presence as teacher could have affected their responses and this needs to be considered in terms of reliability of the data.

The questions were designed to be funnel in shape so that broader questions on the skills women will need to be successful in the 21st Century questions started proceedings (Kvale, 2007). The decision for this was two-fold. Firstly, I needed to ascertain what the girls' perceptions of their future selves were. Then we moved onto humour itself, sandwiched between the broader questions and the students' specific ideas on what would aid them in attempting to write humour. Opening with questions on humour directly would have affected their openness in considering humour as an acceptable mode of writing and possible for them.

The Use of Note Taking

I planned to take notes from the group and individual interview and then use coding analysis to sort them into particular themes (Kerlinger, 1970).

Specifically, I was looking for the themes, phrases, terms and key words that emerged through discussion. After extracting the key relevant themes, I checked through the evidence collected, comparing and contrasting the data, observing any patterns in the responses and then comparing them with the literature that I had originally reviewed.

By theming trends across all responses after each interview, be they from teacher or pupil, I was able to organise information and compare effectively.

Procedure and Participants

Research Plan and Schedule

Figure 1: The Research Plan and Schedule

Steps Taken
1. Ethics Approved
2. Initial Survey to Year 10 Cohort
3. Initial Class interview - Pre-Intervention
4. Teacher Intervention: Comedy Training Workshop with Teachers
5. Collaboration with Teachers on SoW with Feedback on the Intervention

6. Student Intervention: SOW and Spoken Endorsement
7. Additional Writing Activity to Increase Take Up of Humour Writing
8. Concluding Interview with Class
9. Concluding Interview with Teachers

Ethics

During the design, implementation, analysis and reporting phases of this research project, every attempt was made to follow the British Educational Research Association ethical guidelines (BERA, 2011). My research project gained CUREC approval from the University of Oxford Ethical Committee (**Appendix 1**). I then wrote a letter to the Acting Headmistress to seek permission to conduct the research in the school (**Appendix 2**). This permission was granted. I told the participants I was undertaking academic research and that I was interested in the topic of using humour in English Language, with a focus on girls using humour specifically and they would have the opportunity to use this in their GCSE Spoken Endorsement if they so wished to. (**Appendix 3**) Parents, teachers and students were aware that participation in the project was completely voluntary, individuals were

anonymised and understood that the decision to humour or not in their GCSE Spoken Endorsement would not affect their marks. All participating parties gave informed consent, were briefed, and had the right to withdraw at any time.

The research I carried out was focused on the questions I had submitted to CUREC and had consequently been approved; the purpose of the project was to improve our girls' GCSE writing skills, with other possible benefits, and was undertaken with their best interests in mind. Importantly, I reiterated that if girls did not decide to use humour in their GCSE Spoken Endorsement, then this would not affect their marks.

At the beginning of the whole class interview, I repeated the points on anonymity and the right to withdraw, as well as reiterating the aims of the project.

The whole of Year 10 had the intervention – five groups in total, including mine. Aware of bias, I worked to ensure that my class were not given extra support to help with their learning of humour skills to the other pupils in the year, so as not to unfairly advantage those girls. I was aware that my interest in the success of the project might unconsciously increase the time I spent on it in class so closely followed ethical guidelines (BERA, 2011)

As their class teacher, the perceived power dynamic may have also pressured girls into adding to the discussion when they would rather not. I addressed this by dealing sensitively with the interview, treating participants with respect to ensure I achieved my safeguarding responsibilities (Powell and Smith, 2009). I also pre-warned students on the date of the class interview, with the option to work in the school library if they preferred.

I understood that the class discussion could make my research project less desirable and cloud the girls' perception of GCSE writing, i.e. creating anxiety around the idea of writing with humour. I made it clear in the whole class and teacher interviews discussion, and on parental and pupil forms, that girls would not be forced to use these methods in their Spoken Endorsement if they did not wish to, only to experiment as they would with any other tone/style. The fact that the student intervention was based around the GCSE Spoken Endorsement meant that this message was crucial to communicate.

I gave the same assurances about confidentiality and anonymity to the GCSE teachers I interviewed, ensuring they understood that there was no obligation to take part in the research project and emphasised that they were under no pressure from me as Head of Department to take part in the process although I was mindful that this would be difficult for them on a professional basis. All the teachers assured me they were available for interview and interested in the project.

The Initial Survey with Pupils

Methods of sampling were selected in accordance with the scale and timings of the study, and carried out in school for convenience. All of the Year 10 groups were sent the questionnaire (**Appendix 4**).

The pupil research was focused on Year 10 who are aged 14-15 and all studying both English Language GCSE. It was a convenient sample for me to work with and was useful in terms of timing as the students are all in the middle of their GCSE courses.

All 60 Year 10 students were invited to take part in the study, representing a range of abilities but mostly predicted Grade 9-6. 15 of children are on the SEND register; 5 of the children speak English an additional language (EAL). The reason for referencing this information is because these girls may have found humour more difficult to work with. The SEND pupils due to its complexity, and the International girls due to cultural differences towards humour. All 60 students were sent the questionnaire with 46 completing them. However, these figures conform to the low expectations in internet surveys.

The teacher's research was conducted with all four Year 10 teachers. I did not take part in the research myself.

In terms of the type of questions I chose for this initial survey, closed questions, Likert scale and multiple-choice questions were used to draw out data. The reason for including a range of question styles was to reduce the cognitive load of responders. I was wary about the difficulties of the task; attempting humour is a high-risk activity in terms of creating vulnerability in her social group, when teenage girls are 'looking to their peer group for acceptance' (Biddulph, 2013).

The Initial Class Interview

The purpose of the initial whole class interview (**Appendix 5**) was to gain a deeper understanding of the questions of the survey and ascertain whether the girls felt humour might be a viable option for them in the GCSE Spoken Endorsement they would be working on over the next few months.

Drever (2003) recommends preparing a list of questions, so that the interview is, and remains, completely focused on the topic at hand and that all of the key points that need answering are addressed. Drever (2003) also advises that a short preamble reminds the group of what the focus of the research is, and what they have agreed to.

I chose to type their answers although in hindsight, a recording would have been easier to manage.

The Interventions: Introduction

The two interventions were designed by drawing on recommendations from the literature. In the intervention for pupils, bearing in mind the fact that humour was a new and potentially alienating genre, I was keen to hear from as many girls as possible and so used collective discussion to promote that across the class with Alexander (2003); Dawes, Mercer and Wegerif (2000) and Norman (1992) all recommending this method.

Teacher Intervention: Comedy training workshop with GCSE teachers

The first intervention was a Comedy Workshop facilitated by a stand-up comedian who had also written multiple articles for a range of magazines. He was known to the school already, delivering sessions for KS3 during enrichment week so I knew he was reliable and used to school settings. The speaker delivered a 2.5-hour workshop with the same four GCSE teachers who were previously interviewed, and myself.

I suggested the following areas in this workshop, including 1) His own experiences as a stand-up, and the power of learning to use humour to engage an audience 2) Techniques

that worked across both stand-up and written pieces 3) Presentational elements important to comedy, e.g. Vocal delivery and body language.

It was illuminating to hear different ways to approach the topic. Ideally, I would have hired a female comedian to underpin the crux of my research - that girls and women can be funny despite societal beliefs that suggest otherwise as purported in Hitchen's article (2007). My position was that humour is a skill that can be learned, to large benefit for English Language school work but also to life beyond school, i.e., the workplace.

Collaboration with GCSE Teachers on SoW and Feedback on Intervention

We began the session with a wide-ranging discussion on the project itself (**Appendix 6**) then moved onto more specific areas of the teaching.

Based on what the literature had advised regarding the importance of cognitive load theory, I designed an initial draft of the mini-Scheme of Work and the same GCSE teachers, and I worked together to refine the piece. Most collaborative discussion came from the suitability of the examples we were providing, with my first choice of A A Gill's critique of mobile phones being perceived as too predictable and alienating for our target audience of Year 10 girls. Caitlin Moran's feature article on the importance of Harry Styles' contribution to discussions on gender (**Appendix 8**) was deemed to be more relevant and engaging – in both style and content – so we chose that option.

After the session, I had a discussion with the GCSE teachers about their reactions to the session, what they had learned and what could be improved further if I ran this session again.

Student Intervention: Humour Scheme of Work and Spoken Endorsement

The student intervention was a short Scheme of Work designed to teach Year 10 girls how to use humour in their GCSE English Language Spoken Endorsement if they so wished to.

The most important learning for the girls to take on board was to understand that humour was a persuasive skill that could be learnt.

Teachers were provided with a mini-SoW, including lesson plan, supporting materials and Powerpoint using cognitive load theory and comedy practitioner research from the literature (**Appendix 7**).

The Learning Objectives were:

- Identify successful persuasive strategies and humour devices
- Write own examples of successful persuasive writing
- Evaluate the effectiveness of persuasive writing using humour

In brief, the structure of the first lesson followed a traditional 5-part lesson with a Bingo Card starter where humour devices were included alongside better-known persuasive devices to demystify the genre and encourage the girls to regard humour as another persuasive skill they could include. The teacher then shared an effective example of humorous opinion piece by Caitlin Moran and the girls discussed the humour devices and their effectiveness in pairs.

The Main Task was a writing activity to practise using humour – girls had to write the introduction to a speech for chapel where they tried to persuade teachers and peers that

‘Patriarchal and proud! Literature teaches us all we need to know on which men to avoid in real life’

Importantly, I reduced the number of humour techniques they should focus on to five (named THE BIG FIVE) for the purposes of cognitive load. After discussing ideas and a whole class mind map on whiteboard to generate ideas, the girls then worked in a highly structured way to firstly produce a sentence, then two, then a whole paragraph using the five humour techniques previously taught bearing in mind their target audience.

The plenary included sharing the work with a partner, then several students were asked to read their examples, and whilst listening, other students to tick off devices heard (teacher to participate too). Based upon results, we decided upon the most effective writing, providing clear explanation, with reference to marking criteria as justification

After the teaching of the lessons, I again interviewed the teachers, as well as the pupils, making notes, and their responses prompted me to refine the intervention further still.

Additional Writing activity: Opinion Article

After the Spoken Endorsement drafts had been viewed by Year 10 teachers, we understood that humour had been taken up by 23 of the 60 girls and wanted to offer another way for the girls to test out their humour skills. Therefore, I designed a third activity to include further refinements with an opportunity for those girls who would rather write a persuasive article than attempt a speech that they would present in an GCSE examination environment, using the same title as previously presented -

'Patriarchal and proud! Literature teaches us all we need to know on which men to avoid in real life' It was important to acknowledge when not every girl would want to use their GCSE Spoken Endorsement to trial humour, but might still want to trial it in a less stressful environment.

The teachers included more models of humorous persuasive writing and also included live modelling for the introduction, which the girls were allowed to use to set the style and tone for the piece.

The Concluding Pupil Interviews

I conducted final interviews with my Year 10 class to gain their perception of the research project in its entirety and the potential impact of the intervention. We returned to what the girls perceived as necessary skills for women in the 21st century and how humour could be part of that armoury, along with some specific questions on how we could improve the offering. **(Appendix 10)**

The Concluding Teacher Interview

To conclude the research, I interviewed the GCSE teachers using semi-structured questions **(Appendix 11)** to establish whether they had perceived any difference in their classes in their approach to using humour, and consequently academic risk-taking, during the project and to complete the triangulation process (Thomas, 2013).

Chapter Four: Results and Discussion

Introduction

Chapter Four presents the research data gathered from the survey with all of Year 10, interviews with my own Year 10 class, and interviews with our four GCSE teachers.

As aforementioned, I took notes from the interviews then analysed the content, categorising the responses into particular themes (Kerlinger, 1970), allowing me to observe any patterns in the data.

Results from the Research Data – Survey and Interviews

Introduction

46 pupils completed the survey out of a year group of 60. I intended to gain a snapshot of their attitudes towards risk-taking in the classroom, moving towards an understanding of how humour would encourage the propensity to take risks, and link to my research questions as well as possible ways forward.

How Girls Viewed Their Goals and the Challenges of the 21st Century

When asked what key intrinsic factors may stop them from achieving dreams and goals in the future, the top three reasons were lack of motivation (14), lack of confidence (10) and

lack of knowledge about how to make decisions (10). Poor communication skills also rated highly with 8 pupils citing this. It was interesting to me that lack of motivation feature so highly although this added nuance to my understanding of what girls at an independent boarding school might be feeling about the future, or perhaps about a lack of autonomy in the school environment.

In relation to external barriers to the girls' success, just over a third (16) cited discrimination against women. Gender, despite the progression made, is still a wholly relevant subject for young women, even over environmental issues, with 10 citing it as a barrier.

When asked what qualities they believed to be important for a successful woman in the 21st Century, the highest scoring quality, 16, was that of being brave enough to take calculated risks, followed by 9 considering that being able to communicate clearly and persuasively were most important.

Humour as a Skill to be Learnt

There was an overall acceptance that humour was a potentially powerful skill in the Initial Class Interview when I asked: What else might humour add to your spoken endorsement?

A pupil commented it could '*Lighten the mood in general – more engagement*'. When pushed on what engagement meant, they described it as '*Attention being focused, helping understanding*'. There was some nascent understanding of how humour could aid the Spoken Endorsement although parroting back words I've already given: '*It makes it more enjoyable for the audience – if you are droning on, it helps them by laughing*' and

that it *'Softens the tone, makes it warmer because otherwise if you are speaking about heavy topic then it feels a lot – make it easy to enjoy'*. Whilst these comments were not incorrect, they demonstrated a tenuous understanding of the humour genre.

Humour and Academic Risk Taking

In the survey, 36 girls answered that they 'sometimes' didn't mind taking calculated intellectual risks in the classroom, followed closely by 'I don't mind having a go' which boded reasonably well in terms of their openness to trialing a new and potentially risky venture in learning to use humour.

