An effective teacher has been described as one who successfully organizes a classroom, implements instruction, and monitors student progress (Stronge, 2002). A proclivity for making students laugh is an attribute that is less likely to appear on a standard list of essential teacher characteristics. Several contemporary educators believe it is more important to engage students than entertain them. Atherton (2002), for example, claimed: “Entertainment in teaching should be an epiphenomenon—a spin-off—from the achievement of learning, not a route to it” (para. 5). Olson and Clough (2003) noted that a potential consequence of education as entertainment is that students may develop the belief that learning is easy. Despite a concern by some that humor potentially disparages both the teacher and the content being delivered, a growing body of research suggests that humor can motivate and enable students to learn and retain information.

The purpose of this study was to explore the attitudes of secondary teachers toward the use of humor as a component of effective teaching. The modern high school teacher is frequently perceived as a content expert, displaying perhaps fewer affective dispositions than elementary teachers. When compared with their elementary counterparts, secondary teachers report more frustration with student motivation and behavior and are less likely to believe that all students can achieve (National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality, 2007). Because the high school setting is departmentalized, most teachers exchange students every period, meet with a hundred or more students each day, and often teach a single discipline. Secondary schools also offer a large array of extra-curricular activities that compete with academics for students’ time. Establishing a student-centered environment becomes more challenging for the teachers, their administrators, and the university faculties who prepare them for the classroom.

Ten secondary teachers representing a successful K-12, one building, public school district were interviewed regarding the use of humor as a pedagogical tool. Because this study was concerned with actors’ perceptions and interpretations, it drew on the interpretive tradition. Through criterion-based selection, participants were chosen for their expertise with best teaching practices and because the school consistently produced scores above the state average in all academic areas. Open coding of interview transcripts revealed that teachers believed humor contributes to a more enjoyable classroom climate, helps students make content connections, and relaxes students. Teachers differed as to whether humor enhances or detracts from an instructor’s professional credibility. Participants identified both appropriate and inappropriate types of humor.
As schools and school districts strive to increase teacher competencies critical to student achievement, they may spend from 1% to 8% of a district’s net operating expenditures on professional development activities (Hertert, 1997), yet perhaps overlook the potential of something as seemingly innocuous as “humor.” With research indicating that students learn more from teachers who have humor as part of their pedagogic practice (Garner, 2006; James, 2004; Kher, Molstad, & Donahue, 1999), the investigation of this topic holds much importance for K-12 teachers and the university faculty who prepare pre-service teachers for the classroom. Such information can provide both a foundation and rationale for the inclusion of humor as a critical component of a solid teacher preparation program. Likewise, if teachers perceive the use of humor as ineffective, the particular aspects of humor usage failing to show advantages for students can be further isolated and examined.

The literature does not provide a causal link between humor and learning. The research basis for humor in the classroom actually begins with the idea that laughter can stimulate communication and act as a conversation starter, tension-breaker, or therapeutic intervention. The use of humor is more about the development of social relationships than actual responses to jokes (Provine, 2000). Research about enthusiasm of the teacher reveals a strong relationship to student success (Cabello & Terrell, 1994). Similarly, Cruickshank, Jenkins, and Metcalf (2003) reported that effective teachers have warmth and possess a sense of humor. Torok, McMorris, and Lin (2004) asserted that humor has a humanizing effect on the image of an instructor. Researchers have made a connection between humor and the “immediacy” behaviors of instructors (Witt & Wheeless, 2001) while Lowman (1994) equated teaching to performing.

Humor is useful in facilitating attention and motivation (Wandersee, 1982) as well as comprehension (Gorham & Christophel, 1990). Kottler and Zehm (2000) declared that students perceived humorous teachers as “interesting and relevant” (p. 16). Mallard (1999), Tomkovick (2004), and Shatz and LoSchiavo (2006) discovered humor to be a powerful strategy for diffusing tense situations and providing a necessary break from the various sources of classroom agitation. Humor has also been associated with retention of content information. In a study that examined differences in sentence recall between students who were shown humorous sentences and those that were shown non-humorous sentences, Derks, Gardner, and Agarwal (1998) indicated that humorous sentences were better remembered than non-humorous sentences. Likewise, Garner (2006) found that participants who were exposed to a series of lectures containing course-specific humor demonstrated increased retention of the course-content information as compared to those who received the same material without the infusion of humor.

