

**Portraits of Laughter in “*Kid*”ergarten Children:
The Giggles and Guffaws That Support Teaching, Learning, and Relationships**

by

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty
of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Human Development

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April 18, 2006
Blacksburg, Virginia

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Keywords: laughter, humor, relationships, kindergarten, children

ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this qualitative study was to focus on the laughter-provoking events and situations that supported the teaching, learning, and relationships of 13 kindergarten children, one teacher, and one researcher in a public school classroom in Southwestern Virginia. This study drew on principles from portraiture, ethnography, and case studies, and primarily utilized observation, fieldnotes, informal interviews, and audiotape to document daily events and conversations.

Discussion of the importance of laughter for these children, teacher, and researcher begins with three short case study portraits on different children, including how their varying personalities and interests prompted me to use laughter with them in varying ways. Next, the importance and meanings of laughter in the group is given focus, specifically the daily morning group where the entire class came together at once with the classroom teacher. Next, four themes that surfaced early in my research that were filled with laughter are portrayed, primarily how they demonstrated continuity throughout the semester. Then, the stimuli in the daily curriculum or discourse that were laughable are described, with specific focus on how laughter can be important to, or help facilitate learning. Last, I will summarize my findings to discuss the practical applications of laughter and humor for the teacher.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For Maddy, may you always laugh
For Zachary, may you learn to laugh

For the children and teacher who let me into their lives to share their laughter

To Jim, Andy, and Lynn, my wise committee members and friends, who have patiently supported and encouraged me for the past 6 years, even when things seemed impossible

To my mom and dad, who have tolerantly stuck with me the longest

To Mark and Katherine, who joined my committee late, though hung on with me until the end

To my constant, unconditional companions throughout all of this: my dogs Lucy Lou and Elliot Elmo Wormwort, and my cats Mabel Ting Mungbean, Ruby Roo, and Wonky Bird

To myself, because I wrote it.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PROLOGUE: “KID”ERGARTEN.....	1
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	2
Evolution of a Study.....	2
Purpose of My Study.....	5
Research Questions.....	6
Definitions.....	7
What Will Follow.....	9
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	11
Laughter: Serious or Laughable?.....	11
From a Spasmodic Utterance to a Whole Lot o’ Eggs: Laughter Defined.....	13
What Does Laughter Look Like?.....	14
Haughter or Lumor? Lumor or Haughter? Laughter’s Relationship to Humor.....	15
Theories of Laughter.....	16
I am Better Than You! Superiority Theory.....	17
Mismatched Expectations: Incongruity Theory.....	20
Whew! Relief Theory.....	23
Relate to Me! Social Theories of Laughter.....	26
Laughter is Everything! One Multidimensional Theory of Laughter.....	28
My Theoretical Stance.....	29
Benefits of Laughter.....	30
Developing and Sustaining Relationships: Social Benefits.....	30
Laughter as Communication.....	30
Positive Social Exchange.....	31
Laughing Alone.....	32
Laughing Together.....	32
Funny or Not.....	34

Good for the Brain: Cognitive Benefits.....	34
Understanding Children’s Thinking and Learning.....	35
Literature and Reading.....	36
Language and Word Play.....	37
Learning Through Humorous Television and Movies...or Not.....	38
Creativity.....	40
Good for the Body and Soul: Physiological and Psychological Benefits.....	40
Reducing Stress.....	41
Reducing Fear and Anxiety.....	41
Developing a Positive Outlook and Sense-of-Self.....	42
Health Benefits.....	43
Importance of Culture.....	45
Laughter Through the Ages.....	45
The Embeddedness of Context and Culture.....	46
Laughter as Culturally Desirable or Undesirable.....	47
Ethnic and Socioeconomic Differences.....	49
Gender Differences.....	50
Religion.....	52
Special Mention of Tickling.....	54
Say Cheese! Special Mention of Smiling.....	55
Laughter and Humor in Schooling and Education.....	57
What Makes Kindergartners Laugh?.....	59
Why Laughter and Humor in the Classroom?.....	61
Mastering Learning.....	61
Mastering Mistakes.....	63
Mastering Conflict.....	64
Mastering Coping Skills.....	65
Mastering Relationships.....	66

Mastering or Knowing the Self.....	67
Mastering Reading and Social Ideas.....	67
Laughter and Humor as Disruptive to the Classroom.....	69
Conclusion.....	69
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODS.....	71
Quantitative or Qualitative Research.....	71
Question of Field of Thought.....	72
Coming to a Design.....	72
Portraiture.....	73
Ethnography.....	75
Case Study.....	76
Setting	77
Participants.....	77
Collecting Data.....	78
Fieldnotes	78
Personal Journal.....	79
Interviews With Children.....	79
Audiotape.....	81
Photography and Short Videos.....	81
Audience.....	82
My Role in the Research.....	82
Ending Research.....	83
Analyzing Events and Writing Stories.....	84
Research Biases.....	85
Trustworthiness of Data.....	86
CHAPTER FOUR: CHILDREN AND TEACHERS:.....	88
Aaron.....	91
Abigail.....	93

Adam.....	95
Addie.....	97
Brady.....	99
Charlie.....	101
Don Jeffrey.....	103
Isaac.....	105
Jeremy.....	107
Julia	109
Karla.....	111
Lindy.....	113
Patrick.....	115
Sabrina.....	117
Sarah.....	119
CHAPTER FIVE: SETTING.....	121
In Appalachia: Southwestern Virginia.....	121
Appalachian Characteristics Common to Cartwright Elementary.....	122
Cartwright Elementary School.....	123
Aaron Silver’s Classroom.....	125
A Typical Day in Kindergarten.....	126
CHAPTER SIX: ISAAC, JULIA, AND LINDY: 3 CASE STUDY PORTRAITS.....	130
Isaac.....	131
Key Issues: Trust and Security.....	131
The Day He Talked.....	133
The Day He Smiled.....	134
The Day He Laughed.....	135
Julia.....	137
Key Issue: Companionship.....	137
Jokes and Rhymes.....	139

Pop Culture- Literally.....	139
April Fools.....	140
Pull My Finger.....	141
The Moon is Your Pants.....	142
Beep, Beep.....	142
Lindy.....	144
Key Issues: Power and Control.....	144
Hair and Shoelaces.....	147
Mrs. Lindy.....	148
Showing Off.....	149
When She Laughs.....	150
Conclusion.....	151
CHAPTER SEVEN: LAUGHTER IN THE GROUP.....	152
Poopy, Groupy Time.....	152
Lunch, Attendance, and Announcements.....	155
Show and Tell it All.....	157
Conclusion	168
CHAPTER EIGHT: LAUGHTER OVER TIME.....	170
My Notebook.....	170
Meanings.....	175
Not More Knots!.....	177
Meanings.....	178
Teeth and Their Collector.....	180
Meanings.....	185
The Mean Lunch Lady.....	186
Meanings.....	191
CHAPTER NINE: LAUGHTER AND LEARNING.....	193
Conceptual Learning.....	193