The survey asked girls to think of a time they took an intellectual risk – where they did this, what it was, what made them do it, and how it made them feel. 33 out of the 60 girls entered some details. Most referenced school settings, especially the classroom, with discussions and teacher questioning also featuring strongly. The others were at the family dinner table and at family events, like weddings. In terms of feeling, 33 were negative, 25 were neutral and 39 were positive in tone and content. For example, one girl states that the last time she took an academic risk she felt *'really undeserving and dumb'* whilst another *'felt nervous and scared of embarrassment.'*

In contrast, those with a more positive outlook seemed to find risk-taking in the classroom life changing: *'When I started (at school) I was a quiet pupil in class. I wanted to change this and the first time I ever did it was great. It was in a chemistry lesson, and I had answered a question that I was capable of doing, after getting it right it was great,*

acting as a starting point for me to speak up more in class.' This data was corroborated by Teacher Olivia, who in her initial interview said that *'the EAL girls especially found the direct instruction to use humour liberating as it gave them permission to try something new.'* Teacher Kristy concurred with these thoughts to an extent saying, *that humour could act as a kind of excuse to try on a different part of the persona or style of writing.'*

Humour and Cognitive Load

In the survey, when asked how pupils preferred to be taught something new, 15 pupils chose *'When teachers challenge me and have high expectations of me'*, which contrasted the feedback of teachers when collaborating on the SoW. At this session, teachers agreed that when learning a new skill, it's crucial that teaching is chunked down into easy to digest sections – for example, humour techniques were limited to 'The Big Five' so the girls were not overloaded with options. Perhaps reflecting the mixed ability nature of our classes, 6 pupils enjoyed the learning of new skills *'Where there is plenty of time and space to understand concepts'* and 7 pupils mentioned *'it's important that teachers explain things until we understand them'*

Role of Teacher-Pupil Relationship

When asked in the survey about what the most important elements the teacher should include when designing lessons on how to use humour, the top three answers were around advice on how to present themselves confidently voted for by 7 girls, the chance to practise with the teacher (6 pupils) and the importance of the teacher getting involved in creating humour, too. It was interesting that teachers actively engaging in the process itself was relatively high up the agenda and linked to earlier thoughts I'd had in the initial teacher interviews of the Year 1 project, where particular teachers questioned whether humour could be taught as a skill at all.

Role of Pupil-Pupil Relationship

When asked about the best way to learn humour, 10 girls liked to learn *'from my peers and test myself against and with other girls'*. This was also reflected by teachers in the concluding interview, who noticed that attempting to come up with their own written humour was overwhelming and made easier with writing together and sharing ideas. In the concluding class interview, one pupil fed back that it was *'hard to create humour on your own when it was a new skill and would prefer to do it as a class together, then in groups, then pairs, before attempting to create alone.'* Another girl commented that: *'You are trying to write something funny, and you think someone may have written something funnier than you'* and thought that it was *'less embarrassing if you create together as a class, then it's linking everyone's ideas and less pressure on being funny.'*

Additionally, in my final interview with the Year 10 class, some animated discussion focused on the [REDACTED] [REDACTED] of many because she overused humour in her speech, presenting herself as *'overconfident'* or *'full of herself'*. It was fascinating for me that the girls highlighted this as it was a key area in which I was interested: how girls who dare to be funny are received by other pupils. The girls questioned the appropriateness of this girl's use of humour because most of the speeches were quite serious and [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. However, this speech was *'More ironic and funnier but I am not sure everyone got the jokes and sometimes it sounded a bit rude [REDACTED].'* They also said that *'There was a lot of it'* and that *'It's definitely a thing about getting the amount that you use right - you need to balance it with something serious.'* Thus, the class acknowledged that humour was a powerful medium that had to be used judiciously and be relevant to context. The teachers corroborated this view with the approach of the Humour Scheme of Work which recommended that various flavours of humour - irony, sarcasm, bathos - be woven sparingly into the speeches rather than an attempt at all-out laughter.

Humour and confidence

When asked to think of a time they took an intellectual risk and how it felt, confidence in their abilities and the realisation that failure wasn't something to fear were popular themes. 16 pupils out of the 46 responded with positive comments including *'not*

being completely sure of an answer but trying anyway and ending up correct and *'I did it because I could have a slight idea and, when I was correct, I was proud and knew not to doubt myself so much.'* Less positive answers included admissions that when they'd taken an intellectual risk in the classroom, *'it made me feel nervous and scared of embarrassment'* and another described feeling *'really undeserving and dumb'* when taking intellectual risks. Some of this self-negativity was in accordance with the discussion in the class interviews where some girls viewed the attempt to be funny as *'the worst'*.

I asked how pupils would describe their teachers' attitudes to getting things wrong in the classroom themselves and was pleased to see that 36 pupils out of 46 felt that Teachers understood that it is okay to get it wrong and learn from any errors, including in their own practice. I felt this boded well for the project at the beginning of the process as it was a risky venture for teachers in terms of perceived stature and power dynamics, with some of the teachers being more confident than others to try new things and put themselves in a vulnerable position.

Confidence as a theme re-emerged in the concluding class interview when we discussed which famous women the girls deemed to be 'funny women' and Jennifer Lawrence was mentioned. The pupils liked that Lawrence spoke *'Very sharply about people. She is sarcastic and ironic. She doesn't care about what people think.'* When I interjected that *'You mention something interesting there which is that she doesn't care what people think. Do you think that's an important part of this using humour?'*, one pupil admitted *'That is something that holds me back. I might think of and go to say something*

funny, then you think others might not find it funny, so you don't say anything.' Thus, the girls seem to acknowledge that confidence to not worry about the reaction is a crucial part of using humour.

Others then went on to discuss the link between humour and confidence more closely, again, referring back to the [REDACTED] and that using humour *'always comes across as being really confident'* almost as if confidence was something that wasn't always a preferable attribute. This linked to one of the girl's comments about the intense negative physical feeling when the agent of laughter does not receive validation that their humour was understood, with one pupil admitting that *'when you don't get a verbal or physical reaction, it is totally mortifying'*.

When specifically discussing humour in the concluding interview, some girls were crystal clear in their experience of incorporating humour into their Spoken Endorsement, stating *'I didn't enjoy it'* with an acknowledgement that the novelty of trying this new style meant that *'it's quite hard to know when you've done it right'*, pinpointing the subjectivity of humour and resulting ambiguity around whether you have created it accurately.

In my initial interview, girls were able to provide some valuable insights into the possible factors that prevent pupils from trying to use humour in their work, with an observation of how important it was to appear effortless, which I found fascinating. One pupil relayed that, if she was humorous, *'then it's normally by accident - I mean, it's hard to write or speak in a funny way without sounding too much like you are trying too hard. And that's not funny'*. By comparing this idea of perceived effortless to the conversations on

confidence, I was able to ascertain that the girls understood that humour had to be coupled with confidence if it was to be successful, confirming the high stakes in terms of social anxiety for Year 10 girls.

The concluding interview with Teachers corroborated that, unsurprisingly, it was mostly the confident pupils who were most likely to choose to attempt humour. Importantly, teachers noticed a difference in the reaction to humour when shared between each other compared to the sharing with the whole class. Girls tended to be self-deprecating as a norm – not wanting to read their humorous sentences out, using phrases like *'oh, this isn't that funny'* or *'I am no good at this'*, although when they were showing work to each other, *'they were laughing and enjoying it'*. In more able classes, 50% of the class eventually read out their offering, whereas other classes only had one to two girls reading out their own work.

The most relaxed and enjoyable part of the intervention for the class was taking part in the brainstorming around the question 'What does Literature teach us about which men to avoid' – teachers agreed that this was a more natural and enjoyable space for the girls. However, when it came to writing it down, a lack of commitment became clear based on the fear it would not be funny.

Humour in English Learning and Teaching

In the collaboration session with the GCSE teachers, interesting points were made regarding the quality of The Comedy Workshop. They all felt, quite rightly, that a female comedian would have potentially made a difference in terms of relatability and underpin

the project's aims and objectives, with one feeling that [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Bearing in mind the levels of expertise in the Dept, I was not surprised to learn that *'It was an entertaining two hours but reminded me of what I already know, which was still useful'*. Most teachers agreed that the comedy skills he mentioned were *'probably a little advanced for the girls at this stage and that we were on safer ground with some of the more obviously persuasive skills that the girls have been learning since Year 7'*. In addition to this, teachers felt that sarcasm and irony are techniques that Year 10 understand well due to the texts we study at GCSE: Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* and Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. Overall, this was a useful reminder of the importance of context when teaching new skills.

Teacher Eleanor suggested the girls who struggled with the subject tended to produce simplistic writing that relied on obvious techniques like *'easy rhetorical questions that were slightly funny'* rather than going for the 'BIG 5' from the SoW, whilst those who found English easier tended to use the more ambitious techniques with ease. The article chosen was seen as effective because it showcased many different types of humour, *'less laugh out loud and more playful, dry and figurative.'* This was a key factor in trying to communicate the breadth of humour effects on offer to the girls, so they understood the range available to them.

Feedback on the Humour SoW from the girls corroborated the teachers' points on the importance of context. The girls found the Bingo game at the beginning *'helpful'* because *'You just learn the terms and we knew some of these already'*. This indicated that it was easier to write persuasively than humorously, because *'there is less pressure – if you*

try and be funny and it falls a bit flat then it's more awkward than if you are just trying to persuade them.'

I had hypothesised that by couching humour as a persuasive technique, the girls would be more likely to try to use them, which was corroborated by one girl's comment on the lowering of stakes - *'I'd rather try and persuade someone and fail rather than people fake laughing – that would hurt me more than someone not being persuaded by me'*.

Characteristics of Female Humour and Implications for Learning

Within the collaboration session, the teachers and I discussed the nuance of female humour as well as the importance of ensuring the Spoken Endorsement was still tailored to the Pearson Assessment Objectives. We chose articles that were written by women to model live examples. Therefore, it was interesting when in my Class Interview, pupils discussed the importance of what they deemed to be *'natural'* humour that didn't sound forced, that seemed *'effortless'*. Humour that was dry and ironic, or self-deprecating, was deemed to be more desirable than that chasing a response from the listener. Pupils imparted that it *'needs to sound like something you would say? It needs to come across as such, otherwise it sounds fake and forced'*. When asked if boys were just naturally funnier, girls agreed, with one pupil offering:

'Girls just have a little bit more common sense. They see the potential risks, so it (humour) is high risk strategy and that's, you know, the fun is

outweighed by the danger. You can see the downsides more, so you think no, I won't put myself out there'

I had noted that in the classes where they were sharing ideas, the girls had all been very self-deprecating, not wanting to read out their humorous sentences, explaining that “*Oh, this isn't that funny.*” or “*I am no good at this.*” although when they were showing each other, they were laughing and enjoying it. Interestingly though, over half of the class was willing to read them out – 5 out of the 9 present on that day. Questions on how we normalise humour for girls in our school would help stymie any squeamishness about risking the loss of face in front of each other.

Girls' use of Humour and Classroom Relationships

Positive peer-to-peer relationships plus teacher modelling were imperative in the production and sharing of humour according to teacher discussion. Teacher Gillian suggested that ‘*Where girls were willing to give it a go, the more confident ones, a kind of contagion spurred on others, but then perhaps put off some who felt inhibited by the success of other girls in the room*’. Careful planning would mitigate this uneven participation perhaps, with less able girls being paired with the more able. Teachers noticed that, unsurprisingly, those girls who were most masterful at the subject found the tasks easiest.

Girls' Use of Humour and Implications for Learning

From an academic perspective, teachers felt there was a great deal of promise with this new style of writing and speaking, including more sophisticated essay style, rhetoric, debate, and cross-curricular links to History and Politics. Indeed, for girls who were willing to try, there was increased agency and confidence for some of them.

In the initial survey, empirical evidence was mentioned in relation to the benefits of using humour:

“In scientific studies, using humour has been shown to improve connection with people, diffuse tension, elevate our status, foster trust, and compel others to our point of view. If you could be taught the skills for humour, would you have a go at using it?”

At that point, 9 out of the 46 had agreed that *'It would be difficult at first but could be good fun'*, with 7 claiming that *'I would be worried about looking silly'*. Only 2 were completely happy to have a go, with *'What's the worst that could happen?'* whilst 4 out of the responders claimed that they would not use it: *'Never, I am not a funny person.'* More interesting, 22 of the 46 responders did not answer this question, demonstrating either a lack of interest or desire to commit to a point of view, perhaps unsurprisingly considering the lack of knowledge about the genre at this point in the process.

Girls' Use of Humour and Women in the Workplace

When discussing famous women who were funny in my concluding interview with the Year 10 class, girls understood how powerful humour could be, referencing Dawn French, Jennifer Lawrence and Emma Kennedy – but it was not easy for them to think of *many* funny women. Furthermore, as a Dept, we only tend to refer to humorous writing by women when studying transactional writing and normally gravitate towards Caitlin Moran as she often uses references to popular culture which appeal to the younger generation. The teacher collaboration session was interesting in that, as a group, we focused on classic texts like Austen and amusing Shakespearian female characters rather than contemporary female writers or characters. We weren't aware of many either. It was interesting to realise we did not actively advocate humorous writing as such, be it by men or women, considering its potential benefits.

The Creation of a Suitable Classroom Environment

Feedback on the lack of prior learning and teaching came from both the teacher and pupil interviews, resulting in an agreement that humour should be taught as part of the curriculum from Year 7 onwards. This would create a climate where attempting to create humour was normalised in the classroom. Teacher Olivia mooted that her pupils had enjoyed the '*have a go atmosphere*' and that girls felt as if they were able to really '*go there*' with the allowance and freedom of the brief. She had felt that the lessons were '*Freeing. Fun. Enjoyable lessons*'. Whilst not all teachers were as

enthusiastic, responses were positive. Clearly, much of the success of the project was in the individual teacher's propensity to take risks themselves, and welcome the challenge to order that humour invariably would provoke. This was a key observation. Other feedback included the need for more modelling from other women and speakers, that humour and comedy be recognised as an artform, with the idea we could set up a competition in school around it, that we establish its credentials, that we promote it as a skill that can be learnt and provide more models – both written and performed.

Teaching Strategies Designed to Promote Humour

Teachers fed back that they'd found '*talking first, writing later*' to be the best method of approaching humour. At other points, girls seem to prefer reading than modelling first to remove the high-risk nature of sharing vocal humour. The work produced was of variable quality but overall, the lessons were successful and enjoyable. All the teachers agreed that lessons were too quick, and we could have spent longer on the task, especially as it was new.

Teaching Strategies Designed to Promote Humour in English Lessons

Teacher Kristy had embedded humour right from the start of the lesson by role playing and pretending the class were at Bingo: it made the starter '*fun and a bit chaotic*'. It was important that the article was read aloud in order to understand the nuance of the piece

and that this should be done by the teacher or an actor in the class for full effect. Teacher Kristy frequently linked back to Shakespeare MAAN 5:2 – triples, and with a tetra colon that ends in bathos, for example, to demonstrate the usefulness and quality cues of the genre. Teacher Gillian emphasised how she'd presented humour as a stretchable genre that one could manipulate depending of the desired effect, for example, when a pupil had asked for help on including humour in their Spoken Endorsement, Teacher Gillian had asked: *'Do you want to be completely straight or funny or somewhere in the middle?'* and that it stretched and challenged her to see if she could achieve the objective of the lesson, especially interesting as she is an international student and therefore is not fully conversant with English humour. It was important to ground humour in existing texts to establish its importance as a genre and lessons needed to feel fun for girls to produce their best work.