Much of the evidence collected regarding the role of humor in teaching has been generated from the university classroom. Brown and Tomlin (1996) asked college students to describe the positive attributes of good teachers and disclosed that “sense of humor” was frequently mentioned. According to Korobkin (1989), college students reported that learning is enhanced by the inclusion of content-appropriate humor. Kher, Molstad, and Donahue (1999) alleged that appropriate and timely humor in the college classroom fosters mutual openness and respect, and contributes to overall teaching effectiveness. Downs, Javidi and Nussbaum (1988) studied humor usage by ‘award winning’ and ‘ordinary’ teachers and announced that award-winning teachers used humor less frequently than did ordinary teachers. Such a discovery, the authors claimed: “Lends support to the contention that too much humor or self-disclosure is inappropriate and moderate amounts are preferred” (p.139). Rhem (1998) averred that some instructors with only average student evaluations used twice as much humor as those faculty members who were more highly rated, suggesting that for humor to be most valuable in an academic setting, it must be specific, targeted, and appropriate to the subject matter. Inappropriate use of humor creates a hostile learning environment that quickly stifles communication and self-esteem (Loomans & Kolberg, 1993).

Neuliep (1991) conducted one of the few studies that examined the high school environment. Teachers were asked to look at the 13 types of humor Gorham and Christophel (1990) had identified among college professors, and to rate the appropriateness of such humor in their high school classrooms. Neuliep’s study revealed that high school teachers: “Do not perceive the humor of college teachers as necessarily inappropriate” (p. 353), which lends credence to the idea of using the results of collegiate-level studies when discussing the usage of humor in the high school classroom. The humor is deemed appropriate across educa-
tional boundaries, and, therefore, the results can be viewed as universal as well.

While current literature about humor and pedagogy is sparse and largely anecdotal, the existing body of studies has been favorable toward the use of humor in teaching. The literature, however, consistently focuses on humor at the post-secondary level and investigates either the perspective of students toward humor or the direct impact of humor on students. In-depth, qualitative studies involving the attitudes of high school teachers toward the use of humor in the classroom are conspicuously absent. Thus, the purpose of the present study was to determine the viewpoints of secondary teachers about the use of humor as a component of effective teaching.

Method

I conducted two separate one-on-one interviews and a single group interview with 10 secondary teachers from a K-12, one building, public school district. The award-winning high school, noted for tradition and academic excellence, enrolls 300 students. The high school’s rate of 90% or more of its graduates attending college exemplifies the district’s remarkable level of student performance. The estimated population for the surrounding community was 7,822 in 2003 and the median household income is $46,335 (Epdunk, 2008). I selected the setting because this exemplary district prides itself on using innovative “best practices” in teaching and I was curious to discover how faculty members would consider how the role humor might play in their overall instructional plan. I elected to work with 10 teachers because I wanted to keep the number of participants somewhat small to allow opportunity for thick description and two cycles of interviews. I also reasoned that the perception of 10 successful teachers from a school, which has received numerous awards and honors for its outstanding accomplishments, would provide useful, yet manageable, information about promising practices that might be advantageous for other schools and other districts.

The teachers (all pseudonyms) included six Caucasian females: Ms. Abbott (mid-30s), Ms. Bell (late-20s), Ms. Collins (late 40s), Ms. Douglas (mid-40s), Ms. Emerson (early 50s), and Ms. Freeman (mid-30s); and four Caucasian males: Mr. Guthrie (early 30s), Mr. Harris (late 30s), Mr. Ivey (early 30s), and Mr. Johnson (mid-30s), having an average of 11 years teaching experience. I interviewed each teacher twice and single interviews occurred approximately 90 days apart. Seven of the ten teachers participated in a group interview (Ms. Emerson, Ms. Douglas, and Mr. Johnson were not available) that I conducted after the second-round individual interviews. The following content areas were represented: Language Arts/English (Ms. Abbott, Ms. Collins, and Mr. Harris); Mathematics (Ms. Emerson and Mr. Guthrie); History/Social Studies (Ms. Douglas and Mr. Ivey); Science (Ms. Bell and Mr. Johnson) and Business (Ms. Freeman).