Planets and the Solar System.....	193
Other Laughable Learnable Things.....	196
Social Learning.....	200
The Unheard of or Unwillingly Heard of.....	200
The Art of Nosepicking.....	203
Lousy Lice.....	206
CHAPTER TEN: MEANING AND APPLICATIONS FOR TEACHERS.....	208
Image of the Teacher and Child.....	208
General Techniques for the Classroom.....	209
Know Children and Their Interests.....	209
Novelty.....	211
Use Multiple Ways of Learning.....	212
Set Children up for Success.....	213
Have Group Time.....	213
Support Absurdity.....	214
Enhance What You Already Know.....	214
EPILOGUE: MY RETURN TO FIRST GRADE.....	216
REFERENCES.....	222
APPENDICES.....	246
APPENDIX A: Children’s Ages at Beginning of Study.....	246
APPENDIX B: School and Classroom Philosophies.....	247
APPENDIX C: Research Proposal for the Montgomery County School System.....	249
APPENDIX D: Parent Introductory Letter.....	254
APPENDIX E: Parental Permission Form.....	255
APPENDIX F: Teacher Permission Form.....	257
APPENDIX G: IRB Approval March 16,2004.....	259
APPENDIX H: Update on Changes to Current IRB From March 16, 2004.....	260
APPENDIX I: IRB Re-Approval August 5, 2004.....	261

APPENDIX J: Research Update for IRB Approval Continuation From August 5, 2004.....262

APPENDIX K: IRB Approval May 11, 2005.....263

VITA.....264

LIST OF FIGURES

<i>Figure 1.</i> Karla’s picture of ‘kid’ergarten.....	1
<i>Figure 2.</i> Sarah’s portrait of Aaron.....	91
<i>Figure 3.</i> Abigail’s self-portrait.....	93
<i>Figure 4.</i> Adam’s self-portrait.....	95
<i>Figure 5.</i> Addie’s self-portrait.....	97
<i>Figure 6.</i> Brady’s self-portrait.....	99
<i>Figure 7.</i> Charlie’s self-portrait.....	101
<i>Figure 8.</i> Don Jeffrey’s self-portrait.....	103
<i>Figure 9.</i> Isaac’s self-portrait.....	105
<i>Figure 10.</i> Jeremy’s self-portrait.....	107
<i>Figure 11.</i> Julia’s self-portrait.....	109
<i>Figure 12.</i> Karla’s self-portrait.....	111
<i>Figure 13.</i> Lindy’s self-portrait.....	113
<i>Figure 14.</i> Patrick’s self-portrait.....	115
<i>Figure 15.</i> Sabrina’s self-portrait.....	117
<i>Figure 16.</i> Julia’s portrait of Sarah.....	119
<i>Figures 17.-20.</i> Kindergarten Teeth.....	180

PROLOGUE

“Kid”ergarten



Figure 1. “Kid”ergarten

When I questioned Adam about what he enjoyed he said, “I like being in ‘*kid*’ergarten.” Karla drew a picture of what she thought “*kid*’ergarten is like and told me, “Kids would grow and poke out of the ground like flowers with lots of colors. They would be happy and smiling and grow taller than trees.

They would laugh, and laugh, and laugh, ALLLLLLLLL the time.”

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Evolution of a Study

The day that I knew I would study children's laughter happened more than 5 years ago during my first year of teaching, a time when I was convinced I knew more about children than I did. I was in my toddler classroom where we were in the middle of snack time, and anyone who has worked with young children knows that snack is tumultuous enough without any extraneous occurrences. Suddenly, Ethel, 2 years and 4 months old at the time, put down her spoon, pushed back her chair, stood on it, smiled with pure intent to smile (I know it was intended as I saw it thoughtfully creep upon her face), looked right at me, and proceeded to laugh. Immediately, I looked at her sternly and stated in my deepest and most serious of teacher voices, "Ethel, please sit down during snack time." Much to my disbelief, she continued to stand precariously on the edge of her chair. Again, and I know my eyebrows were raised this time as I could feel them ascending toward my hairline, I emphatically declared, "Ethel, I said please sit down." She stood, she stood, and on she stood, grinning and laughing.

It did not end there. After the second time I told her to sit down and she declined, Greg, Cindy, and Bobby, a group of triplets, all gingerly put their spoons down and stood on their chairs, at first hesitantly, then confidently. A few seconds later, Gilda, a girl with no spoken language at the time, did the same. Still seconds later, Jerry climbed upon his chair and after that, Gordon stood on his. Before I could

fully contemplate what was happening, I had all seven of my toddlers perched on their chairs around the snack table, each one looking at me attentively, some grinning and some laughing, though each taking the chance that it was all right to do this in our classroom.

I stopped trying to control the chair situation because it was so outlandish and uncharacteristic of Ethel and the others, that I intuited the need to gouge deeper than my desire to enforce our classroom rules and discover the significance. Ethel could not tell me why she stood on her chair, as her language and intuition were not developed enough to let me know her motive. I don't believe she was consciously aware of the reason, though it was not about defying social norms, manners, rules of the classroom, or causing a commotion, as was always my initial thought when a child did something contrary to the normal classroom routine. Ethel had an idea that she would stand on her chair, did it to see how I would respond, and when I reacted positively, the other children noticed and enhanced the funniness of the game by participating. Somehow, in her profound 2-year-old mind, she knew there to be a deep-rooted intersubjectivity in the situation—she somehow anticipated that I might find her behavior funny, and the truth was I found the situation brilliantly and fantastically hilarious.

For me, this situation was an issue of relinquishing my control and authority as a teacher, and had I not been willing to do this, I would have missed its glorious outcome, which was a game that positively united everyone in the classroom through laughter. In the deepest of senses the children knew the kind of teacher and person I hoped to be, which was a lighthearted, playful, and understanding one. When all of

the children began standing I could no longer pretend to be in control, and the smile I had been trying to hide broke free, which just as soon became shaking full-body laughter, until I decided to join in and stand on my chair to show them that I accepted and appreciated this act that I feel helped me begin my voyage to becoming a better teacher.

This anecdote was the impetus that spawned my interest in studying children's laughter. As there was little descriptive information on this subject, the goal of my thesis research was to describe the many specific scenarios in which children laugh, and using the children in my preschool class was convenient and fitting. I found that children can potentially laugh at everything, especially in a familiar and accepting environment, but most intriguing was my finding that every laughter situation I documented occurred *only* in the context of interacting with other children or teachers. The ways in which children related with others was multifaceted, and I found laughter to be involved in relationships in different ways including initiating new relationships, or enhancing or sustaining those that had already begun to develop (Smidl, 2003).