Data measured against the Literature Reviewed

Introduction

After careful examination of the data, the results began to shed some light on my research questions. Several themes of significance emerged connected to the link between humour and academic risk-taking for girls and the importance of the classroom learning environment.

Key themes that emerged in connection with girls' ability to use humour and academic risk-taking related to the balance of pupil and teacher interaction in lessons; the generic benefits of a whole class approach; and specific benefits in relation to learning and

understanding in English Language, with especial focus on persuasive writing and speaking.

The impact of social relationships and a pupil's ability to fail forward also appears to be of crucial importance to girls and is linked to confidence in her environment and teacher.

There was also some interesting data on the best way to learn in relation to individual, pair and group work which shed light on matters related to both academic risk-taking and the wider classroom environment.

Humour and Academic Risk-Taking in Girls

The Role of Risk-Taking

The important role of risk-taking arose in my notes, and in both my teacher and pupil interviews. Pupils highlighted a lack of confidence in the genre as being a key factor that prevented them from using humour in their Spoken Endorsement and the lessons associated with the Humour SoW. They also believed that it was possible to increase a healthier approach to academic risk-taking by building in repeated activities to promote humour.

The inclusion of whole class creation of humour in lessons was seen by many pupils as a way in which pupils' propensity to take academic risks could be increased, supporting Jones' (2010) findings that pupils gain confidence in the classroom by taking part in a range of activities in which interaction is required, with Thompson's (2007) comments supporting the GCSE teacher's observation that girls were more comfortable talking and discussing humour before they were asked to commit their ideas to paper.

Teachers Kristy and Olivia referred to risk-taking when discussing the levels of participation within their classes on humour, suggesting that there were links between the two. Kristy discussed the difference between confidence in understanding the humour techniques themselves and confidence to vocalise the techniques in a whole class sharing. At other points, some pupils had very much wanted to read exemplars and quietly emulate the technique before sharing.

Ultimately, my Year 10 class participants all varied in their confidence in using humour and how it related to persuasion and when the two genres were not connected in their minds, those girls tended to sit back and not move forward with the activities. Other participants, who saw the connection between humour and persuasion, and were confident to take risks and experiment out loud, showed a greater engagement with the activity. Therefore, academic risk-taking, whether it be the willingness to consider something that traditionally is an alien terrain or the willingness to take risks in front of peers, emerged as a significant factor affecting pupil's participation in the project.

When asked in the final teacher interview whether classes had been more confident in taking risks with humour whilst speaking, rather than writing, the four teachers largely agreed with each other although agreed that it had to be a whole class activity. They also concurred that pupils had been happier to share ideas and write down their humorous sentence when more time was spent discussing the techniques as persuasive, whilst pupils still had questions and points about the suitability and success of their humour compared to others. Clearly, using humour was a high-risk social activity for this group and future work would need to carefully consider how to mitigate the overly critical and perfectionist nature of girls at this juncture of adolescence by establishing a culture of 'psychological safety' as mooted by Edmundson et al, (1999)

The role of social relationships and the classroom environment

Teachers and pupils both discussed the role of social relationships and the classroom environment. The two topics can be viewed as distinct from each other, but data indicated a strong correlation between them.

Firstly, pupils discussed the importance of feeling 'cringe' when others did not find their humour successful and aired concerns of appearing 'overly confident', demonstrating the importance of a classroom being a safe space and not oppressive as Barnes (2010) emphasises when he suggests that pupils need to be able to feel they can offer solutions

without fear of embarrassment and offense. Thus, we see the importance of creating a mutually supportive space as suggested by Alexander (2008a) and the impact on how a pupil feels in the classroom. One pupil emphasised that when humour is successful, it becomes pleasurable and 'feels good', indicating a virtuous circle. Therefore, the data indicates that girls see the classroom environment as having a significant impact on how comfortable they feel in attempting humour and, ergo, it is a factor that teachers should be aware of, especially in relation to their own fears on attempting humour when 'live' modelling.

Most pupils seemed especially affected by the environment and how other pupils would perceive them when attempting to use humour in their work. Teachers did not mention this in discussion, but the data showed that it was a key element affecting the girls' contributions. The GDST report (2022) had highlighted the perfectionism that affects girls and the importance of social acceptance, revealing that teachers were largely unaware of the underlying concerns girls have about their social standing in the group when taking academic risks. This needs to be well considered in planning to mitigate the insecurity of Year 10 girls in the classroom.

The girls' concerns about making errors and appearing 'overly confident' to other pupils challenges Barnes' (1976) view that pupils are mostly concerned with teacher approval. Despite this being a valid point, the data suggests that it is their peers' approval that matters most to them: girls had been '*nervous and scared of embarrassment*' in front of

others in the class. Pupils did not mention how important it was that they gained the teacher's approval. Despite this, the data does suggest there are links between understanding, risk-taking, the classroom environment and, importantly, the relationships between the pupils themselves.

The responses of the girls supported suggestions in the literature that girls' contributions to class discussion and sharing is affected by the environment of the classroom and their relationships with other girls in the lessons (Goodwin, 2006; Cruddas and Haddock, 2003) as *'when you don't get a verbal or physical reaction, it is totally mortifying'*. Other girls could judge you harshly, too, if you sounded *'overconfident' and 'full of yourself'*. Thus, the data suggests that teachers must be alert to dynamics between girls in the classroom and moments of vulnerability when sharing ideas, especially as girls tend to *'direct their energies towards mastery of material'* (Kenney-Benson, Pomerania, Ryan and Patrick (2006) and this will be more challenging in light of the high-risk to social standing when taking academic risks with humour.

The literature suggested that these risks to pupils' relationships could be mitigated somewhat if girls were able to work with friends rather than teacher-chosen partners and groups with Cruddas and Haddock (2003) underlining the importance of friendship groups at this point of adolescence. The girls corroborated this view with their suggestions that they work *'in groups or pairs'* whilst generating ideas for humour. Therefore, it is an important factor to consider when planning, with strategies needed to be put in place to

ensure a comfortable and supportive atmosphere is established, where pupils feel safe to explore and share ideas that are academically risky.

Humour and a Positive Learning Environment for Girls

The Power of the Teacher and Pupil Relationship

My Year 10 class and the GCSE teachers agreed that humour was made more acceptable when teachers took risks themselves and took part in the generation of humour. It was seen as important that teachers and pupils were talking and contributing to the creation of humour together, effectively establishing a 'dialogic' classroom environment (Alexander, 2008a). Therefore, the power of the teacher and pupil relationship in creating humour emerged as especially significant in that if the teacher did not proffer their own humorous ideas and suggestions then it was unlikely that the pupils would either, corroborating Bruner (2008) and Webb, Nemer and Ing (2006)'s view that teachers are a crucial element in not only developing higher-order skills but scaffolding learning so that pupils can emulate their modelling. In contrast to this, it was key that the class were given enough time to talk about their own humorous ideas in order to prevent a teacher dominated lesson which could undermine pupils' agency and belief in their own capabilities.

The General Benefits of Learning to Use Humour as a Skill

Most girls reported they enjoyed learning to use humour in the final interview. They also suggested several benefits to learning humour as a persuasive skill. It was deemed '*good*

fun’, although this feedback was in relation to the group brainstorming session, rather than the individual work. Instead, positive feedback on the individual work included commentary on how *‘proud’* they felt *‘when they had had a go’* at creating humour and it worked, focusing more on the intrinsic value gained. They also enjoyed the lessons in that they helped hone their persuasive skills to a new level. They especially enjoyed the discussions around humour with the teacher and each other and purported that talking helped consolidate their knowledge. These observations paralleled those of Vygotsky’s (1962, 1978) ideas on the value of talk between teacher and pupil. They also mirrored Mercer (1995) and his ideas on the importance of talk amongst peers. The performative element of the lessons – the GCSE Spoken Endorsements – were discussed in a positive light by some pupils although most felt that they were not well versed enough with the techniques at that stage to use them successfully. However, in the final interview with teachers there was strong agreement that, where the student had committed to using humour throughout the Spoken Endorsement, it made for a highly entertaining, varied and engaging speech, although only 30% of girls chose to use this method. When girls had the confidence to try the techniques, they were likely to succeed in producing humour, hence the virtuous circle referred to in the literature. Goebel (2011) presented the benefits of humour for all students, regardless of ability in the subject, whether they be gifted and talented pupils *‘who need to think outside of the box if they are to be intellectually challenged’* to students who found English difficult and were reassured by humour’s

ability to 'decrease anxiety and build trust' (p8). To conclude, both pupils and teacher groups corroborated this argument, but the benefits were only possible once pupils had taken the step and committed to experiment and used humour techniques.

Specific Benefits in Relation to Learning and Understanding in English

Language

Pupils stated that learning humour skills helped them to hone and refine their persuasive skills when studying English Language. Teachers also suggested that it helped girls with their verbal skills and argument, with *'the use of levity, irony and bathos creating a more sophisticated style.'* Additionally, pupils linked oral and written skills and how one enabled the other, a link which Fullard and Dacey (2008) found to be significant, with oral skills leading to an improvement in written skills, whilst also corroborating Richards (2009) theory that speaking and listening helps pupils to develop their ideas to fruition before writing.

Pupils also mentioned various different strategies which helped them improve the quality of their humour skills, with the three most frequently referenced being the importance of having enough time to prepare before sharing ideas and speeches; pair work prior to group discussion; and ensuring that humour was tackled more frequently as a genre in the curriculum. This supported the assertions of Sweller (1988) and Kalyuga et al (2003) on

novel or abstract knowledge necessitating substantial time allocation so that the skills for learning humour would be achievable to the mixed sets of our school.

Teachers also emphasised the importance of giving girls enough time to consider and discuss their ideas and approach before asking them to share with the group, corroborating Kitson et al (2001) and Haydn et al. (2014), both of whom recommend allowing pupils sufficient 'thinking time'.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Individual, Pair and Group Work

Discussion with my Year 10 pupils emphasised the positive and negative aspects of pair and group work. Some girls did not enjoy working in pairs and preferred whole class discussion. This contrasted the ideas of Saloman (1993), Vgotsky (1978), Smith et al (2009), Laughlin et al. (2006) and Barnes (2010) who propose that groups can achieve more than the individual. The data did not support Mercer's (2013) view that group work has little educational value. It could indicate that when subjects are as difficult or as nuanced as humour, pupils prefer a whole class discussion with the teacher actively shaping the direction of travel.

Chapter 5: Findings and Conclusion

Introduction

The final section consists of a summary of the results of the research, focused on providing answers to the three questions which emerged from the literature review, commentary on the limitations of the evidence collected and conclusions reached from the research findings.

Question 1: Which Teaching Strategies Might Encourage Girls to Use Humour in GCSE English Language?

It emerged that there was a range of teaching strategies that could encourage girls to learn to use humour in English Language lessons, for example, studying exemplars of female opinion writers that were culturally relevant to pupils. Games and fun class activities (Persuasive Bingo) were also used effectively as a starter to engender confidence, acting as a retrieval exercise that repositioned humour as a persuasive skill, again, as recommended by the literature. The data shows that pupils enjoyed the lessons and became more confident and apt to take academic risks after each lesson, showing again how confidence and participation can be built by the teacher.

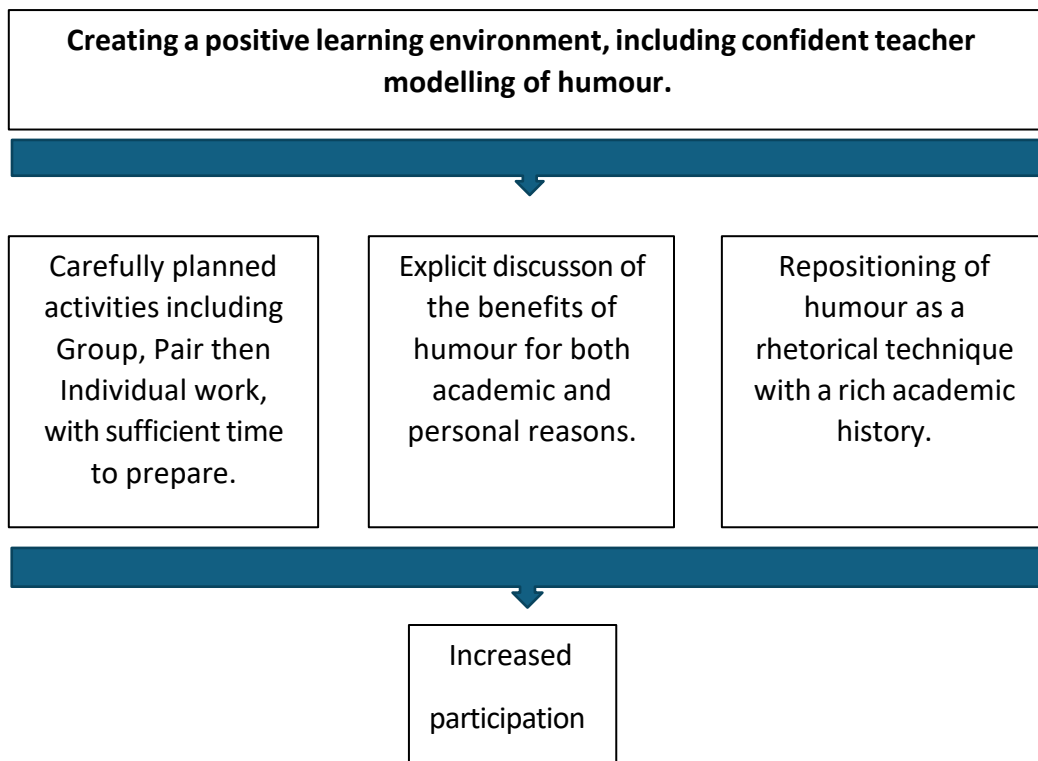
Other important strategies to note included the importance of pupils being given time to understand and prepare – both in class and prep. Evidence also suggested that girls

needed time to discuss in pairs, before trying out ideas in front of the whole class, corroborating Mercer and Littleton (2007) and Baxter (2010), who emphasise the importance of allowing girls to practise in unfamiliar contexts. Crucially, the teacher must create a positive learning environment – teacher modelling is fundamental and has a holistic effect across all teaching strategies and activities, corroborating Webb, Nemer and Ing (2006).