Data Collection and Analysis

Investigating the perceptions of secondary teachers toward the use of humor in the classroom has its theoretical underpinnings in social interactionism, which sets forth the premise that the shared meanings associated with humor are derived from social interaction and modified through interpretation. Blumer (1969), for example, stated that social situations, such as classroom settings, are best described as retrospective interpretations produced by the improvisational quality of interaction. According to Flaherty (1990), Blumer’s depiction of interpersonal relations is robust because it incorporates adjustment to novelty as the central motif of a dynamic model. Flaherty further maintained that interaction is a resilient process capable of withstanding the turbulence introduced by such unexpected conduct as humor. Similarly, incongruity theory of humor involves a contrast between something exalted, solemn, or dignified, such as traditional classroom instruction, and something trivial or disreputable, such as the introduction of humor into that traditional instruction (Monro, 1988). Laughter is a way of acknowledging this incongruity between the conceptions that listeners or viewers hold in their minds and what happens to upset their expectations.

Humor is difficult to study in context because a need exists for a common interpretation of symbolic meanings. Therefore, conducting interviews with the teachers was the most effective methodology to employ because the face-to-face communication allowed me to capture and analyze the actual words of participants, which conveyed their powerful emotions and depth of insight. Phenomenological and interpretive tradition was the foundation for my study, whereby meanings were socially constructed, situated, and relative to a specific context. My purpose was to describe individuals’ experiences and identify the essence of
those experiences. The study likewise contained elements of narrative inquiry whereby I tell the teachers' reactions to the role of humor in their story. My approach was consistent with Connelly and Clandinin (1990) who described narrative research as a collaborative document, a mutually constructed story out of the lives of both researcher and participant.

I chose the teachers through criterion-based or typical case selection whereby I developed a profile of attributes that an average case would possess and then sought instances of this case (LeCompte & Preissle, 1997). Through collaboration with the principal, I selected 10 teachers (29% of the faculty) because of their consistently high performance reviews and propensity for utilizing high quality teaching techniques. These teachers routinely produced students who score extremely well on state assessments. Thus, I used a purposive sampling strategy (Creswell, 2005) in which I approached essential informants able to provide in-depth information, expertise, and equitableness on the topic.

The interview format paralleled what Denzin (1978) described as a nonscheduled standardized interview, whereby the interviewer prepares a guide but ultimately shapes the process according to the interviewees' responses. Despite the semi-structured nature of the interview(s), I gave participants latitude in shaping the content of the process; I did not employ fixed alternative questions. I asked teachers to respond to prompts, such as: (1) I would like to know your reaction toward the use of humor as a tool when teaching. (2) What advantages or disadvantages do you perceive about the role humor might play for you as a teacher? (3) Describe your own experiences with the use of humor in a classroom setting. Each interviewing “layer” contributed to the overall trustworthiness of the data and increased confidence in the findings. The process was iterative; thus, the later interviews probed new emerging themes identified in previous interviews.

I performed open coding, indexing, and interpreting and utilized the software program, NVivo 2.0. Open coding specifically pertained to the naming and categorizing of basic concepts, themes, and other phenomena through close examination of the databases (Strauss, 1987). I conducted a content analysis of the recorded comments provided by the respondents to understand the nature of those remarks in context and to examine their discussions for evidence of prevailing concerns. According to Bogdan and Biklin (2003), an investigator can identify categories by using words or phrases to represent the topics and patterns. I employed “in vivo coding,” and used the participants’ own words, language, and terminology to create categories. Grouping together the most frequently occurring keywords (e.g., “classroom climate,” “relax”) served to create and organize a schema of such categories. I also compared each participant’s codes to the other participants’ codes, checked for commonalities and differences, and ultimately produced a matrix of data patterns.

Audio-recording the interviews allowed me to address internal validity by preserving what LeCompte and Preissle (1997) labeled: “All data unabstracted” (p. 340). I further established internal validity through disciplined subjectivity (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997) and combined rigorous researcher reflection and self-monitoring. To do so, I continuously exposed all phases of data collection and analysis to questioning and reevaluation. Independent and formal corroboration from the 10 informants served to enhance the credibility of all the participant reports.

Results

From a thematic analysis of the tape-recorded interviews, five overarching categories emerged, and each consisted of a qualitative aspect about using humor as a pedagogical tool: 1) Humor and Classroom Climate; 2) Humor and Linking Content; 3) Humor and Student Relaxation; 4) Humor and Teacher Credibility; and 5) Appropriateness of Humor. The excerpts that follow provide a representation of the dialogue conducted throughout the interviews with the participants.