After my thesis was completed I stuck it in a box with the exhaustion and finality of a wet and muddy camping trip, one that was satisfying but thankfully over. When I decided I was not quite bedraggled enough and would continue my education, I knew I still wanted to study children's laughter, but I was also aware that I needed to revisit my previous study and findings to figure out how I could more deeply investigate the most salient points of what I had found. I concluded that I needed a closer focus on the importance of relationships to children's laughter, as well as the

importance of laughter to children's relationships, including those with other children and their teachers.

As my thesis study of preschoolers took place in a University Lab School setting, I was first interested in expanding my research to children of an age group I had not studied before, and because I wanted to look more specifically at developing relationships, I desired to begin my study with a group of children I did not know. Also, because I am a strong believer in the public school system, I felt becoming immersed in a more traditional, structured public school setting could have more meaning for a greater number of people.

Purpose of My Study

In the world of serious science, laughter is seen as a lightweight topic, and has always dangled at the threshold of scientific scrutiny. It is often seen through a cloudy lens as something capricious that warrants little prestige if studied, and in the past, it has had an unfortunate reputation because the earliest completed studies of laughter were done by researchers who did not study it rigorously, but enthusiastically without method. Because of this, there may be no other facet of human behavior that has so many unanswered questions about its origin or purpose (Provine, 2000), and I sought to study this phenomenon that is necessary to be happy.

In my study, I felt it was essential to move beyond the minimal scientific understanding of laughter and begin to look deeply into its importance to human development, specifically how it is important to teachers and children in a kindergarten classroom. There is a growing body of literature that supports the value

of laughter in many life areas including improving psychological well being, enhancing interpersonal relationships, facilitating learning, understanding children's thinking, improving health, reducing fear and anxiety, and understanding culture. However, despite the beginnings of some very important research on these benefits, there is still too little for practitioners and scientists to begin to fully acknowledge its value in life for children and those who work with children. I believed a study of laughter could promote better insight into how children relate to one another and their teachers, and demonstrate that laughter can be a powerful tool for helping children learn.

Despite the need for more research on children's laughter in the literature, the reason I continue to study this subject is really a personal one that becomes simpler every time I explain it: Every day I spend with young children I see how they use laughter to connect with others. I see how it is used to help them learn through books, art, music, and play. I witness how laughter can make a tired child more alert, a sad child happy, or a bored child inspired. I see how important it is for helping a teacher to resolve conflicts, and help children learn to look realistically, yet hopefully at a world that is often not easy or fair. The fact that laughter is ubiquitous in most children around the world, but becomes much more uncommon as we age, is enough to prove to me that a study of children's laughter is valuable.

Research Questions

Following are the questions that guided my study:

1. How are children and teacher's relationships facilitated, enhanced, or sustained through laughter (relationships between children and teachers, children and children, teachers and teachers)?
2. How is laughter important to individual children and the classroom group?
3. How do teachers use laughter based on the differing needs and personalities of individual children?
4. How do the relationships that develop with laughter or humor as a key tenet demonstrate continuity?
5. How is learning demonstrated through the humor and laughter in daily curriculum and events?

Definitions

Following is a clarification of how I define two key terms in my research questions:

Laughter: In an attempt to begin to describe the different intensities of laughter, I have used Kuhn's (1994) 15 stages of laughter. I kept this hierarchy in mind as I was writing to help me talk of laughter in terms of degree, though I am not claiming complete accuracy. My main goal for including these stages is to help the reader to begin to understand the variability and complexity of laughter.

1. **Smirk:** Slight, often fleeting upturning of the corners of the mouth, completely voluntary and controllable.
2. **Smile:** Silent, voluntary and controllable, more perceptible than a smirk; begins to release endorphins.

3. **Grin:** Silent, controllable, but uses more facial muscles (e.g., eyes begin to narrow).
4. **Snicker:** First emergence of sound with facial muscles, but still controllable.
5. **Giggle:** Has a 50% chance of reversal to avoid a full laugh; sound of giggling is amusing; efforts to suppress it tend to increase its strength.
6. **Chuckle:** Involves chest muscles with different pitch.
7. **Chortle:** Originates even deeper in the chest and involves muscles of torso; usually provokes laughter in others.
8. **Laugh:** Involves facial and thoracic muscles as well as abdomen and extremities; sound of barking or snorting.
9. **Cackle:** First involuntary stage; pitch is higher and body begins to rock, spine extends and flexes with an upturning of head.
10. **Guffaw:** Full body response; feet stomp, arms wave, thighs get slapped, torso rocks, sound is deep and loud; may result in free flowing of tears, increased heart rate, and breathlessness; strongest solitary laughter experience.
11. **Howl:** Volume and pitch rise higher and higher and body becomes more animated.
12. **Shriek:** Greater intensity than a howl; sense of helplessness and vulnerability.
13. **Roar:** Lose individuality (i.e., the audience roars).
14. **Convulse:** Body is completely out of control in a fit of laughter resembling a seizure; extremities flail aimlessly, balance is lost, gasp for breath, collapse or fall off chair.

15. Die: Instant of total helplessness; a brief, physically intense, transcendent experience; having died, we are thereafter reborn in a refreshing moment of breathlessness and exhaustion with colors more vivid and everything sparkling; everything is renewed (Adapted from Kuhn 1994, pp. 34-35).

Relationship: The idea of a relationship means different things to most people, and it is difficult to contemplate how a young child defines and attaches meaning to one. For the purposes of my dissertation and within the context of the classroom, I decided to define the word relationship based on the primary characteristics that are applicable to relating within a classroom. The first important feature of how the children's interactions came to develop is that they were placed together in kindergarten on a predetermined basis, contingent upon their age and place of residence. Thus, those interactions they subsequently engaged in were not initially based on personal choice, personalities, or interests. Since the school year runs for a finite period of time and on a consistent schedule, the children's interactions would inevitably end, at least with this particular group and teacher. However, because these children would be together for an entire year, continuity automatically became a condition of their interactions and relationships. Thus, for these children and teacher, relationship means any combination of children and the classroom teacher co-existing and interacting with one another in the school environment over a period of time.

What Will Follow

The remainder of this dissertation has been organized differently than the traditional one, and the chapters have been constructed to show the importance of

laughter in teaching, learning, and relationships in different ways. Chapter 2 discusses the literature on the theories and benefits of laughter, the cultural meanings of laughter, and its use in schooling and education. Chapter 3 describes the research methods that guided my study with focus on portraiture, ethnography, and case study. Chapter 4 is dedicated to describing the participants in my study, and Chapter 5 portrays the setting, including the region, school, and classroom. Chapter 6 is a compilation of three short case study portraits on Isaac, Julia, and Lindy including how their varying personalities and interests prompted me to interact and use laughter with them in varying ways. Chapter 7 focuses on laughter in the morning group where all children came together with the classroom teacher, where I examine the relationships and content of the laughable discussions that took place. Chapter 8 discusses four themes that surfaced early in my research through laughter-provoking play, and discusses how they showed continuity throughout the semester. Chapter 9 depicts the things in the daily curriculum or discourse that were laughable and later demonstrated a child had learned, including concepts and social skills. I have woven most of my interpretation with the telling of each story, as my analysis occurred simultaneously with each event, and the meanings often transformed as our relationships grew or changed, though I have also dedicated Chapter 10 to a short description of the practical applications of my findings to teachers.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Laughter: Serious or Laughable?