Finally, being clear about the benefits of humour was valuable in promoting the genre. Data shows that if reasons are given to how humour positively impacts not only grades but the personal, this improved motivation to learn.

The findings can be summarised as follows:

Figure 2: Teaching Strategies That Encourage Humour in English Lessons.



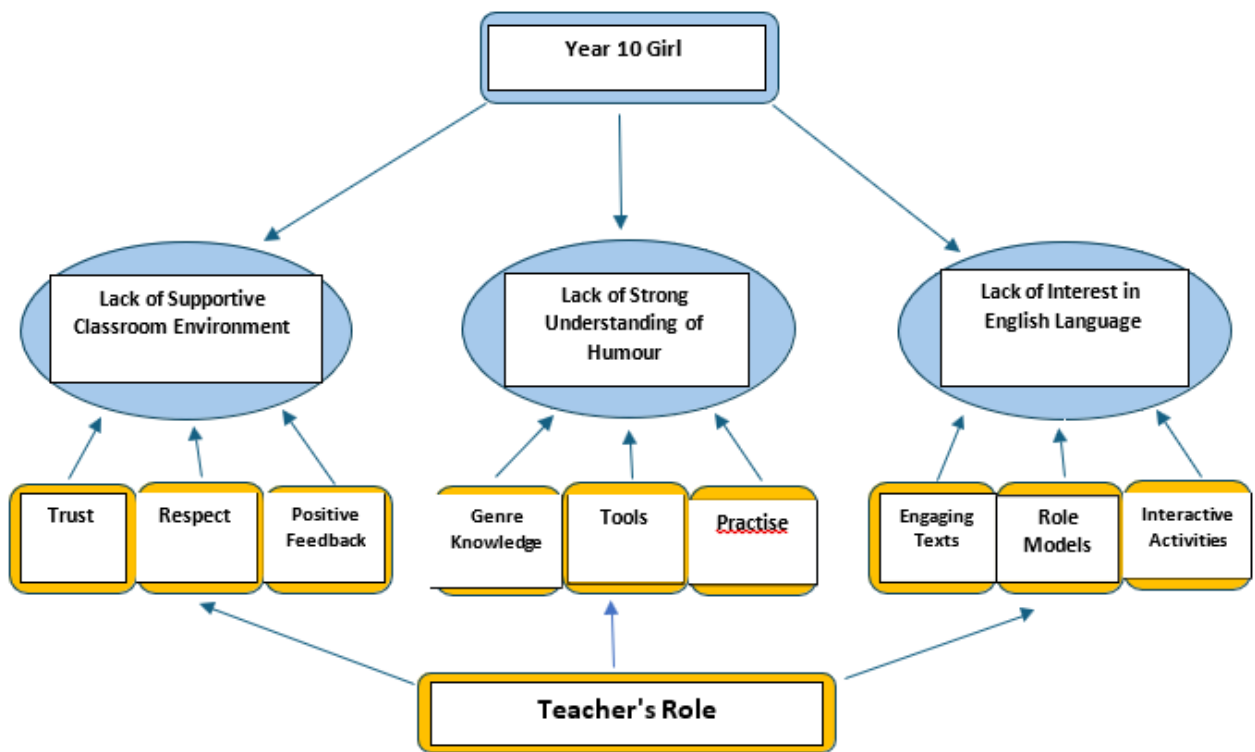
Question 2: Which Factors Appear to Prevent Girls from Choosing to Leverage Humour as a Persuasive Skill?

The data pointed to a range of components that could prevent girls from choosing humour as a persuasive skill. It could be suggested that there are three main reasons that limit girls' academic risk-taking, and consequently their propensity to use humour as a persuasive skill in English Language lessons, as they seem to be linked. These limiting factors are the lack of a supportive classroom environment, the lack of a strong understanding of humour, and a lack of interest in English Language. If one or more of these aspects is present, then it appears that the pupil does not feel confident enough to attempt to use humour. It is imperative for the teacher to build an atmosphere of trust and respect between the girls so that atmosphere is conducive to learning a new skill and can confidently discuss the topic (Barnes, 2010; Jones 2010). Teachers also need to ensure that pupils have a strong understanding of the subject, have spent sufficient time and been given enough support to understand the genre, and, importantly, feel able to use it as a tool. The evidence shows that once girls have been given the opportunity to use humour and receive some positive feedback on its success, they are more likely to participate in whole class discussion and share ideas. Again, the teacher is responsible for planning and setting up the activities in order to promote humour as a skill which has been shown to improve the quality of responses in GCSE English Language, specifically the Spoken Endorsement and Persuasive Writing. In short, humour needs to be normalised as

a powerful genre at girls' schools. This could be achieved by including more humorous texts and ensuring they are used as part of the reading offering at school. In addition, we could offer more role models, including more training for the Department on the humour genre, and how to use humour within teaching itself.

The findings can be summarised as follows:

Figure 3: Factors That Appear to Prevent Girls Using Humour as a Persuasive Skill.



Question 3: To What Extent Does the Encouragement of Humour in English Language Improve Girls' Propensity for Academic Risk Taking and Confidence?

The data shows some girls found learning to use humour helped them take academic risks and improved confidence in English Language. The findings also suggest that to successfully use humour, the pupil needs the confidence to actually take risks themselves - both academically and socially – and so the stakes were high.

The girls who chose to use humour in their Spoken Endorsements, although uncomfortable at points, were personally pleased to have taken up the challenge and their work increased in sophistication and maturity. Thus, the data collected supports the claims of the literature around using the benefits of challenging girls to grapple with difficult concepts whilst supporting them with girl-friendly teaching and learning techniques. This was apparent in the responses to the whole year survey, and additionally in my interviews with both teachers and pupils.

Despite this, the data also suggests that the promotion of humour as a persuasive skill only improves learning and teaching to an extent. The evidence shows that a multi-faceted approach is necessary for the learning to be successful, for example: reading relevant exemplars; learning humour techniques; analysis of exemplar work; practising said techniques in written work; understanding the power of non-verbal communication when using humour in speeches; giving sufficient time to practise; and pair, group and

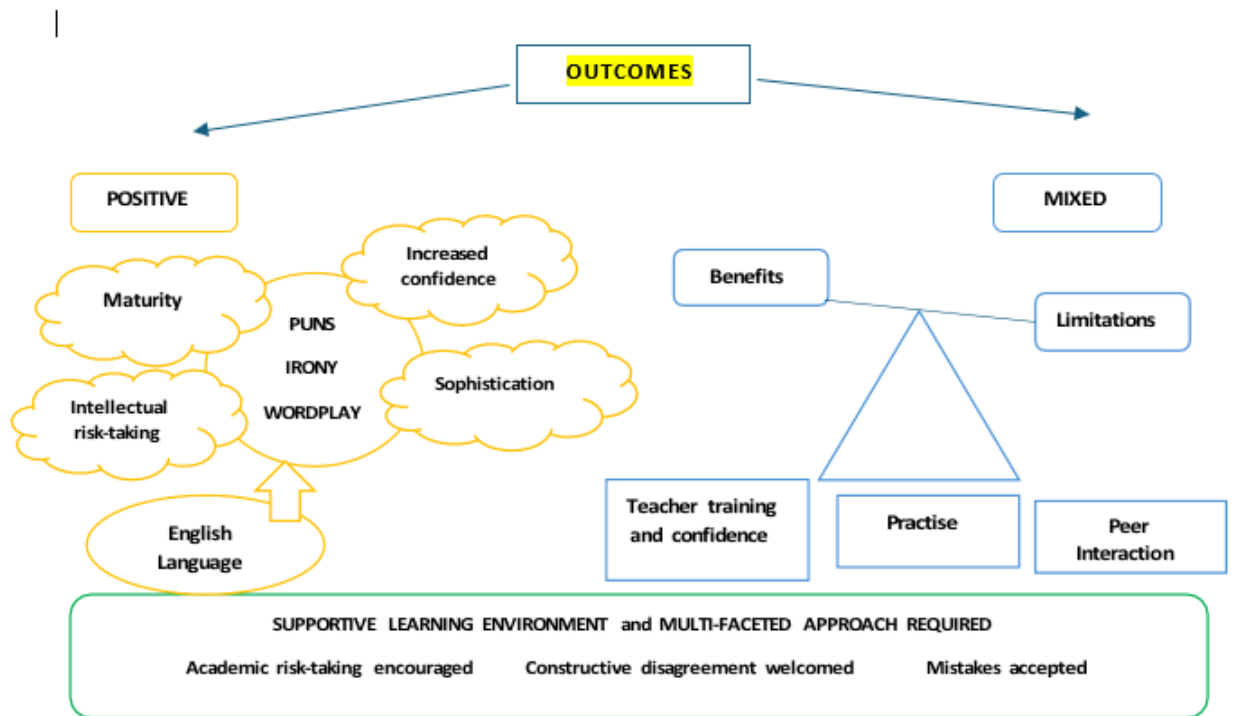
whole class discussion. Additionally, thinking time and practise were integral to the promotion of pupil understanding and therefore confidence.

However, the evidence did not convincingly show that the learning of humour as a persuasive technique helped girls to structure their work well or write detailed and evidenced persuasive writing. Some girls managed to weave a range of humour techniques throughout their work, whereas many included a standalone and simple rhetorical question at the start of their responses - be it Spoken Endorsement or written piece – and considered this sufficient.

It is also imperative that the teacher involved is well versed and confident in humour before setting out. The onus is on the teacher to build pupil confidence and that can only be engendered with confident teaching. To add, the teacher must ensure that taking risks, disagreeing and inaccuracy are not just allowed but actively encouraged (Harris et al, 2014) in the girls' classroom to counteract perfectionism and lack of participation from a group who are traditionally stymied by social gender expectations both inside and outside of school. Ultimately, teachers need to be trained further in humour as a subject within itself and, arguably, the ability to use humour as a teaching method, many of whom may already do, for example, using irony and light sarcasm to engage pupils. (Shade, 1999)

The findings can be summarised as follows:

Figure 4: To What Extent Does the Encouragement of Humour in English Language Improve Girls' Propensity for Academic Risk Taking and Confidence



The Limitations of the Research Project

There were many limitations to the project that meant that it was ultimately not possible to provide a cast-iron response to the research questions. However, the evidence certainly provided an interesting and promising starting point on how the teaching and learning of humour by girls could aid them in the English Language GCSE.

The project was self-limiting by nature due to its title in that, although there was interesting evidence on girls' learning of humour, the project was operating in an

environment that was alien to the nature of society, i.e. there were no boys present as we are a single-sex school. This is problematic for a number of reasons. Firstly, the results are only applicable to girls who are learning with other girls. Secondly, this environment will not be replicated outside of a single-sex school and therefore results are skewed towards an atmosphere where girl-centred learning is the *modus operandi*. As a result of this, it is not possible to conclude how the girls who took part in the research will react when they leave the school and are part of normal society, competing with boys and men in the workplaces of tomorrow.

Other limitations included a total absence of prior learning. The conscious crafting of humour in GCSE Language is largely not practised, and therefore girls were coming to a genre of writing that was alien to them. Finally, due to the lack of prior knowledge, and the pressures of teaching GCSE Language in its current form, we were unable to provide enough foundational work and time allocated to the research.

Despite these many limitations, the project, I hope, provides a glimpse of what is possible when girls are given the tools and support they need to use humour to persuade, and how this may increase their propensity to take academic risks, and confidence, in their GCSE English Language, and lives beyond the school environment.

Next Steps

I will be sharing my research findings with a variety of colleagues to whom the subject matter is pertinent, including Heads of Department, our Deputy Head Academic and our Headmistress who has been interested in the findings of the project. I would like to collaborate with the Drama and PSHE departments in producing a whole school focus on the benefits of humour, and how to incorporate it into a variety of relevant environments – in short, promoting the use of humour as a persuasive tool and one which increases confidence and power in girls.

In terms of English Language teaching, I intend to begin humour learning much earlier, in Year 7, as part of the curriculum focused on persuasive writing, creating a SoW and resources so that, by the time girls reach Year 10, they are more than ready to include humour as a persuasive technique. I also saw the opportunity to include the history of humour, linking it back to its ancient Greek foundations, to raise perceptions of comedy and humour amongst the pupils and fit the academic profile of the school.

Additionally, there is a clear opportunity to teach more effective public speaking and debate using humour. I will be collaborating closely with the History and Politics Department to ensure we are unified in our approach, and look forward to sharing these findings with pupils and teachers in a programme of chapels.

The project also highlighted the opportunity for further research projects with links between girls' perceptions of humour, confidence, oracy - and self-limiting belief

systems. I would be interested in launching a wider-scale research project that included girls from co-ed and state-maintained schools.

Finally, it is clear that what girls need to see are living breathing female role models who include humour within their remit with ease - whether that involves ensuring that we bring in well-known funny women to school-wide lectures, or provide more structured regular workshops, or launch a competition to find our school's Humour Laureate, I feel that the project is alive with opportunities to help girls realise that humour is power, it is a skill that can be learnt, and that the future of humour is very much female.

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Appendix 1 CUREC Ethical Approval

SECTION A: Filter for CUREC 2 application		
This section determines whether the application for ethics review should be made using this form (CUREC 1A) or the CUREC 2 form (for research with more complex ethical issues).		
Please indicate with an 'X'.	Yes	No
1. Does the research involve the deception of participants?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
2. Are the research participants vulnerable in the context of the research, or classed as people whose ability to give free and informed consent is in question ? For example, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants aged 16 or under (also answer question AS); • Participants aged 16 - 18 who can neither be considered competent youths nor recruited under Approved Procedure 25 • adults at risk; Note the University's Safeguarding Guidance and Code of Practice and its implications for researchers involving young people or adults at risk.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
3. By taking part in the research, will participants be at risk of criminal prosecution or significant harm?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
4. Does your research raise issues relevant to the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act (the Prevent Duty), which seeks to prevent people from being drawn into	<input type="checkbox"/>	

terrorism? Best Practice Guidance 07 on the Prevent Duty provides further guidance.			
If you answered 'No' to all the questions above, go to Section B. If you answered 'Yes' to any question above, continue to question 5 below.			
5. Is your project covered by a CUREC Approved Procedure?			<input type="checkbox"/>
If yes, list the CUREC Approved Procedure(s) you will follow	AP25 and AP15		
If you have answered 'No' to all questions 1-4, go on to Section B . If you answered 'Yes' to ANY of questions 1-4, and answered 'No' to question 5, stop completing this form and do not submit it for ethical review. You will instead need to submit a CUREC 2 a1212lication form . If you answered 'Yes' to any of questions 1-4, and your project is covered by an Approved Procedure, go on to Section B . If more than one Approved Procedure applies, contact the SSH IDREC or your DREC for advice on whether a CUREC 2 form should be submitted instead.			