Humor and Classroom Climate

Teachers had distinct opinions about the role humor plays in the creation of classroom climate, which they described as a “sense of community” and a “feeling of belonging.” Teachers specifically addressed the ability of humor to diminish anxiety and reduce the threatening nature of “dread” courses, like math, and by changing the tone of the instructional process. Humor was associated with interactions that were frequent, friendly, cooperative, helpful, and trusting. According to Ms. Collins: “The importance of classroom climate cannot be overstated. The atmosphere needs to be one of comfort and ease. Humor helps to set that kind of tone.” Ms. Douglas agreed: “Humor creates a situation where students are happy
and attentive. They hang on to your words because the humor draws them into the conversation.” Mr. Ivey explained that humor could serve as an icebreaker for incoming freshmen: “The first few days of high school can be very tense. Humor makes the transition to a new environment a little easier.” Ms. Emerson noted: “I teach geometry, which is a subject many students find intimidating. I think I take the edge off the topic by injecting humor into my examples and into my overall instruction.” Mr. Johnson elaborated: AP Chemistry is enough to make any of the kids shake in their boots. Talk about ‘dread.’ I tell my students that chemistry is not to be memorized. It is like a sport that has to be ‘played.’ So, I often show up in class wearing sports attire, including my old football jersey and pads. It immediately simplifies the process and even the reluctant learners are put at ease. I love to tell corny jokes. ‘What is the name of chemical K9P? Dog urine.’ I try to fill the classroom climate with excitement and anticipation. What will we do next?

While first acknowledging its potential, Ms. Bell also expressed that humor might contribute to a teacher-centered classroom: I’m not totally sold on the role of humor in creating a good climate. In fact, I think the humor can go to a teacher’s head and the teaching becomes a stand-up act, which, of course, puts the focus on the teacher rather than the students. The humor is self-serving.

Mr. Freeman was in accord: “Moderation is key. If a teacher isn’t careful, the reliance on humor can be nothing more than a recycling of the teacher-dominated class. I like to see the creativity and energy in classroom climate originate with the students.” He added: “Having students sit back and wait for something funny may encourage passivity.” Teachers did not want to emphasize humor at the expense of the overall learning process.

Humor and Linking Content

A recurring theme throughout the interviews was the potential for humor to allow students to make associations with academic material. Five teachers explained that humor serves as a mnemonic device. Mr. Harris clarified: “The humor connection is based on the principle that the human mind much more easily remembers data attached to spatial, personal, or otherwise meaningful information.” Said Ms. Abbott: “When I tell silly jokes about vocabulary words, my students will try to use the words over and over just to repeat the joke. They think we have an inside joke among ourselves.” She also stated: “I like to use puns as mnemonic devices to help kids remember ideas or terms. While studying the novel, To Kill a Mockingbird, I’ll sometimes refer to it as ‘Tequila Mockingbird’ just to see who’s paying attention.”

Mr. Johnson explained: “I try to relate the material to something humorous. By drawing comparisons to something funny, I find that it leads to higher retention levels. The kids remember the funny reference and it helps them remember the content.” Ms. Douglas offered: Teaching freshman History is not the most interesting of topics to most 14- and 15-year olds. You have to make it exciting and memorable somehow! The Enlightenment is easy to do with humor, Locke = love, Hobbes = hate. I use humorous pictures on the Smartboard, like drawing devilish ears on Hobbes. I also have been known to give humorous notes. When Saladin the Muslim leader in the Crusades won a lot of battles I talk about how he creamed the Italians, conquered all of the thousand islands in the region, defeated the French, and so on with ‘salad dressing’ references. It may sound silly and my students moan, but they love it. They are engaged and remember better.

Mr. Emerson said: “I give the formula for a circle, A=πr², but mention that I thought pies were round.” Ms. Emerson also remarked: “Laughter gets the adrenaline flowing so that the student’s mind is more receptive to information! It works with teachers too. I think the kids definitely remember content when humor is applied.” These five teachers conveyed that positive linkages led to better assimilation and overall retention.

Conversely, two teachers insisted that some students fail to “connect” concepts delivered with humor because they regard the content as unimportant. For example, Mr. Guthrie contributed: “A student who wants to remember key concepts will do so no matter how the material is presented. A little less humor and more self discipline would work just as well.” Mr. Freeman reflected: “Humor might be used to initially draw the students into the discussion, but you do not want to make a joke of the subject material. You must draw the line between the two. Otherwise, I would contend
that the kids actually *miss* the connection.” Messers Guthrie and Freeman voiced concern that the type of recall brought about by humor may not be meaningful or lasting.