“A simple test to enable us to judge the value of something is to imagine a society without the feature under examination, or to imagine a child without it” (Lloyd, 1985, pg. 73).

Overall, in terms of the subjects that have been scrupulously studied in history, there is a scant amount of literature on the subject of laughter. When it comes to laughter in children, there is even less. One might wonder why so few people would study a subject so interesting, though maybe it is laughter’s perceived lack of seriousness that makes many unwilling, or perhaps unable to study it. Another possibility for a lack of research on children’s laughter is the mindset that many adults still undervalue children and view childhood as a disease that needs curing. As Jordan Smoller (1987) jokes in his article, adults often view childhood as an affliction whose symptoms include dwarfism, immaturity, and knowledge deficits.

Any parent, teacher, and growing child knows that being young is fraught with difficulty, including a desire to become independent and gain control over life, and acquire the powers and responsibility of the adult whom he or she must interact with, answer to, and rely on. There is a lot of frustration in childhood as a young person learns to negotiate his or her changing body, thoughts, roles, and multiple experiences with varying people on a day-to-day basis (Wolfenstein, 1954). In terms of this frequent discontent and seemingly never-ending growing pains, laughter and humor can promote overall healthier growth and development in children in a

multitude of arenas (Klein, 2003). For me it was *only* after experiencing the benefits of laughter in my classroom and myself that my research really became meaningful and more than just a fun subject to study. It immediately became integral to my ability to be a happy person and understanding teacher.

To preface what is to follow, my literature review will focus mainly on laughter rather than humor, though humor is naturally included in my literature review and dissertation, as humor is what produces the type of laughter that is considered humorous laughter, most of which I found in my previous study of preschool children (Smidl, 2003). Including humor in my discussion is integral because I hope to provide ideas and suggestions about the importance and uses of laughter and humor to children and teachers in education, and the appropriate use of both could be vital to a laughing student, teacher, and classroom.

My literature review will begin with an overview of laughter and describe its relationship to humor. Next, I will summarize the primary theories of laughter that guide the research of those who succumb to its importance and appeal, with a subsequent discussion on the research and articles written on the benefits of laughter and humor to social, cognitive, physiological, and psychological development. Next, I will note the reasons why addressing cultural differences is vital to any study on these topics, and finally, I will review the literature written on laughter and humor and the potential meanings to schooling and education for teachers and children.

As you will see, I have included many older studies of laughter and humor because I feel they are imperative to an understanding of how thoughts on these subjects have changed, or not changed, over time. I see their inclusion as something

that strengthens, rather than lessens the reader's picture of children's laughter and what it might mean in today's social and cultural context. Overall, the basic theories and thoughts on the origin and meanings of laughter have stayed the same over the years, and all theories remain applicable dependent on the time and place in which laughter-producing situations occur. In particular, what makes children laugh at any given time is still representative of all of the previous findings of studies of this sort, even though the culture and values of our current society are everchanging. Also, most of the older studies that I decided to include were ones that many authors also cited, giving them a classic status, and rendering them mentionable.

I have also included both primary sources (articles from research journals) and secondary sources (articles from unrefereed trade and practical journals), as both are crucial to an understanding of laughter in the classroom, especially in terms of what may be pertinent to fostering them in this setting (Galvan, 2005; Hart, 1998).

From a Spasmodic Utterance to a Whole Lot o' Eggs: Laughter Defined

Given the common sound of laughter, our ignorance of it is remarkable. What would a group of nonlaughing aliens think if they suddenly appeared on our planet? What would they think of these "large, featherless bipeds emitting paroxysms of sound from a toothy vent in their faces" (Provine, 2000, p.6)? When thought about, the sheer phenomenon of laughter is extraordinarily complex and some have even called laughter the human song (Provine, 2000). One eloquently espoused definition of laughter comes from over 400 years ago by Joubert (1579/1980, p. 73):

Laughter is a movement caused by the jubilant mind and the unequal agitation of the heart, which draws back the mouth and the lips, and shakes the diaphragm and the pectoral parts with impetuosity and broken-up sound, through all of which is expressed a feeling over an ugly thing unworthy of pity.

In *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (2002), the present-day meaning of laugh is defined as meaning “to manifest the spasmodic utterance, facial distortion, shaking of the sides, etc. which forms the instinctive expression of mirth, amusement, sense of ludicrous, scorn, etc.” From these two definitions, the reader can already see how time and culture have radically changed perceptions of what is thought to cause laughter, from an ugly thing unworthy of pity in the 16th century to something amusing or ludicrous in the 21st.

The noun laughter is given two meanings: The first is the “action of laughing,” and the second is “the whole number of eggs laid by a fowl before she is ready to sit.” Though I focused on the spasmodic utterance of laughter for the purposes of my research, I am curious exactly how many the “whole number of eggs” is for the fowl.

What Does Laughter Look Like?

The facial expression associated with laughter is one that is visually common to all of us, though most of us have never tried to describe it. Many have described children as sounding and behaving like frolicking and cackling monkeys, and this is essentially correct. Most of the mannerisms of primates and humans are the same

during laughter, even though there are characteristics found particular to varying species (Van Hooff & Preuschoft, 2003). Following is the most common description of the sounds and facial display of laughter as frequently described in humans...and monkeys.

The salvos of expirations, given in a series of exhalatory barks, end in a state of deep expiration, in which the laughter may choke and, face red, gasp for breath. Subsequently there is an inspiration howl, after which a new series of expiration barks may follow. The mouth is wide open, the mouth corners are retracted, the teeth bared, and sometimes there is a shedding of tears. The laughter makes boisterous, seemingly uncontrollable movements with his body and arms. These are without the tension and rigidity characteristic of aggression or fear. On the contrary, in true whole-hearted laughter there is a general relaxation of the musculature, to the extent even that the laughter may lose his equilibrium, seeking support from a neighbor while slapping him on the shoulders (Van Hooff & Preuschoft, 2003, pg. 260).

Critchley (2002) also explains laughter as an explosion within the body that can be compared to other explosive phenomenon that oscillate the organs.

Haughter or Lumor? Lumor or Haughter? Laughter's Relationship to Humor

Though many researchers often interchange humor with laughter and find the theories of humor and laughter synonymous, this is a misconception and may lead to a misunderstanding of these phenomena, as it is often smiling and laughter that are a response to humor and can be seen as physical overt behaviors (Apte, 1985).

Commonly, the word humor is used to refer to cognitive and emotional processes, whereas laughter refers to the behavioral end product or a reflex-like physiological-behavioral response (Lefcourt & Martin, 1986). Theoretically, the distinction is made in that those theories about laughter must take into account the many nonhumorous types of situations that produce it, such as anxiety or embarrassment, whereas theories of humor strictly embrace scenarios that are considered funny (Chapman & Foot, 1996).