SECTION B: Researchers	
1. Name of Principle Investigator or student's supervisor	
2. Department or Institute	Department of Education
3. University of Oxford email address	
Copy and paste the following six rows as necessary to complete for each additional researcher who will be involved in this study, including student(s) and those external to the University.	
4. Name of researcher or student	
5. Department or Institute	Department of Education

6. University of Oxford email address	[REDACTED]	
7. Role in research	Student	
8. Degree programme, if student research	MSc Learning and Teaching	
The whole research team		
9. Have the researchers undertaken research ethics and integrity training?	Yes	No <input type="checkbox"/>
10. Please provide details of any research ethics and integrity training undertaken, including the dates of the training. Alternatively state relevant research experience.	The University of Oxford's research ethics and integrity training - 17/02/23	
11. State any conflicts of interest and explain how these will be addressed.	None.	

SECTION C: The research project	
1. Title of the research project	
Funny Girl: Exploring the Impact of Teaching and Learning Humour in GCSE English Language	
2. Anticipated start date of the aspect of the research	January24. As soon as I receive approval.

<p>project involving human participants and/ or personal data {dd/mm/yy}).</p>	
<p>3. Anticipated research end date {dd/mm/yy}).</p>	<p>31/12/24</p>
<p>4. Provide a brief lay summary of the aims and objectives of the research. This should cover the questions it will answer and any potential benefits. (max 300 words)</p>	
<p>I am exploring the concept of teaching and learning humour skills from both a teacher and student perspective using Cognitive Load Theory, with a focus on how this impacts intellectual risk-taking.</p> <p>The study involves a multifaceted approach that includes surveys, observations and interviews where I investigate the link between teaching and learning humour and benefits to both groups.:</p> <p>The GCSE English teachers will take part in a training by a comedian who works in school settings. The teachers and I will then collaborate on producing a Scheme of Work. We will consider Cognitive Load theory when compiling the SoW.</p> <p>I will be creating, trialling and refining a Scheme of Work to teach girls how to use humour in their GCSE Language, benefitting the school and the Dept. The point of the intervention is to investigate the best way to teach humour to girls using Cognitive Load Theory, as well as the effect of teaching and learning humour on academic performance and intellectual risk-taking in girls, amongst other benefits. The findings will potentially reinforce the importance of humour within the curriculum.</p> <p>Teachers will teach the girls to use comedic techniques in their Spoken Endorsement this year using the SoW, but only if girls would like to. Using comedic techniques will be entirely optional for the girls and not affect the grading of their Spoken Endorsement</p>	

which can include any style or tone, if it is relatively formal.

There are multiple benefits to the study for girls and teachers, including the fact that humour can operate as a form of persuasion that helps create highly effective communication, as noted in multiple Examiner Reports from Pearson, my school's English Examination Board, on transactional writing. I am also interested in the effect on both girls' and teachers' sense of agency, confidence and willingness to take to more risks in the classroom.

1. What are girls and teachers' perspectives of intellectual risk-taking in the classroom?
2. How does a consideration of Cognitive Load Theory affect the teaching of humour to girls?
3. What are the benefits and outcomes of this intervention as perceived by both teachers and students?

5. Please indicate the methods to be used (indicate with an 'X'):

Analysis of existing records	<input type="checkbox"/>
Snowball sampling (recruiting through contacts of existing participants)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Use of casual or local workers e.g. interpreters (refer to guidance in BPG 01: Researcher safety! .)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Participant observation	
Covert observation	<input type="checkbox"/>
Observation of specific organisational practices	<input type="checkbox"/>
Participant completes questionnaire in hard copy	<input type="checkbox"/>
Participant completes online questionnaire or other online task (refer to guidance in BPG 06: Internet-mediated research)	
Using social media to recruit or interact with participants (refer to guidance in BPG 06: Internet-mediated research)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Participant performs paper and pencil task	<input type="checkbox"/>

Participant performs verbal or aural task (e.g. for linguistic study)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Focus group	<input type="checkbox"/>
Interview (refer to guidance in BPG 10: Conducting research interviews)	
Audio recording of participant (you will generally need specific consent from participants for this)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Video recording of participant (you will generally need specific consent from participants for this)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Photography of participant (you will generally need specific consent from participants for this)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Others (please specify below)	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Provide a brief summary of the research design and methods. What will research participants be asked to do? (max 300 words)	
<p>My research consists of surveys with a variety of different style questions, including multiple choice, Likert and open-ended, to the Year 10 cohort that consists of 60 pupils, plus a semi-structured discussion with the four GCSE teachers in my Dept and my Year 10 class.</p> <p><u>Intellectual risk-taking</u></p> <p>Overview of some of the topics that I will cover with my Dept: The teachers' views on what may stop girls from achieving dreams and goals What qualities they believe are important to be a successful woman in the 21st century To what extent they feel we prepare girls for the future at St Mary's Caine To what extent teachers feel confident in trying something new in the classroom Perceptions on St Mary's girls' attitude towards risk-taking What part perfectionism plays within the classroom Teacher's own attitudes towards getting things wrong and perfectionism How making mistakes in the classroom is managed/portrayed</p> <p>Overview of some of the topics that I will cover with the students: The girls' view on what may stop them from achieving dreams and goals What qualities they believe are important to be a successful woman in the 21st century</p>	

To what extent they feel prepared for the future
 To what extent they feel that school prepares them for the adult world
 To what extent they feel confident in trying something new in the classroom
 Perceptions of **St Mary's** girls' attitude towards risk-taking
 What part perfectionism plays within their approach to learning
 Their own teacher's attitudes towards getting things wrong and perfectionism
 How making mistakes in the classroom is managed/portrayed


On teaching and learning using humour skills

Overview of some of the topics that I will cover with my Dept:

Initial perceptions on the concept of teaching humour as part of the Spoken Endorsement
 What style of materials will best support the teacher in their teaching of humour
 How can we use girl-friendly pedagogy to create a scheme of work that teaches humour to girls in an accessible and safe way
 Anecdotal evidence on how the lessons were received
 How girls' risk-taking and sense of agency was affected by the lessons
 Effect, if any, on the academic results in the Spoken Endorsement.

Overview of some of the topics that I will cover with the students:

Initial perceptions on the concept of learning humour as part of the Spoken Endorsement
 What style of materials will best support the teacher in their teaching of humour
 The kind of activities they would find most beneficial and accessible when learning humour
 Feedback on how the lessons were received
 How girls' risk-taking and sense of agency was affected by the lessons
 For those girls that choose to use humour in the Spoken Endorsement, changed perceptions, if any, re risk-taking and using humour

<p>7. List the location(s) where the research will be conducted, including any other countries.</p>	
<p>8. Clarify which parts of the research will be</p>	<p>Group discussion with semi-structured questions with my Dept - at Dept Meeting. Questionnaire to LV cohort - online through school email Group discussion with semi-structured questions with my LV- in class time.</p>

<p>conducted in-person and which will take place remotely, e.g. online.</p>		
<p>9. If your research involves fieldwork or travel and your department requires a travel risk assessment, will you have completed and returned a risk assessment form beforehand? Please indicate with an 'X'. (This must be approved by your department before you travel. If you are travelling overseas, you are advised to take out University travel insurance.) Refer to guidance available from your Department, the Safety Office, the Social Sciences Division, and the Humanities Division and on travel for University business.</p>	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Not required in this instance	
<p>10. In the case of international or collaborative research, explain how you will address any ethical issues specific to the local context. Please provide details of the local review, approval or permission obtained or required. Refer to the BPG 16: Social science research conducted outside the UK and the Code of Conduct for Ethical Fieldwork. If there will be no local review, explain why not. Please mention any stakeholder or community engagement that has been/ will be undertaken in relation to the research. Please also address any physical or psychological risks for Oxford researchers and local fieldworkers in Section G.</p>		
N/a		
11. Name of departmental/ peer reviewer (if applicable)	N/a	

12. External organisation funding the research and grant reference (if applicable)	N/a
13. Please refer to the CUREC Best Practice Guidance	N/a
and list any that have been used to develop your research.	

SECTION D: Recruitment of research participants	
1. Number of participants	64
2. How was the number of participants decided?	Three groups: English Dept GCSE Teachers- 4 Year 10-cohort - 60 girls My Year 10.class -11 girls (counted within the overall Year 10 cohort of 60)
3. Age range of participants	Students - 15-16 English Dept- Over 18
4. Inclusion criteria	The inclusion criteria is as stated above.
5. Exclusion criteria	I chose LV rather than other year groups because they are in the active process of learning the skills needed for GCSE.
6. Indicate with an 'X' all intended recruitment methods	Poster advert <input type="checkbox"/>
	Flyer <input type="checkbox"/>
	Email circulation
	Social media (e.g. Twitter, Facebook) <input type="checkbox"/>
	Website <input type="checkbox"/>
	In-person approach
	Snowball sampling <input type="checkbox"/>

	Recruitment sites (e.g. Mechanical Turk)	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Existing contacts or volunteer database	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Other (please specify):	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. How will potential participants be identified and approached?	<p>I will email the Year 10 group with the Information letter and opt out form.</p> <p>The Year 10 pupils who are happy to take part will then be emailed with a link.</p> <p>I will use my Year 10 class for the semi-structured discussion as I teach them GCSE Language.</p>	
8. Will informed consent be obtained from the research participants or their parents/ guardians? If not, please explain why not.	Yes.	
9. For each activity or group of participants, explain how <u>informed consent</u> will be obtained from the participants themselves and/ or their parents/ guardians, if applicable. How will their consent be recorded?	<p>See enclosed for the following letters/forms which all feature an opt-out clause. I will create a spreadsheet to record informed consent details for each group. This will be stored on a password-protected desktop computer:</p> <p>Headteacher Both Information Letter and Consent forms are formal communications. They are to be printed out and given to the headteacher's personal assistant for signature by [REDACTED] the headteacher is still able to request an opt-in option if preferred. A copy of the signed forms will be returned to me as the researcher and this will be stored securely.</p> <p>Materials:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information Letter to the headteacher 2. Consent form for the headteacher <p>Parents Both Information Letter and Opt-out forms will be emailed to all Year 10 parents using the school email. Parents/Guardians can choose to opt-out at any stage and this is clearly stated on the materials emailed.</p> <p>Materials:</p>	

	<p>3. Information letter for parents 4. Opt-out form for parents</p> <p>Students Students will be fully informed via an information sheet and opt-out form that will be delivered through school email. Students will be made aware that they are free not to take part even if their parents/guardians have consented. Students can choose to opt-out at any stage and this is clearly stated on the materials emailed.</p> <p>Materials: 5. Information letter to students 6. Opt-out form for students</p> <p>Teachers Teachers will be firstly informed about the intervention in the weekly English Dept meeting. This will then be followed up by an information sheet and consent form that will be delivered through the school email. Any pedagogic intervention by the researcher will be agreed with the teacher and be within the normal practices of the classroom and teachers.</p> <p>Materials: 7. Information Letter to participating teachers 8. Consent form for teachers</p>
<p>10. Provide details of any payments and incentives and the rationale for providing these.</p>	<p>None.</p>
<p>11. Describe how participants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • may withdraw from the study • may withdraw any personal information they have provided from the study 	<p>Stage 1: Parents and students are able to opt out of the research through the letters/forms sent out.</p> <p>Stage 2: The questionnaire is voluntary, so students are able to additionally opt out when they receive the link to the questionnaire.</p> <p>Nb I have advised parents, teachers and students that any anonymous data cannot be removed once collected.</p>

SECTION E: Research data

All information provided by participants is considered research data for the purpose of this form. Any research data from which participants can be identified is known as [personal data](#); any personal data which is sensitive is considered [special category data](#). Management of personal data, either directly or via a third party, must comply with the requirements of the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018, as set out in the [Universitls Guidance on Data Protection and Research](#).

In answering the questions below, please also consider the points raised in the [Data Protection Checklist](#) and [Data Protection Screening Assessment](#) and whether, for higher-risk data processing, a separate [Data Protection Impact Assessment](#) may also be required for the research. Advice on research data management and security is available from [Research Data Oxford](#) and your local IT department. Advice on data protection is available from the [Information Compliance team](#).

For guidance on conducting internet-mediated research, refer to CUREC's [Best Practice Guidance 06: Internet-mediated research](#).

1. What data will be collected? (Indicate with an 'X')

Screening documents	<input type="checkbox"/>	Task results (e.g. questionnaires, diaries)	
Consent records (e.g., written consent forms, audio-recorded consent, assent forms)		IPAddresses (refer to Best Practice Guidance 09: Data collection, protection and management for guidance)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Contact details for the purpose of this research only	<input type="checkbox"/>	Field notes	
Contact details for future use (guidance)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Photographs	<input type="checkbox"/>
Opt-out forms		Information about the health of the participant (including mental health)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Audio recordings	<input type="checkbox"/>	Previously collected (secondary) data	<input type="checkbox"/>
Video recordings	<input type="checkbox"/>	Data already in the public domain. Specify the source of the data:	<input type="checkbox"/>
Transcript of audio/ video recordings	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other, please specify:	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. During the course of the research, where will each type of research data be stored?	All questionnaire responses will be saved using the university service. Personal data will not be stored.		
3. Who will have access to the research data during the project?	I alone will have access to the research data during the project.		
4. Please complete this section if your research involves the use of secondary (i.e. previously collected) data.	Please indicated with an 'X'.	Yes	No
	Are data access agreements in place for access to and use of this secondary data?(If so, please attach these.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Did the individuals agree that their data could be used for this purpose?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Could anyone (including members of the research team) link the data back to an individual or individuals? If this is a possibility, please explain how the associated ethical issues will be addressed:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. How do you intend to share the research data at the end	Depositing in a specialist data centre or archive	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Submitting to a journal to support a publication	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Depositing in an institutional repository	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Dissemination via a project or institutional website	<input type="checkbox"/>	

6. How do you intend to report and disseminate the results of the research? (Indicate with an 'X')	No plan to share the data	
	Other (please specify):	
	Thesis publication	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Publication in a peer reviewed journal	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Publicly available report	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Conference presentation	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Publication on a website	
	Pre-registration	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Report to a research funder	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Providing participants with a lay summary of the results	<input type="checkbox"/>
Submission for academic assessment		
Other (please specify):	<input type="checkbox"/>	
7. Explain what will happen to the data at the end of the research project. This question must be answered for each type of data, including completed consent forms.		
I confirm that my supervisor will be storing the research data safely for at least 3 years after final publication or public release and adhere to any additional research funder policies . Personal data will then be destroyed in order to comply with the UK General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act, via a secure destruction process.		