**Humor and Student Relaxation**

Seven teachers perceived that humor relaxes students and relieves stress by providing a less intimidating environment. Students correspondingly show an increased level of comprehension. According to Ms. Abbott:

I teach classical literature to sophomores and some of the novels and short stories can be a little overwhelming, especially in this day of text messaging slang. I try to use humor to show them that all literature is based on previous archetypes, patterns, and recurrences. So, I might read a simple little story, like *The Three Pigs* just to demonstrate common themes.

Mr. Ivey shared the following:

Many kids think that World Civilizations is going to be a boring class. When I first started teaching, I was overly concerned with simply covering the content and I didn’t stray too far from the textbook. I’m not so sure I was able to maintain high levels of interest with the kids. Now that I have added humor, students seem enthused about coming to my class. The humor relaxes them and gives me the freedom to try a lot of neat things.

In total, the teachers communicated the overriding idea that humor has been a successful strategy in their classrooms for stress reduction and calming of students.

**Humor and Teacher Credibility**

Teachers had differing viewpoints about humor and instructor credibility. Six teachers stated that humor enhances credibility by “making the teacher seem down-to-earth.” Mr. Harris explained: “Humor also indicates wit and intelligence. Many school and content-appropriate ‘jokes’ are only caught by those who pay attention and are intelligent, thus not compromising a teacher’s credibility at all when used appropriately.” Ms. Collins declared: “As long as the humor is relevant and appropriate, I don’t see how this adversely affects the lesson’s importance.” The six teachers were quick to point out that teacher credibility can be enhanced if humor is targeted to the topic at hand and placed within the context of the learning experience.

Four teachers suggested that humor undermines credibility by giving the impression that the course and its instructor are “easy” and not challenging. Ms. Bell stated: “Students could perceive topics as frivolous and the instructor as less-than-serious if humor is used frequently.” Mr. Freeman remarked: “I think the use of humor, or the over-use of humor, might lead to the students remembering you as a very good jokester, but not necessarily a very good teacher.” Mr. Guthrie added: “I definitely think it’s important to make material accessible, but we can dilute content too much, attempting to make it entertaining or funny, and see students miss key concepts altogether. Not all students are sophisticated enough to make distinctions.” These four teachers emphasized that the use of humor must never be incongruent with one’s position as a classroom instructional leader.

**Appropriateness of Humor**

Teachers identified categories of “appropriate” humor. Mr. Ivey detailed:

When explaining how French and American cultures are different, I use the example of a man walking down the street wearing purple pants. I ask students what they would think if their father wore purple pants to work and so forth. In France/Europe this may often be totally acceptable. The kids love thinking about this and they laugh.

Mr. Johnson said: “I put random pictures in PowerPoint lectures just to keep the students interested. I relate chemical reaction types to dating scenarios.” He also added: “I tell numerous chemistry jokes, show chemistry cartoons from *Einstein Simplified*, and clip cartoons from the paper that are appropriate.” Mr. Freeman found it appropriate to use “comic strips on the worksheets or tests that relate to the subject being taught, while Ms. Bell admitted: “I’ve done impersonations. I might imitate Vanna White, for example, as I am demonstrating something new on the Smartboard. According to Ms. Abbott:

When teaching any parts of grammar or mechanics, I typically try to incorporate humor of some kind. For instance, last week while teaching the appropriate use of the semi-colon, I incorporated myself into the sample sentence I gave students:
‘Ms. B is the best teacher I know; she is not only brilliant, she is also witty and overwhelmingly attractive.’ Yes, narcissistic, but effective. I then took it another step further to incorporate a current foreign exchange student who the class really likes. ‘He is from Switzerland. The United States is the best country ever; Switzerland is an armpit.’ We all laughed, including the foreign exchange student who then told us how beautiful the scenery in Switzerland is, giving his peers an opportunity to understand him more. Nearly all students correctly incorporated the use of the semi-colon into the essay on which we were then working.

Mr. Harris related that he finds his “Crazy Prize Box” to be a very appropriate use of humor: Instead of giving out bonus points or pieces of candy for rewards for review games or doing well on assessments, I sometimes allow the students to select a prize from the crazy prize box, which has items like: junk computer parts, junk mail I get at school, acorns, empty ketchup packets, old classroom posters, you name it. The great thing is, is that they kill for this stuff! I think using humor is important because it makes students want to be a part of the class.

Other appropriate manifestations of humor the teachers contributed included role-playing, puns, exaggeration, music, and lighthearted literature. When discussing inappropriate forms of humor in the classroom, all 10 teachers mentioned, “use of sarcasm.” The teachers singled out the mocking of students, razing students, criticizing students in a mean-spirited way, or being disrespectful. Participants agreed that any attempt at sarcasm requires a strong rapport with the students so the young people know they are, in fact, being teased. Otherwise, the teacher should direct the sarcasm solely at him or herself. Said Mr. Johnson: “Sarcastic banter with students is not the type of humor you can break into when first meeting your students.”