Many scholars postulate that studying laughter is a precursor to or simultaneous topic that needs to be addressed during any study on humor, and though laughter is not always synonymous with humor, it is the major indicator and hence should be acknowledged (Gibbon, 1988). I found that most of the past research has focused on humor in children without taking note of how to accurately define the humor response, if it can be defined at all. Though most researchers will concur that laughter is the response to humor, few of them have made attempts to richly describe it and its occurrence, and even fewer have considered the cases where laughter is a nonhumorous response. Overall, most researchers will agree that it is very difficult to decipher between the semantic borders of laughter and humor, though they will undeniably concur that there is a very intimate and definite relationship between them (Apte, 1985; Lloyd, 1985).

Theories of Laughter

Over the past several hundred years philosophers, poets, psychologists, and intellectuals of all sorts have put forth numerous theories of laughter, and scholars of

theory have attempted to carefully classify them. However, the often-esoteric subject of laughter and the verbosity of pedants make the classification of some theories moderately difficult (Justin, 1932). With this in mind, I have followed the lead of others by placing the theories in the categories by which they can be best understood, though there is naturally some overlap and occasional difference of opinion.

Important to note is that these theories of laughter are non-specific to children, and devising a children's theory of laughter would be a monumental task since children's developmental changes would need to be one of the primary components. In Justin's (1932) study to test the validity of these theories, she found they are all essentially correct, as every theory has the potential to be when placed in the accurate context.

I am Better Than You! Superiority Theory

“We laugh, but our laughter is vain!

That someone's unhappy, is plain—

At others' sad plight

We scream with delight!

Getting pleasure from other folks' pain” (cited in Gruner, 1978, p. 37)!

The first, oldest, and most widespread theory of laughter is the Superiority Theory, which contends that laughter is an expression of a person's feelings of superiority over other people, or a feeling of superiority over our own former infirmity (Morreall, 1983; 1987; Rapp, 1947). Plato, this theory's first proponent, believes that laughter is harmful and a pain in the soul and we laugh at vice, particularly self-ignorance, in other people who are relatively powerless (Plato, 1976). Plato argues that when we laugh heavily and lose control of ourselves we

become less than fully human, in fact, laughter shakes the body, distorts the features of the face, and makes man similar to the monkey. He saw laughter as so malicious that he felt it should not even be portrayed in literature, and he was so emphatic about its detrimental qualities that he was never seen laughing (Plato, 1976). He described how pain and pleasure are associated with laughter, and made the analogy between the laughable and scratching an itch. Just as scratching satisfies the itch, the pleasure of laughter relieves the pain associated with gloating over friends' misfortunes (Plato, 1976).

Aristotle, Plato's pupil, is not as emphatic as Plato about the evils of laughter, though he still thinks that laughter is a form of derision and believed, "the laughable is a subdivision of the ugly that does not cause injury or pain" (cited in Provine, 2000, p. 13). He believes that even wit is really educated insolence, and if a person laughs too much he cannot live a good life, though a small amount of laughter is desirable if done in moderation (Aristotle, 2000). He also suggested that laughter should only be allowed for useful functions as a way of taming it (cited in Kuschel, 1994). Cicero adds, "For it is by satirizing the character of others, by making fun of our own, by comparing a thing with a worse, ... that laughter is stimulated" (cited in Greig 1969, pg. 226-227). Socrates also suggests that the sources of laughter are the weak and impotent, and the misfortunes of friends excite joy and laughter (cited in Gregory, 1923).

Not until Thomas Hobbes began his writing on laughter was the Superiority Theory expanded to say that laughter can be harmful to a person's character, and there is something gravely wrong with the person that only feels secure with himself

by making fun of or looking down on others (cited in Ewin, 2001; Gruner, 1997). In essence, laughter is our own sense of superiority to others in recognition of our own inferiority or follies in the past, and he disagrees from Plato and Aristotle about who it is laughing at whom. In fact, laughing at ourselves is quite prevalent as we recall our previous misfortunes and embarrassments, and laugh knowing that we are now much better off (Lefcourt & Martin, 1986). Anthony Ludovici talks about Hobbes' theory from an evolutionary perspective when he discusses that the baring of teeth during laughter occurs because originally it was seen as a challenge or threat to let an enemy know they were stronger and unafraid (Ludovici, 1932).

Bergler (1956) has a slightly different take on the Superiority Theory by claiming we have psychic masochism. He describes this as turning externally perceived displeasure into internally perceived pleasure because at heart, we are all unconscious masochists. Though we try to transfer this displeasure, our superego will not allow it, nor is the ego allowed this pleasure. Subsequently, what happens is our ego develops the ability to respond to this displeasure with pseudoaggression rather than real aggression. The laughter that results is an alibi to escape the censure of the superego. Bergler's most gruesome picture of why we become masochistic and end up expressing laughter in these ways is that we suffer from extreme fear and megalomania in infancy. "We suffer from a septet of baby fears including the fear of starvation, of being devoured, of being poisoned, of being choked, of being chopped to pieces, of being drained, and of being castrated" (cited in Gruner, 1978, p. 27).

Baudelaire sees laughter as being primarily diabolical, and only secondarily human, as it is a clash between our infinite greatness and wretchedness. He sees

laughing as satanic in origin feeling that Satan laughs because he is a living contradiction of keeping with his intellectual powers. Within his theory is the thought that we also laugh at our superiority over animals, which includes basic human and animal functions such as sexual relations, sleep, death, lactation, aging, nudity, and cannibalism (Baudelaire, 1956).

Some researchers have begun to contemplate the relevance of the Superiority Theory to children, as its ideas have historically been questioned in relation to their appropriateness to this age group. This theory may help us further understand children's emotional and social processes, especially as they begin to engage in aggressive or taunting types of humor.

Mismatched Expectations: Incongruity Theory

When looking at the Incongruity Theory, the focus needs to be shifted from the emotional to the cognitive side of laughter, for the Incongruity Theory contends that what makes us laugh is an intellectual reaction to something that is unexpected, illogical, or inappropriate (Morreall, 1983). The basic tenet of this theory suggests that we laugh when there is a breach to our orderly world as we have come to understand and live it, and when something does not fit into our anticipated experience it surprises us and produces laughter (Buckley, 2003). It should first be noted that there are different descriptions of exactly what incongruity means within this theory; some believe the incongruity needs to be resolved for laughter, as in figuring out a joke (Suls, 1983), and some feel it only needs to be something that exists or happens and causes a person to be surprised and laugh (Holland, 1982).