SECTION F: Protection of research participants and their personal data		
1. How identifiable will the participants be from the research outputs ? (Indicate with an 'X')	Directly identifiable from the information included	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Pseudonymised/ indirectly identifiable	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Not identifiable - data is anonymous	
	Other, please specify:	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. To what extent will the data be de-identified ? How identifiable will any individuals be from the	I won't be using names on any of data. The forms sent out will be anonymised. My field notes will also not include names.	

research data? Describe any measures you will take towards assuring <u>confidentialit</u> , potential risks to confidentiality.	
3 . How will you ensure that third parties (e.g., interpreters and transcribers) are aware of and adhere to the measures described in this form?	I am the only researcher.

SECTION G: Risks and benefits of the research	
1. Will the research involve topics that could be considered <u>sensitive</u> ? If so: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Please provide more detail or supporting information (such as the interview questions) to show the range of questions; Explain what steps will be taken to reduce risk of distress; Consider seeking advice from within your Department or from the ethics committee including whether the application might benefit from additional ethics review (e.g., via a CUREC 2 application). 	
N/a.	
2. Describe any additional burden or risks to the participants or others, including the potential for any indirect negative consequences. Explain the steps you will take to address these.	
There will be a time commitment for the participants. I will address this by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allowing all LV girls to answer the questionnaire at the start of lesson time, if they wish to participate. The questionnaire will take 10 minutes maximum. Ensuring my interviews with the LV class will happen during lessons focused on GCSE writing. Allowing those who do not wish to take part to go to the library instead. Organising discussions with the Dept to occur in Dept Meeting Time as part of Teaching and Learning. 	
3 . Describe any physical or psychological risks to the researcher(s) (including local fieldworkers or research assistants) and the steps you will take to address these.	
N/a	
4. Describe any benefits of the research, both to participants and to others. Outline the processes put in place to enable equitable research (see <u>BPG 16 Social science research conducted outside the UK</u> for further guidance).	

I will be creating, trialing and refining a Scheme of Work to teach girls how to use humour in their GCSE Language, using Cognitive Load Theory, benefiting the school and the Dept. The point of the intervention is to investigate the best way to teach humour to girls, and the effect of teaching and learning humour on academic performance and intellectual risk-taking in girls, amongst other benefits. The findings will potentially reinforce the importance of humour within the curriculum.

5. Comment on the societal impact.

The findings may point towards the need for further training for educators to the benefit of both teacher and student.

6. Give details of any other ethical issues or relevant information.

- As their class teacher, the perceived power dynamic may pressure girls into adding to the discussion when they would rather not. I will address this by pre-warning them on the date of the debate with the option to work in the school library if they prefer.
- I understand that there may be class discussion which makes my research project less desirable/adds difficulty, i.e. negative reactions to the idea of writing with humour. Ultimately, girls will not be forced to use these methods in their writing if they do not wish to, only to experiment as they would with any other tone/style.

SECTION H: Professional guidelines		
Please indicate with an 'X' at least one set of professional guidelines you will follow.		
Research specialism/ methodology	Association and guidance	
Anthropology	Association of Social Anthro12ologists of the UK	<input type="checkbox"/>
	ACM Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct	<input type="checkbox"/>
Computer Science	British Societ of Criminolog Statement of Ethics	<input type="checkbox"/>
	British Educational Research Association Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research	
Criminology	American Association of Geogra12hers Statement on Professional Ethics	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Oral Histor Societ of the UK Ethical Guidelines	<input type="checkbox"/>
Education		
Geography		
History		

Internet-mediated research	Association of Internet Researchers Ethical Guidelines	<input type="checkbox"/>
	British Psychological Society : Ethics Guidelines for internet-mediated research	
	Association for Computing Machinery Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct	
Management	Academy of Management Code of Ethics	<input type="checkbox"/>
Political Science	American Political Science Association (APSA) Guide to Professional Ethics in Political Science	<input type="checkbox"/>
Politics	Political Studies Association. Guidelines for Good Professional Conduct	<input type="checkbox"/>
Psychology	British Psychological Society Code of Ethics and Conduct	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social research	Social Research Association: Ethical Guidelines	<input type="checkbox"/>
Socio-legal studies	Socio-Legal Studies Association: Statement of Principles of Ethical Research Practice	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sociology	The British Sociological Association: Statement of Ethical Practice	<input type="checkbox"/>
Visual research	ESRC National Centre for Research Methods Review Paper: Visual Ethics: Ethical Issues in Visual Research	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other professional guidelines	The University of Oxford's research ethics and integrity training - 17/02/23	

SECTION I: Endorsements and signatures

Please ensure this form is endorsed by the [Principal Investigator](#) (or student's supervisor), the Head of Department (or nominee) and, if student research, by the student themselves.

The SSH IDREC Secretariat accepts either option below. If you have a [DREC](#), check which signature option it prefers.

- **Option 1: direct email endorsements**
Each of the signatories should submit an email from a University of Oxford email address, indicating their acceptance of the responsibilities listed below.
- **Option 2: signatures**
Please scan the signed form and email it to us as a PDF. Pasted images of signatures cannot be accepted.

Endorsement by the Principal Investigator/ student supervisor and student, if applicable

I/ we the researchers understand my/ our responsibilities as Principal Investigator (and student, if applicable) as outlined in the guidance on the CUREC website. I/ we declare that the answers above accurately describe the research as presently designed, and that the ethics committee will be informed of any changes to the project which affect the answers to this form.

I/ we will inform the relevant IDREC if the Principal Investigator changes.

Name of Principal Investigator	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
Date	05/04/23
Name of student (if applicable)	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
Date	06/12/23

Departmental endorsement -from the Head of Department or nominee

(Another senior member of the department may sign where the head of department is the Principal Investigator, or where the Head of Department has appointed a nominee. Example nominees include Deputy Head of Department, Director of Research, or Director of Graduate/ Undergraduate Studies.)

On the basis of the information available to me, I confirm that:

- I am aware of the research proposed and have read this application;
- To the best of my knowledge, the proposed design and scientific methodology do not raise ethical concerns;
- I support this research in principle, subject to ethical and other necessary reviews.

Signature	[REDACTED]
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Name	[REDACTED]
Role	Chair of CUREC for the Dept of Education, University of Oxford.
Date	

Appendix 2 Letter Seeking Approval from the Head Teacher

<p>UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION</p> <p>15 Norham Gardens, Oxford OX2 6PY Tel: +44(0)1865 274024 Fax: +44(0)1865 274027</p> <p>general.enquiries@education.ox.ac.uk www.education.ox.ac.uk</p> <p>Director [REDACTED]</p>	
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[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Funny Girl: Exploring the Impact of Teaching and Learning Humour Skills in GCSE English Language

Ethics Approval Reference: EDUC_C1A_23_117

[REDACTED]

I am writing to enquire about conducting research in our school in the spring term. I am a MSc student at the University of Oxford, supervised by [REDACTED], and self-funded. In my research study, Exploring the Impact of Teaching and Learning Comedic Skills in GCSE English Language, I aim to explore the effects of teaching and learning humour on both the teacher and student community.

The research will take place with three groups: the whole LV year, my LV class and GCSE teachers within the Dept. The most current pedagogical research on how best to teach girls will inform the entire project, including Cognitive Load Theory. The multifaceted

approach includes surveys and interviews. The aim is to design an adjunct to our existing Schemes of Work, encouraging girls to experiment with humour in GCSE tasks, where appropriate. There are multiple benefits to this, including the fact that humour can operate as a form of persuasion that helps create highly effective writing, as noted in multiple Examiner Reports from Pearson, our Examination Board. I am also interested in the effect on both teachers' and girls' sense of agency, confidence and willingness to take to more risks in the classroom.

I will not be making any judgements about teaching but will provide teachers with training by a well-respected external supplier on how to use humour in their teaching. I will also be collaborating with the teachers on a mini-scheme of work so they can teach the girls to use comedic techniques in their Spoken Endorsement this year, but girls do not have to use this technique in their talk if they do not want to. Regardless of whether they choose to humour or not, the grading of their Spoken Endorsement will not be affected; any style or tone can be used, as long as it is relatively sophisticated.

What happens during the process:

- LV students and Teachers will be asked to complete an anonymous questionnaire with differing questions for each group.
- The questionnaire will be sent to them as an email with a link to a Microsoft form. There are 15 questions for each group, mostly in multiple choice style. The research is designed not to take up more than 10 minutes of their time maximum. This time will be factored into the start of a lesson. These questionnaires are voluntary. Students can read their own books if they do not wish to take part. Teachers can opt out if they wish.
- My LV class will take part in a 20-minute discussion. I am including this as part of their GCSE Writing course. Any data taken whilst making field notes is anonymised and held securely.
- During the Teaching and Learning section of our Department meeting, I will run a semi-structured interview with the GCSE teachers on how we currently teach the GCSE Spoken Endorsement and Persuasive Writing with the title of the project in mind.

Oxford University has strict ethical procedures on conducting ethical research with teachers and students, consistent with current British Educational Research Association guidelines. Before beginning the research, I would inform parents/guardians about the research and offer the students and parents/guardians the opportunity to refuse to

participate. Throughout the research, students and parents/guardians will be able to refuse to participate at any time.

All participants, including students, teachers and the school, would be made anonymous in all research reports. The data collected would be kept strictly confidential, available only to my supervisor and myself and not used other than specified without the further consent of all involved being obtained. All recordings would be destroyed at the end of the research period, and kept in locked conditions until then. I have an enhanced DBS check from September 2014. I have enclosed copies of the information for parents/guardians and students with this letter.

If you are happy for the school to take part in the study, or you need more information about what is involved, please contact me. Whether or not you feel it would be appropriate for the school to participate, I would be grateful if you would complete the pro-forma below, and return it to me as soon as possible.

Thank you for your time and attention. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

[Redacted signature]

Exploring the Impact of Teaching and Learning Comedic Skills in GCSE English Language

[Redacted line]

[Redacted line]

[Redacted line]

[Redacted line]

[Redacted line]

[Redacted line]

[Redacted line]

We do not wish to participate in this project.

We would like to find out more about this project.

We would like to take part in this project.

If you would like further information, or are interested in taking part, please give the name of a contact person for your school, and details of the best way to contact him or her.

Contact name:



Contact email:

Contact telephone number:

Please return this form in the stamped addressed envelope enclosed with this letter.

Thank you for your help.

Appendix 3 Letter Seeking Pupil Agreement

<p>UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION</p> <p>15 Norham Gardens, Oxford OX2 6PY Tel: +44(0)1865 274024 Fax: +44(0)1865 274027 general.enquiries@education.ox.ac.uk www.education.ox.ac.uk</p> <p>Director [REDACTED]</p>	 
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[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Funny Girl: Exploring the Impact of Teaching and Learning Humour Skills in GCSE English Language

INFORMATION SHEET FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AGED 11 TO 15 YEARS

Ethics Approval Reference: EDUC_C1A_23_117

I am inviting you to join in a research study that I am conducting as part of my Master's degree at the University of Oxford in the Department of Education. Before you decide if you would like to join in, it's important to understand what the study is about, why we're

doing it and what it would involve for you.

Please read and think about this leaflet carefully. Please feel free to talk to your family, friends, or the researchers about it if you want. If anything isn't clear or you have more questions you can ask your parent/guardian to give us a call and we can discuss it with you and your parent/guardian.

Why are we doing this research?

- I would like to explore the effects of teaching and learning humour skills, with a focus on taking intellectual risks. Both the English Department and LV will be part of the study.
- As part of your lessons for the Spoken Endorsement, you will learn how to use humour as a persuasive feature, but do not have to use this technique in your talk if you do not want to. Using comedic techniques will be entirely optional and not affect the grading of your Spoken Endorsement which can include any style or tone, as long as it is relatively sophisticated.

Why have I been invited to take part?

We are inviting you to take part because you are a young person, aged between 15 and 16 years old and learning skills for your English Language GCSE. We are inviting all the LV year – 60 young people - to take part.

Do I have to take part?

No - It is up to you. I will ask you to tell us that you are happy to take part. I will give you a copy of this information sheet to keep. You are free to stop taking part at any time during the research without giving a reason, by telling me. If you decide to stop, I will not use the information I have already collected from you. Please note that

What will happen to me if I take part?

- You will be asked to complete an anonymous questionnaire twice.
- The questionnaire will be sent to you as an email with a link to a Microsoft form.

There are 15 questions, mostly in multiple choice style. The research is designed not to take up more than 10 minutes of your time, maximum. This time will be factored into the start of the lesson.

- If you are in my LV class, then the questionnaire will be followed up by two 20-minute discussions as part of our revision of GCSE Writing technique.

What happens to the results of the study?

The information you provide during the study is the **research data**. No personal data will be collected during this research. **Other research data** will be stored for 3 years after I have submitted my research assignment to the University. The research will be written up as part of my work as a student at the University of Oxford.

What are the advantages / disadvantages of taking part?

There is no disadvantage to taking part. The advantages are that it will help you self-reflect on your approach to the English Language GCSE.

Will anyone else know I'm doing this?

We will keep your information private. This means we will only tell those who have a need or right to know, such as your parent/guardian.

What if I don't want to take part in the research anymore?

Just tell your parent/guardian or myself that you don't want to take part. You don't have to give a reason and no one will be annoyed with you. It is YOUR choice.

Who has reviewed the study?

Before any research involving people can start, it has to be checked by a Research Ethics Committee to make sure that it is OK for the research to go ahead. This study has been approved by the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee.

What if there is a problem or something goes wrong?

Please tell us if you are worried about any part of this study, by contacting me. You may also talk to your form tutor/parent/guardian who will let me know. If you are still unhappy or wish to make a complaint, either you or your tutor/parent/guardian can contact the chair of the Research Ethics Committee at the Department of Education at the University of Oxford: [REDACTED]

Data Protection

No personal data is being collected about you except your agreement to take part in the research. The University of Oxford is the data controller with respect to your personal data and, as such, will determine how your personal data is used in the study.

The University will process your personal data for the purpose of the research outlined above. Research is a task that we perform in the public interest.