Eight of the participants talked about the inappropriateness of humor in conjunction with testing and assessment. Mr. Ivey insisted: “I would not advocate humor when preparing students for a serious academic situation, such as state testing or something like the ACT or SAT.” Ms. Collins concurred: “Poking fun at high-stakes testing is not appropriate for all students. Some see the tests as their future and do not want to joke about it.”

Six teachers spoke of “disciplining a student on a serious manner” as off-limits for humor. Ms. Collins made a concession: “When disciplining a student for forgetting materials I might role play by pinning a post-it-note to my own shirt and joke about how the teacher makes sure how to remember things.”

Ms. Abbot offered an overall summation: “When the subject matter is too serious—Holocaust, discrimination—teaching Night by Elie Wiesel or House of the Spirits, humor would be totally inappropriate.” In short, teachers were dismissive of humor that demeans, reinforces stereotypes, biases or sexual or cultural misconceptions, or is directed at someone who does not wish to participate.

**Discussion**

In contrast to humorists who gauge success by laughter, educators measure humor’s effectiveness by how it promotes learning. Findings in the present study are consistent with discussions in the peer-reviewed literature that describe the use of humor as: (a) an important component of the learning process to increase student interest and attention (Gorham & Christophel, 1990), (b) providing students with a “mental break” (Shatz & LoShiavo, 2006), and (c) promoting the understanding and retention of concepts (Derks, Gardner, & Agarwal, 1998; Garner, 2006).

The secondary teachers in the present study were very confirmatory about the role of humor in teaching. As a group, they conveyed that humor could be integrated into the classroom such that it fosters a sense of openness and respect between students and teachers. Instructors’ thoughtful employment of humor can contribute to teaching effectiveness and provide a pleasant climate in which to interact. The prevailing message communicated throughout the interviews was that humor should be appropriate for the audience, target-specific, and placed within the context of learning. Some teachers did perceive that humor, especially when over-used, could threaten the authority of a teacher or undermine the significance of material presented in the classroom. Others argued that using humor might be self-serving for some instructors and promote a teacher-centered classroom environment.

Teachers articulated that there are indeed appropriate and inappropriate uses of humor in the high school classroom. Many of the respondents
exhorted the idea that humor need not be a divergence from the core content and were in favor of humor woven into their subject matter. Teachers should avoid humor related to physical appearance, mannerisms, or cultural identification. It is also best to eliminate jokes and puns related to family relationships, religion, customs, or racial issues. Humor should not be sarcastic in nature or that which attempts to deliver an unkind comment disguised as a “joke.” If humor leads to individual or whole group discomfort, it likely has no place in the classroom setting.

Limitations & Future Research

The present study centered on a small number of participants from a specific school with a reputation for excellence. Thus, the informants might possess sameness in their collective experiences with humor as a pedagogical tool. The results may not generalize to other teachers or other school districts. Stake (1995), however, asserted that naturalistic generalizability ensues more frequently from a single study to another that is similar than from a single study to a population. While data in this study captured initial impressions of these respondents, I recommend further research to expand this inquiry in the form of a longitudinal study. Doing so could document the evolution of teachers’ perceptions about humor. I would like to revisit these teachers and conduct observations in their classrooms and witness their uses of humor in real-time class sessions.

Expansion of the study to include other sites, other contexts, and other grade levels is highly suggested. A limitation of this study was the failure to address potential cultural, gender, or dispositional differences when discussing the use of classroom humor. A teacher from a different background or with different life experiences and temperament might negatively construe particular uses of humor while another teacher discerns the same humor in a positive vein. It would be beneficial, then, to conduct interviews with teachers from diverse school settings, including an urban school with at-risk students and a rural environment.

In conclusion, the secondary teachers in the present study appeared to have internalized many of the characteristics of effective teaching, especially in the area of demonstrating a robust sense of humor. While some of these perceived benefits of humor might be embedded within larger frameworks of effectual teaching behaviors, it is evident that these instructors understood humor as a pedagogical tool which stands on its own merits. The participants, recognized regionally for their use of best teaching practices, considered humor to be an integral part of that repertoire and acknowledged the importance of bringing laughter to students to reinforce the notion that learning, at any age, should be pleasurable.

References