Aristotle originally suggested the Incongruity Theory, though he did not develop it since it conflicted with the concepts of his Superiority Theory; perhaps he felt too superior to suggest there may be more to laughter (cited in Morreall, 1983). Not until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries did this theory resurface with the thinking of Immanuel Kant who felt that in everything that is to excite a lively convulsive laugh, there must be something absurd (Kant, 1892). By his theory, we have an understanding of the real relation of objects in the world and then perceive a new concept that challenges our reality, and our subsequent laughter is an expression of this difference. He asserts it is our perception, rather than our conception that is always right, and we are always glad to see our tireless, strict, wearisome governess, the reason, for once convicted of insufficiency (Kant, 1892). In 1819, Hazlitt also supported the Incongruity Theory stating that laughter stems from the disconnecting of one idea from another, or the jostling of one feeling against another. He acknowledged that humans are the only animals that laugh or weep, for they are the only animals that are struck with the difference between what things are, and how they should be (Hazlitt, 1920).

Koestler (1964) developed incongruity to refer to the juxtaposition of two normally incongruous frames of reference, or the discovery of various similarities and analogies implicit in concepts normally considered remote from each other. In his idea of what causes laughter are scientific discoveries and the creative process, both of which are falsified by a person coming to an understanding that a new frame of thinking exists (Koestler, 1964). Holland (1982) suggests a theory of laughter in

which people will laugh at things that touch on their self-identities, meaning anything they can personally relate to from their previous experiences or knowledge.

Charles Darwin is also a proponent of the Incongruity Theory, and contends that something incongruous or unaccountable makes us laugh, though we must be in a pleasant frame of mind (Darwin, 1899). James Beattie (1776) asserts that we laugh when our mind recognizes the peculiarity of a relationship, as long as it does not arouse stronger emotions like anger or pity, and Monro (1951) suggests that what will most likely generate laughter is being jolted out of a whole frame of mind or universe of discourse.

In looking at Freud's analytical perspective, Matte (2001), feels his theory falls mainly, though not solely, into the category of incongruity rather than the Relief Theory, which will follow, and exemplifies that what we laugh at is a reversal of expectations. It is a good thing Freud is dead, as I am not sure he would be supportive of something not completely based on relief, sex, and debaucherous principles. By including Freud in the Incongruity Theory, Matte (2001) states that the psychoanalytic dynamic of a tension between the conscious and the hidden idea is like the tension found in incongruity. For example, he sees the stand-up comedian as a natural psychoanalyst who tries to understand and break down the conscious resistance of his or her audience to make them laugh; which then gives the comedian a sense of relief and power by being able to get at their unconscious. Thus, he advances that incongruity should become a grand theory of sorts, also incorporating the drives of superiority and relief.

The Incongruity Theory says much about children's cognitive development by allowing us to look at how they view and comprehend the world. By understanding and documenting what children think is funny, we can begin to learn how they think, what they know, and how they learn. What this incongruity can mean for children is in learning to know that an event could not, should not, or usually does not occur as depicted physically or in their mind.

Many researchers of laughter and humor in children look towards Piaget to define operational and preoperational thought to determine what types of incongruity should make children laugh at different ages (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969). However, many have since come to see that in terms of children's humor and the things that make them laugh, a child's ability to think logically often occurs much sooner than Piaget would suggest for children overall, and most humor does not exclusively sample Piagetian concepts (McGhee, 1974b).

Whew! Relief Theory

The next theory, Relief Theory, shifts to a physiological and psychological explanation of laughter. There are many different versions of this theory, though they all suggest the basic premise that laughing produces relief by releasing pent-up energy that collects from stress, fear, or anxiety. The first example of this theory can be seen in Shaftesbury's essay of 1711, "The Freedom of Wit and Humour," which states,

The natural free spirits of ingenious men, if imprisoned or controlled, will find out other ways of motion to relieve themselves in their constraint; and whether it be in burlesque, mimicry, or buffoonery, they will be glad at any rate to vent

themselves, and be revenged their constrainers (cited in Morreall, 1983, p. 20).

Sigmund Freud, a Relief Theorist as most scholars proclaim, asserts that laughter occurs because society prevents us from openly expressing our drives of sex, hostility, and obscenity. He postulates that we have a certain amount of psychic energy that needs to be released to gain satisfaction, and the amount that is unneeded or pent-up is discharged in laughter (Freud, 1960). Freud's theory of laughter focuses mostly on jokes, which like dreams, have hidden benefits that tap into the unconscious (Freud, 1960). He feels we create and use jokes in order to bring to the conscious the things that society has forced us to repress, and we laugh over our "triumph of narcissism, the ego's victorious assertion of its own invulnerability" (Freud, 1928 pg. 2).

Herbert Spencer (1911) speculates that there is a close connection between nervous energy and our motor nervous system, suggesting that when one is in a pleasurable state of mind, any overabundance of emotion that we deem to be inappropriate may cause an escape of nervous energy that takes the form of laughter. This extra energy is first released through muscles connected with speech, and then if these channels are not enough, through the muscles of respiration and the diaphragm. If still more energy needs releasing, the person may begin to sway back and forth, slap his knee, or clap his hands (Spencer, 1911). Spencer sees laughter as very different from other types of emotion because it is not the early stage of an emotion that escalates into something else, such as anger, which if escalates turns into a practical action such as fighting.

Spencer (1911) compares laughter to opening a valve in a steam pipe where excess pressure is released upon its opening, and feels that the nervous energy of laughter is let go in just this way as a quick and necessary discharge of surplus energy (Spencer, 1911). Berlyne (1972) disagrees with this in that the concept of releasing built-up tension is contrary to what we know about the nervous system, and suggests there is more of an arousal boost, followed by an arousal jag associated with laughing. Rather than seeing laughter as a release of excess arousal or tension, it is an expression of the pleasure related to changes in arousal (Berlyne, 1972).

Carpino (1985) asserts that we laugh when we feel something is not as awful as we expected it to be, thus producing relief and laughter. An example in this case is flying on a plane with severe turbulence that eventually subsides, and all on board look at each other and laugh with relief (Carpino, 1985). In 1859, Alexander Bain suggested at what he called a “Degradation” theory of laughter where laughter occurs from relief following a situation where we need to outwardly feign respect or reverence towards someone we don’t really feel this way about (Bain, 1875).

A different view of the Relief Theory is that laughter occurs as a physical relief to the bodily systems. Allin (1903) professed that laughter is not an appeal to our superiority or appreciation of the ludicrous, but a result of blood vessel and nervous system changes. It is an exercise for the lungs, it feeds the blood with oxygen, it increases metabolism, and it is complete body nutrition. Because of laughing, our blood circulates more effectively and our lungs inflate to their maximum capacity (Allin, 1903).

By embracing the Relief Theory, we can come to a better understanding about how children's use of humor may be related to their stress, fears, or anxiety. A child may come to laugh at a social situation where he or she knows he is in trouble, thus using laughter to alleviate and possibly avoid punishment (Smidl, 2003). It can also manifest itself during times when a child feels embarrassed, thus laughing to show others that he or she can sustain a sense-of self under the embarrassing conditions. Understanding this theory can also be particularly important to children in cases where adults might reprimand a child for laughing at inappropriate times, when in fact a child might not be laughing because he finds the situation funny at all.