Further information about your rights with respect to your personal data is available from <https://compliance.web.ox.ac.uk/individual-rights>.

Contact details

If you would like to discuss the research with someone beforehand (or if you have questions afterwards), please contact:

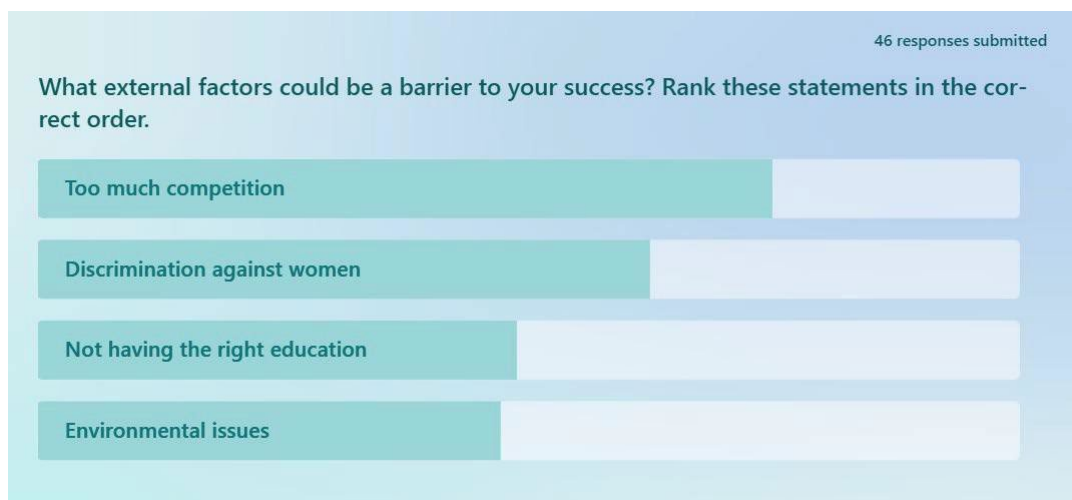
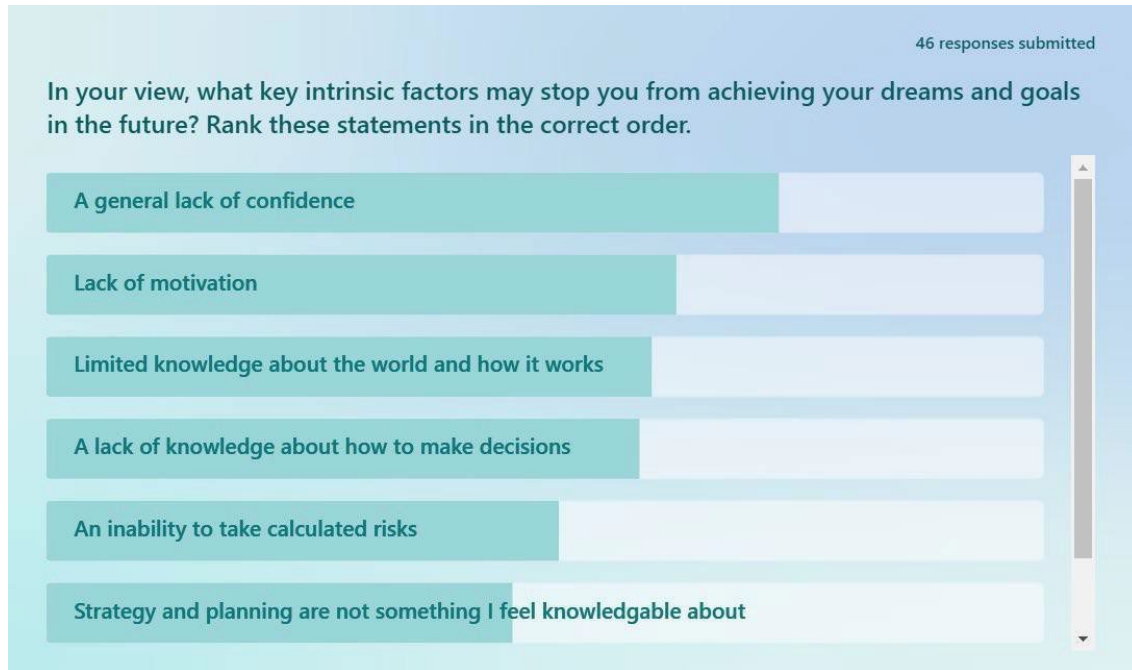
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Thank you for reading this – please ask any questions if you need to.

Appendix 4 Survey to whole of Year 10 cohort

Microsoft Form Questionnaire – Students.

Overall Presentation:



46 responses submitted

What qualities do you believe to be important to be a successful woman in the 21st Century? Rank these statements in the correct order.

Statement	Rank (by bar length)
Being confident in my own abilities	1
Communicating both clearly and persuasively	2
Open to making mistakes and learning from them	3
Understanding my own needs and boundaries	4
An ability to think on my feet; flexibility of thought	5
Able to confidently deal with both men and women in the work environment	6

How comfortable are you in taking calculated intellectual risks in the classroom?

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree

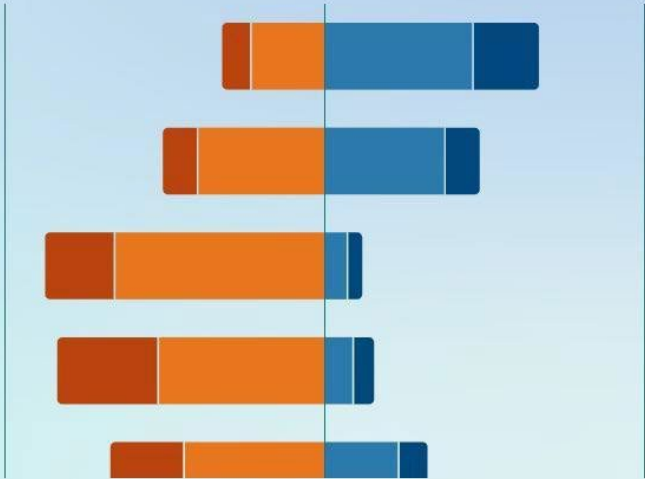
Never. I do not want to get it wrong.

I will have a go if I am asked but it's not a comfortable...

Sometimes. If I feel the class is a safe space for me to get it...

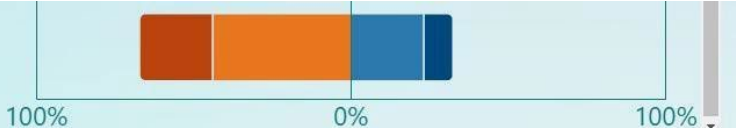
I don't mind having a go. It's not the end of the world if I get it...

I enjoy being challenged and



4 of 10

I enjoy being challenged and want to become more assertive.



46 responses submitted

Think of a time you took an intellectual risk. It could of been in the classroom, or around the dinner table - wherever! What was it? What made you do it? How did it make you feel?



46 responses submitted

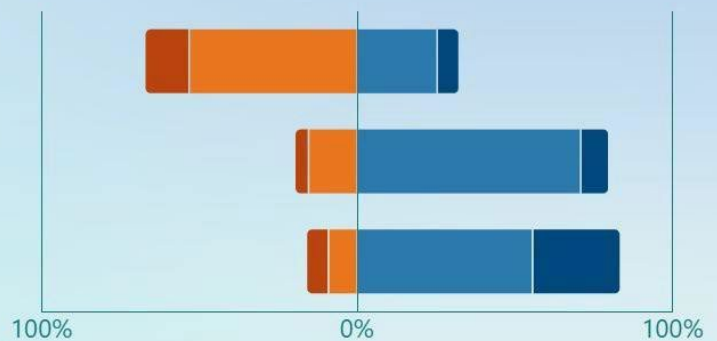
How would you describe your teachers' attitudes to getting things wrong in the classroom? When mistakes happen, how are they portrayed?

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly agree

Teachers do not like to admit they have made an error.

Teachers are a little embarrassed but manage it well.

Teachers understand that it is okay to get it wrong and learn...



How do you prefer to be taught something new? Rank these statements in the correct order.

Where there is plenty of time and space to understand concepts.

Reassurance, reiteration, clarification - it's important that teachers explain things in differen...

With a very clear structure and explained in language that is easy to understand.

With lots of interactiity and questions where we can all collaborate and feel able to ask an...

I like to learn from my peers and test myself against and with other girls

I need a great deal of reassurance; I am not as confident as I appear.

When teachers challenge me and have high expectations of me.



46 responses submitted

It has been shown in scientific studies that using humour allows us to connect with people, diffuse tension, elevate our status, foster trust, and compel others to our point of...

It would be difficult at first but could be good fun.

I am happy to give it a go. What's the worst thing that could happen?!

I would be worried about looking silly.

Never. I am not a funny person.

46 responses submitted

If a teacher was designing lessons to help you learn how to use humour in your writing and speech, what would be the most important elements to include?



Appendix 5. List of Semi-Structured Questions for the Initial Class Interview

1. How would you define humour?
2. What knowledge or awareness do you have of writing humorously?
3. What are your initial perceptions on the concept of learning humour as part of the Spoken Endorsement?
4. What style of materials will best support the teacher in their teaching of humour in your opinion?
5. What kind of activities would you find most beneficial and accessible when learning humour?
6. Have you attempted to use humour before? What were the results?
7. Is there any other information or support that you feel would be useful?

Appendix 6. List of Semi-Structured Questions for the Initial Teacher Interview and Collaboration

1. To what extent they feel we prepare girls for the future at [REDACTED]
2. Perceptions on [REDACTED] girls' attitude towards risk-taking/what part perfectionism plays within the classroom
3. What are your initial perceptions on the concept of teaching humour as part of the Spoken Endorsement?
4. What do you feel are some of the biggest challenges that would face in terms of teaching humour in GCSE English Language?
5. What style of materials will best support the teacher in their teaching of humour?
6. How can we use girl-friendly pedagogy to create a Scheme of Work that teaches humour to girls in an accessible and safe way?
7. What knowledge or awareness do you have about the writing humorously?
8. How would you define humour?
9. Is there any other information or support that you feel would be useful when teaching humorous writing in particular?

Appendix 7. Scheme of Work with Lesson Plan and PowerPoint

LESSON PLAN:

Topic: Effective persuasive writing using humour

Learning objectives:

- Identify successful persuasive strategies and humour devices
- Write own examples of successful persuasive writing
- Evaluate the effectiveness of persuasive writing using humour

Timings	Activities	Opportunity for assessment	Resources
Starter 10 mins	<p>Bingo card starter - to intro the humour devices with better known persuasive devices. Humour devices on the back as models for writing later. Need to kept face down, bingo side up.</p> <p>After a fast-paced quiz – read out the question number and definition and they write the number next to the definition.</p> <p>If it's taking too long – just do the first 10 questions (the humour techniques are the first 5 questions)</p> <p>Briefly introduce the benefits of using humour in persuasive writing with the PowerPoint. Link to the Examiner's Criteria on how this help 'sophisticated styles and effective range of style'</p>	Ability to identify devices	Bingo cards and Humour technique checklist
Intro 10 mins	<p>Read out some of the Caitlin Moran article 'Harry Styles is.....' for reference. Girls annotate and discuss where the humour devices and their effectiveness.</p>	Group discussion	Whiteboard And Caitlin Moran article
Main Tasks 25 mins	<p>Writing activity to practise using devices</p> <p>Introduce the writing task on creating a speech with some humour elements in it.</p> <p>Write a speech for chapel where you try to persuade your teachers and peers that 'Patriarchal and proud! Literature teaches us all we need to know on which men to avoid in real life'</p>		Instructions on Paper Checklist

	<p>Point to the BIG 5 humour techniques that could be used in their own speeches as a minimum.</p> <p>Discuss ideas and whole class mind map on whiteboard to generate ideas.</p> <p>Go through the target audience slide – discuss the importance of tailoring work to your target audience.</p> <p><u>Task 1:</u> Write one really well-crafted sentence, using a humorous device, with reference to the question, as though it were the opening to a paragraph</p> <p><u>Task 2:</u> Review and build, writing two more sentences, expanding your point, using two more devices of your choice – use examiner criteria to build and shape your sentences</p> <p><u>Task 3:</u> Join with a partner and review the success of your sentences</p>	<p>Individual writing</p> <p>Paired discussion</p>	
Extension Tasks	Annotate your own piece, indicating where you have used particular devices OR continue writing to create a whole paragraph	Annotations Writing	Own piece of writing
Plenary 15 mins	<p>Group to decide upon 'best' example of persuasive and humorous writing</p> <p>Select several students to read their examples, and whilst listening, other students to tick off devices heard (teacher to participate too)</p> <p>Based upon results, decide upon most effective writing, providing clear explanation, with reference to marking criteria as justification</p> <p>In following lessons – think on how you might use humour devices in your chosen speech.</p>	<p>Verbal feedback</p> <p>Ability to identify most successful writing</p>	Checklist

POWERPOINT:

Persuasive Technique Bingo!

Emotive words	Drilling down with lists	Rhetorical questions	Informal style	Facts and Stats	Criticise the opposite opinion
Triples	Inclusive pronouns	Flattery	Play on reader's sympathy	Hyperbolic imagery	Repetition of words/phrases
Catchy slogans and phrases	Figures of speech/idioms	Contrasts	Make positive points personal	Anecdotes	Irony or sarcasm
Emotive pictures	Short sentences/ paragraphs	Play on reader's guilt	Imagery	Quote a reliable source	Parody

How to Use Humour in Persuasive Writing

Learn how to effectively incorporate humour into persuasive writing to better connect with your audience.

Lesson 1: Understanding the Power of Humour in Persuasive Writing

Introduction to Humour in Persuasive Writing

- Humour can be an effective technique in persuasive writing when used appropriately.
- It helps capture the reader's attention, makes content more memorable, and establishes common ground.
- However, humour should complement rather than detract from the main argument.

Helps achieve examiner criteria

General criteria		
To be awarded a Pass, Merit or Distinction a Learner must:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> be audible, and use Spoken Standard English which, for the purposes of the spoken language assessment, means that a Learner must: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> be intelligible, and generally use language appropriate to the formal setting of the presentation. 		
Pass	Merit	Distinction
In addition to the general criteria, to be awarded a Pass a Learner's performance in his or her spoken language assessment must meet all of the following criteria - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> expresses straightforward ideas/information/feelings, makes an attempt to organise and structure his or her presentation, makes an attempt to meet the needs of the audience, and listens to questions/feedback and provides an appropriate response in a straight forward manner. 	In addition to the general criteria, to be awarded a Merit a Learner's performance in his or her spoken language assessment must meet all of the following criteria - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> expresses challenging ideas/information/feelings using a range of vocabulary, organises and structures his or her presentation clearly and appropriately to meet the needs of the audience, achieves the purpose of his or her presentation, and listens to questions/feedback responding formally and in some detail. 	In addition to the general criteria, to be awarded a Distinction a Learner's performance in his or her spoken language assessment must meet all of the following criteria - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> expresses sophisticated ideas/information/feelings using a sophisticated repertoire of vocabulary, organises and structures his or her presentation using an effective range of strategies to engage the audience, achieves the purpose of his or her presentation, and listens to questions/feedback, responds perceptively and if appropriate elaborates with further ideas and information.

Writing assessment grids for Question 8 and Question 9

AOS:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate clearly, effectively and imaginatively, selecting and adapting tone, style and register for different forms, purposes and audiences Organise information and ideas, using structural and grammatical features to support coherence and cohesion of texts 		
Level	Mark	The candidate:
	0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> provides no rewardable material
Level 1	1-4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> offers a basic response, with audience and/or purpose not fully established expresses information and ideas, with limited use of structural and grammatical features
Level 2	5-9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> shows an awareness of audience and purpose, with straightforward use of tone, style and register expresses and orders information and ideas: uses paragraphs and a range of structural and grammatical features
Level 3	10-14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> selects material and stylistic or rhetorical devices to suit audience and purpose, with appropriate use of tone, style and register develops and connects appropriate information and ideas: structural and grammatical features and paragraphing make meaning clear
Level 4	15-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> organises material for particular effect, with effective use of tone, style and register manages information and ideas, with structural and grammatical features used cohesively and deliberately across the text
Level 5	20-24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> shapes audience response with subtlety, with sophisticated and sustained use of tone, style and register manipulates complex ideas, utilising a range of structural and grammatical features to support coherence and cohesion.

Benefits of humour



Makes content more engaging and memorable

Using humour helps the audience relate better to the content and recall it later.



Helps connect with the audience

Humour builds rapport with the audience and makes the speaker seem more approachable.



Reduces Tension

Humour lightens the mood and makes the audience more receptive to the message

In summary, humour is a powerful tool for making ideas stick, building connections, and keeping the audience engaged.

Other benefits to girls and women



New research suggests that being funny helps leaders gain influence, **and that women benefit more than men from using humour in public speaking.**

Why?

Humour is associated with intelligence and competence, so women presenters who used humour effectively are seen as competent, diligent and independent.

Now analyse a persuasive piece of writing for humour....

'Why Harry Styles in a dress is a good thing'
by Caitlin Moran

Read some of this together – then **discuss how the touches of humour enhance the persuasive message and engages the audience.**

Types of humour - The Big 5



Irony or Sarcasm

When the actual meaning is the opposite of the literal meaning and designed to point out contradictions.



Hyperbolic metaphors and similes

Using exaggerated similes and metaphors to create humour



Parody

Imitating someone or something with deliberate exaggeration for comic effect

Using different types of humour can make persuasive writing more engaging and memorable.

Types of humour...



Triples

A three-word list, with the final item being surprising, absurd or the opposite of what you'd expect



Drilling down

When you focus on one thing and go into a huge amount of detail about it, with the effect being absurdly humorous

Using different types of humour can make persuasive writing more engaging and memorable.

KEY! Identifying Target Audience

- Why is it important to consider the target audience when using humour in persuasive writing?
- Identify the characteristics and preferences of your target audience for the chapel (teachers and peers)
- How will you tailor their humour to resonate with their specific audience?

Writing Tasks

- Task 1: Write one really well-crafted sentence, using a humorous device, with reference to the question, as though it were the opening to a paragraph
- Task 2: Review and build, writing two more sentences, expanding your point, using two more devices of your choice – use examiner criteria to build and shape your sentences
- Task 3: Join with a partner and review the success of your sentences. How have they enhanced the persuasive message? How can they be improved?

Writing Task

- Write an article for the school magazine, Kaleidoscope, where you try to persuade your peers that:

‘Patriarchal and proud. Literature teaches us all we need to know about which men to avoid in real life!’

*Spend 5 mins creating a plan and spend 30 minutes writing.
Use the Big 5 techniques, plus any others from the grid.*

‘Patriarchal and proud. Literature teaches us all we need to know about which men to avoid in real life!’

- Dorian Gray from The Picture of Dorian Gray
- Severus Snape/Voldemort/Draco
- Patrick Bateman from American Psycho
- Dracula
- Heathcliff
- Claudio/Borachio/DJ/Leonato
- Gerald/Eric/Mr Birling
- Tom Buchanan
- President Snow
- Henry Winter
- Max Winter
- Edmund from Narnia

Suggested Plan

- Intro - RQ's, Sarcasm, Personal Anecdote - tell a story about falling for the wrong guy. Hyperbolic imagery about 'bad boys' today?
- Body Section 1 - Examples of men from the classics – 19th C Lit for example
- Body Section 2 - Maybe focus on more modern versions of the bad boy
- Body Section - Counter argument - make an argument PRO proud and patriarchal men THEN Consider the GOOD GUYS in Literature and beyond.
- Ending - link back to the beginning/repeat words or sentences – finish on a humour point

Intro practise

Tamlin from 'A Court of Thorn and Roses' is a walking red flag, visible from space on a cloudy day. Despite his horrendous acts of entrapment and cruelty, he smoulders. Hypnotic eyes, darkly attractive and with a rather large capacity to imprison and torture young women – he's a real catch. Just one of a multitude of proud and patriachal men, I'm here to discuss the many benefits of studying Literature. Including how to avoid the Bad Boys. Let's start at the beginning....

The key takeaways on effectively using humour in persuasive writing

- Keep the humour relevant to your argument.
- Too much humour or irrelevant humour can undermine persuasiveness. Use humour thoughtfully and sparingly for maximum impact
- Humour should support your argument, not detract from it. Test humour on audience before using to ensure it lands as intended.

Appendix 8. Caitlin Moran article 'Harry Styles' used in the Scheme of Work

Caitlin Moran: why Harry Styles in a dress is a good thing

His embrace of all things feminine only makes him more desirable

[Caitlin Moran](#)

Saturday January 23, 2021, 12:01am, The Times

Music



Caitlin Moran
TIMES MAGAZINE

Where do we invent new kinds of men? And how? Over the past ten years, the current feminist renaissance – the *femaissance*, if you will – has served us up dozens of new kinds of women. Body-positive, twerking Lizzo in her purple leotard; the gleeful hustler-stoner Jewish girls in *Broad City*; Michaela Coel’s dazzling, flawed turn in *I May Destroy You*; the moustache-wearing King Princess. Fleabag, Greta Thunberg, Villanelle, Cardi B, Beyoncé, Michelle Obama, Malala; every week, it seems, there’s a new kind of woman being minted. I can’t lie – as the mother of teenage daughters, it’s awesome. When I was their age, my female role models came down to a) Margaret Thatcher, or b) Courtney Love. Obviously, that’s a potent mix – but not one with, shall we say, much nuance.

But men, on the other hand? Who do 21st-century teenage boys have to look up to? Alas, there’s not so much invention here. Pop culture still tends to offer us superheroes, gangsters, detectives, “good, normal blokes”, or neurotic man-boys. David Tennant’s turn in *Doctor Who* – a hot, witty, genius pacifist – was 15 long years ago. Lil Nas X used *Old Town Road* to invent “glamorous gay cowboy”; and, in *Game of Thrones*, Peter Dinklage’s dark, sarcastic Tyrion was, essentially, a dwarf Martin Amis stuck in a *Dungeons & Dragons* epic.

But other than that? The range of heroes young men have to be inspired by is bizarrely limited. Perhaps this explains the rise of men’s rights activists and incels. What insecure man *wouldn’t* be angered by, and jealous of, women? Women these days get to do *everything* – “woman stuff” like having emotions, nice dresses and babies; *and* “man stuff”, like having jobs, talking about sex and wearing trousers. Men feel a pressure

to accrue and display power, money, physical strength, sexual attractiveness and “toughness”. If you fail to have these things, the fear is that neither men nor women will respect you.

This is why the rise and rise of Harry Styles, right – former teen heart-throb of One Direction turned singer-songwriter, model and icon – is so heartening. Styles is, yes, rich – apparently worth £60 million – and sexually attractive. As I am 45 and he is 26, it does not behove me to dwell on his attractiveness: I’ve reached an age where you stop fancying hot young pop stars and start exclaiming, “Oh, I bet his mother is so *proud* of him,” instead.

But it’s what Styles has decided to do with all his power and fame that’s so intriguing. Last month, he appeared on the cover of *Vogue*, wearing a dress. This isn’t the first time Styles has worn “things that only women are supposed to wear” – he’s regularly popped up wearing pearl necklaces and see-through blouses – but it is certainly the most controversial. Candace Owens, an American conservative author and activist, tweeted, “There is no society that can survive without strong men... In the west, the steady feminization of our men at the same time that Marxism is being taught to our children is not a coincidence. It is an outright attack. Bring back manly men.”

It certainly kicked off a heated debate about what “being a man” means now. This only intensified with the release of the video for his single *Treat People with Kindness*. It essentially casts him as Ginger Rogers,

and *Fleabag*'s Phoebe Waller-Bridge as Fred Astaire: it's Waller-Bridge wearing the trousers, smoking a cigar and bending the similarly trousered Styles over her arm for a kiss at the end.



Harry Styles in 2019

GETTY IMAGES

And Styles clearly believes in the “admiring female power” signals he’s giving off – his love life has not been an endless string of blonde models. Instead, his partners are invariably smart, older career women – his current girlfriend, the director Olivia Wilde, is 36. Not since George Clooney married a leading human rights lawyer has middle-aged, working womankind felt so... *valued*.

What's fascinating about Styles' gleeful embracing of "feminine" things is that, contrary to what many conservatives believe, it has made him *more* powerful and desirable. After all, you have to have an astonishing amount of balls to give up every traditional signifier of masculine power.

Harry Styles' continuing popularity rests on him being an outlier: one of the first straight men to realise that if women have found power and freedom by taking masculine things, then men can be equally empowered by adopting feminine things. When Alexander the Great wept because he had no new worlds to conquer, if only he'd realised his next big challenge could have been "wearing a lovely floral suit and talking to women". Like this new kind of man, Harry Styles.

Appendix 9. A Year 10 Article in Response to the SoW

Patriarchal and proud: literature tells us all we need to know about which men to avoid in real life.

How in 2024 can the United States of the America consider Donald Trump an eligible candidate for presidency? If anybody represents the negativity of the patriarchy, it's Trump. This guy made so many mistakes, people can't count them, and he looks like a joke. What woman would seriously want to date this man with his orange face and that hair? If ever there was a time to question the patriarchy, it's now! Greta Gerwig does this in Barbie. Ken's ideas about the patriarchy are quite muddled. His understanding that horses play a major role teaches us how ridiculous this ideology is. But is there really such a thing as the perfect man?

Let's start with Don John, the ultimate schemer - I wouldn't trust him as far as I could throw him. With a heart as dark as his intentions, Don John spends his time deceiving and manipulating everyone around him. But his peers, the so-called Renaissance social elite who believe themselves to be astute and judicious, clearly wouldn't know that a villain if he punched them on their nose in broad daylight. This he sort of does, just as the play opens; so be warned! And then there's his brother (runs in the family, clearly) . Silver-tongue, rich as Croesus, as fit as a butcher's dog. But I wouldn't touch him with a big stick. He's a gullible fool and has a yen for cruel and unusual punishment of defenceless woman. No prizes for guessing why he's still on the shelf-steer clear! Don John's idea of fun is ruining other people's happiness, so unless you're into drama and deception, he's one to avoid.

Mr. Darcy - a flawed character, but actually a keeper. While the iconic leading man of Pride and Prejudice is prone to snobbery, a closer look reveals his depth of character. For every moment of prideful arrogance, there's an equal dose of quiet kindness and a strong moral compass. Literature is rife with unflattering portrayals of the male ego - from Austen's arrogant aristocrats to Rowling's bigoted buffoons. But not all literary men fall into the category of toady toffs and tyrannical twerps. For every magnetic misogynist, there's a thoughtful, unassuming partner material. When it comes to real-life romance, it pays to look past the charming cads and identify the keepers. If he's too busy brooding to smile, he's probably not worth your while.

Wickham, a wolf in sheep's clothing—a devil in disguise; Collins, the professed rector who doesn't have a shred of Christian virtue—a hypocrite; Mr. Birling, the exploitative capitalist—a money-making maniac. Each of these characters from literature serves as a stark warning about the types of men to avoid. Wickham's charm and deceit in *Pride and Prejudice* can easily lure you into a web of lies and betrayal. Mr. Collins, with his pompous self-righteousness, is a masterclass in hypocrisy, using his position to mask his true, ignoble nature. Meanwhile, Mr. Birling in *An Inspector Calls*

epitomizes the ruthless capitalist, prioritizing profit over people, showing how financial success can often conceal a lack of moral integrity.

A Darcy or a Dracula? Never trust a man who says “trust me”. We definitely want to stay away from Dracula. None of us want the kiss of death. So, maybe we need to get real. Darcy is the best real we're going to get. There's no such thing as perfect. Darcy maybe arrogant and proud, but deep down he's a good guy. Isn't this the best we can hope for?

Appendix 10 List of Questions for the Final Class Interview

- 1) Could you give me some feedback on how you found the lessons based on humour?
- 2) How was your risk-taking and confidence affected by the lessons?
- 3) For those girls that choose to use humour in either the Spoken Endorsement or Written Article, did it change your perceptions re your propensity to be able to use humour, and taking academic risks in the classroom, generally?
- 4) What didn't work?
- 5) Would you use humour again? If not, why?
- 6) How could we improve the lessons and provision of this genre?

Appendix 11 List of Questions for the Final Teacher Interview

- 1) Could you offer some anecdotal evidence on how the lessons were received in your class? What made the difference in creating engagement with the genre?
- 2) How, if at all, was girls' risk-taking affected by the lessons?
- 3) What were the effects, if any, on the academic results in the Spoken Endorsement?
- 4) And the effects on the girls' confidence?
- 5) How did girls tend to work best in the lessons?
- 6) Is there worth in us pursuing the genre as part of our teaching here? If so, how you envisage best doing that?
- 7) What else can we do going forward to encourage humour in the English Language GCSE? Which other departments can we link to from a co-curricular perspective?