Relate to Me! Social Theories of Laughter

I created this category of Social Theories since I felt there were enough theories in the literature to support those that are based on relationships. I believe the only reason for their absence of popularity despite the fact that that most researchers have found laughing is a social experience, is that they are not as frequently and passionately described as other theories, nor are there classical figures (e.g. Aristotle and Plato) in history supporting them. As you can see in these Social Theories, there is much about them that falls into other categories, though they all include the idea that laughter is a means of relating to one another, and the relationship is integral to laughter.

Goldstein (1976) suggests a "Balance" theory of laughter, specifically related to humor that differentiates one social group from another, and feels that humans laugh at stereotypical or derogatory jokes as a means of identifying with one's own social group. Those who are members of the group being laughed at may do so in

order to indicate that they are *not* a part of the subclass of people within their own group, which decreases any possible inadequacies that person may have. By laughing, it then distinguishes them from their own social group who is the purpose of the joke (Goldstein, 1976).

Max Eastman (1921; 1936) looks at laughter as a higher degree of smiling, and believes it expresses pleasure rather than pain. Contrary to many of the early theorists, he sees laughter as an act of acceptance rather than rejection, and considers it to be a human element or instinct that does not need further analyzing. Eastman feels we use laughter as a means of gaining pleasure in social communication, and looks at all laughter as a way to be playful with another, and Buckley (2003) extends this by saying it is the inherent playfulness of laughter that enhances its meaning. Eastman dismisses the laughter of scorn in his theory by believing that the laughter of scorn and that of delight use different neural mechanisms, and therefore cannot be compared (Eastman, 1936). Konrad Lorenz also asserts that laughter supports social relationships and creates a bond, and that shared laughter not only directs aggression, but produces a feeling of social unity (Lorenz, 1967). Hayworth (1928) postulated that laughter is based on a social explanation that started as a vocal signal to other members of the group that they could relax with safety. Whether or not laughter is instinctive or learned does not matter in Hayworth's (1928) opinion, as it is a conditioned and useful response.

Another mentionable theory of laughter that I consider social is that of Henri Bergson who discovered that anything similar to the makeup of a machine is laughter producing, and sees laughter as something mechanical encrusted on the living

(Bergson, 1911). This means that laughter results from lower machine-like qualities in another person, usually mishaps or something ridiculous, and what makes us laugh is the person who gives us the impression of a thing, and what is laughable are things that are done automatically (cited in Bliss, 1915). He discusses that laughter is purely for social purposes in a group or society as a whole, and is a method of forceful adaptation to belong to a particular group (Bergson, 1911). Hence, the function of laughter is not to harm or humiliate any member of the society, but to help him so that his inelasticity will be eradicated and he will be changeable enough to adapt to the demands of social life (Bergson, 1911).

Laughter is Everything! One Multidimensional Theory of Laughter

Giles and Oxford (1970) are rare in that they support a more universal and multidimensional theory of laughter, which encompasses all of the other theory categories in some way. They give 7 mutually exclusive conditions for which laughter could occur. The first, humorous laughter, is thought to be the most common, whereby we laugh at anything we perceive, see, hear, or feel is funny. Second, social laughter is a behavioral response that has the purpose of integrating one into a social group, whether the stimulus is comic or not. Ignorance laughter is the third type, and is used to help a person disguise his ignorance in a situation that he does not really comprehend. Fourth, anxiety laughter is thought to relieve stress in any situation that warrants it, though they believe that this category has a low frequency.

Fifth, Oxford & Giles (1970) see derision laughter as occurring most frequently in children, where laughter is directed towards a person who has been

involved in an unorthodox act or has a less common physical or behavioral attribute. Next, apologetic laughter helps a person clear oneself from blame in a situation where he or she is looking for an excuse for a particular behavior, inducing those present to experience the behavior or incident as funny. They say laughter of this form usually occurs with a statement such as “I’ve never done this before” (Giles & Oxford, 1970, pg. 98). Seventh and last is their idea that laughter comes from being tickled and may be a masochistic response. They see each theory as essential for the most comprehensive explanation of laughter possible, and no theory on its own could suggest a universal explanation.

My Theoretical Stance

Becker (1998) says it best when he talks of how no available theory can give a person the ideas or words for what he or she actually experiences. Gregory (1923) states that though the theories of laughter are often informative, revealing, valuable, and can help discover the clues contained in the act of laughter, theories do little more than trace them through their almost infinite varieties (Gregory, 1923). Overall, whether looking at children or adults, there can be no one true theory of laughter pertinent to everyone, and children can potentially laugh at everything (Holland, 1982). Therefore, in my own study I decided to encompass all of these theories to develop an integrative perspective that would account for all of the possibilities. In my past study I found them to all be accurate, albeit the Incongruity Theory was the best supported because the young age group I was teaching found many things novel, and hence incongruous, to their previous experiences (Smidl, 2003).

Benefits of Laughter

Developing and Sustaining Relationships: Social Benefits

“Laughter is not at all a bad beginning for a friendship, and it is far the best ending for one” (Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 1995, pg.16).

Laughter has been postulated as primarily a social activity that mostly occurs within patterns of interaction. Laughter is thought of as a shared experience, one that comes to help define the interactive process of socialability and social life from birth to death (Buckley 2003; Glenn, 2003; Graham, 1995; Hertzler, 1970; Koller, 1988; Stearns, 1972). It is this social significance that has been researched and documented most often. More specifically, research has focused on how laughter supports relationships by enhancing trusting interactions, developing group cohesiveness, easing communication, and improving social competence (Masten, 1986; McGhee, 1989, Panksepp, 2000; Morreall, 1997; Piddington, 1933).

Laughter as Communication

The important truth is that laughter differentiates humans from most animals and is a unique form of relating that is common to the majority of human societies speaking different languages (Askenasy, 1987; Rothbart, 1973; Boston, 1974). Scholars of laughter believe that in the course of social interaction, laughter serves as a means of communicating and bringing people closer (Glenn, 2003; Coser, 1959). Laughter is like an invitation to start a conversation; it aims at decreasing social distance by increasing the comfort level of a situation through a shared and enjoyed experience. In communication, there is a transfer or exchange of messages that occurs between the sender and receiver, and laughter can help facilitate this exchange

of interactions that contain meaning and mood, which is usually positive. Somehow we manage to produce laughter at precisely the right times in a variety of social situations by picking up on cues that dictate exactly when we should use laughter to communicate with others (Hertzler, 1970).

Positive Social Exchange

Bariaud (1989) determined that humor cannot really be understood without putting it in the framework of social exchange. It is also asserted that the presence of others seems to be an essential element in laughter, though the exchange must be a positive one by those involved (Kenderdine, 1931; Ziv, 1984). For children, this positive exchange is an important concern in how a child comes to know that his or her creations or actions are funny, which is prompted by the reaction of others. Here is where adults are integral in helping children feel success at their attempts to produce laughter, and gain a desire to reproduce these positive interactions again (Bariaud, 1989).

Also demonstrating the social exchange necessary for laughter is the fact that whereas crying appears at birth, laughter does not occur until the third or fourth month and coincides with the development of reciprocal social interaction with the caregiver (Apte, 1985). It used to be thought that laughter was only real in the adult who had the capacity to understand the joke, however, this is undoubtedly untrue as many have seen or documented laughter in the baby, usually beginning with the game of peek-a-boo. Whether laughter is inborn and inherent to a person or a learned behavior, has and will probably always be up for debate, though all agree that it is indisputably a reciprocal social experience (Glenn, 2003).

Laughing Alone

A well-documented observation is that one rarely sees a child laughing alone during his or her play (McComas, 1923; Panksepp, 2000; Chapman, 1973; De la Cruz, 1981). In fact, when one sees a person laughing alone, it is most commonly associated with mental illness rather than happiness. Gregg, Miller, and Linton, (1929) discovered that children rarely laugh when they are by themselves, deducing that laughter is an indication of social awareness, responsiveness to others, and is a relationship-forming phenomenon. Bainum, Lounsbury, and Pollio (1984) assert that laughter only occurs when a child is alone in 5 per cent of all recorded situations, and Brackett (1933) reported solitary laughter in 15 per cent of total laughing instances, a higher number than others but still supporting laughter as social. Provine and Fischer (1989) found that laughter was 30 times more frequent in social than solitary situations. In fact, the only instances where children have been documented to laugh alone was in a study by Blatz, Allin, and Millichamp (1936) who found that laughter only occurred after the completion or anticipation of an event, or in finding something out of place.

Laughing Together

The importance and affect of laughter on the group has been assiduously investigated. Chapman and Chapman (1974) established that an increase in a companion's laughter led to enhanced laughter and smiling in others, and the likelihood of laughter also increased with the size of the group (Levy & Fenley, 1979). Group glee situations were found to be an uncontrollable phenomenon, where a single child's laughter produces a domino effect of laughter, and though

precipitated by many different types of situations, group glee is most prominent in younger children (Sherman, 1975).

Freedman and Perlick (1979) found that when people were in larger groups and exposed to recorded laughter there was more laughter, however, laughter cues needed to be present. When companions laughed more, subjects also rated the material as funnier and the strongest predictor of a child's laughter was the amount of time he or she spent in social play interactions with others (McGhee & Lloyd, 1982). Martin and Gray (1996) established that when a group was either exposed to a video with a laugh track or without, those who had seen the video with laughter present gave significantly higher ratings than the group who watched the one without laughter. This shows how laughter, like smiling and talking, is engaged in almost exclusively during social encounters, and mirth responses are rated as funnier when they are shared with others (Chapman, 1975, 1996; Provine, 1996a; 1996b).

McGhee (1989) also contends that laughter helps in the development of friendships in a group, and can provide an acceptable means of showing group opposition in a socially acceptable manner. This is applicable when looking at young children in a classroom, as over time they usually come to form close bonds with others that are everchanging throughout the year. Brackett (1933) determined that children who laughed frequently played more with others who exhibited this behavior, and young children were already showing preference towards being in a laughing group. Martineau (1972) believes that the function and result of laughter and humor depends upon the individual and the group's perception of the meaning of that event for the person and the group, thus, context within relationships is integral.

Funny or Not

The social importance of laughter may be so monumental that people might not even need a humorous stimulus in order to laugh together. While one child was listening to humorous audiotapes with headphones and laughing, his companion would also laugh, even though he or she was unable to hear the humorous material on the tape (Chapman, 1975). Brown, Wheeler, and Cash (1980) found that imitation is involved in whether or not a preschool child will laugh, and that a child will often laugh when another child is present, whether or not there is a humorous stimulus. Further support was found whereby much more laughter was recorded in dyads when watching humorous tapes than when alone, regardless of the funniness ratings of the tapes. In this study, however, strangers laughed more with one another than did friends, possibly a reaction to a new or uncomfortable social situation (Devereux & Ginsburg, 2001). Scogin and Pollio (1980) performed an observational study of the process of humor in group dynamics and saw that even deprecating remarks can be positive in a group that knows each other, and different types of humor, and the quantity of humorous remarks is different, depending upon the type of relationship between the members.

Good for the Brain: Cognitive Benefits

It is quite difficult to describe the meaning of laughter within the cognitive realm, as cognition encompasses so many things. In the context of schooling and education it can mean how children learn to perceive and solve problems, come to understand language, concepts, and the basics of reading, how they create art and stories, and how they play and negotiate interactions effectively. For children, the

cognitive process is directly related to everything they are exposed to, how they learn it, and how they integrate it into what they already know (Goldhaber, 2000).

Understanding Children's Thinking and Learning

Many researchers claim that adults can gain knowledge about the intricacy of a child's understanding of the world by paying attention to what he or she laughs at and listens to in different situations (McGhee & Chapman, 1980). We can begin to learn about children's theories of how things work, and watch the incongruous events that disrupt their perceptions and cause laughter. For a practical example, watching children laugh at things such as twenty clowns coming out of a small car, an adult speeding up or slowing down the pace of everyday actions, or seeing a rabbit pulled out of a hat, can help adults better grasp a child's understanding of concepts such as space, time, and causality (Elkind, 2000). In his paper, Veale (2004), suggested that incongruity plays a role in laughing, but it may not be the cause. Nevertheless, he proposed that whether incongruity is a cause or a correlation, we laugh at things that challenge our perceptions of the world.

In terms of Piagetian theory, we can determine which cognitive stage children are in by their thinking as well as the types of things they laugh at and understand (Rothbart, 1976). Showing 4 and 6-year old children a four-category system of pictures and gauging their laughter responses helped the adult classify the developmental level of a child's thinking (Brown, 1993). Justin (1932) also suggested that an increased intelligence quotient will allow a child to laugh more frequently, though this result has not been frequently corroborated or even recently studied (Kenderdine, 1931; Brackett, 1933; Ding & Jersild, 1932). Klein (1985)

found that children could understand Piagetian concepts much earlier than he would suggest by his stages of cognitive development, however children will eventually and inevitably go through the understanding of concepts as described by Piaget. Klein (1985) also hypothesized that children's overall reaction to incongruity will lessen with age, as incongruity gets easier to solve alongside the increased ability of logical and abstract thinking.

Zigler, Levine, and Gould (1966) first suggested that laughing at jokes or other types of events meant to produce laughter need to present a challenge to a child's ability to understand them. In fact, Athey (1977) found that children usually did not find jokes funny if they had outgrown the cognitive stage of development that the joke represented. Here is where placing children of different ages together could be helpful to laughter and humor development, as would be supported by Lev Vygotsky's theory of scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978). I have seen this in my previous study of laughter in preschoolers where a child who understood a joke would just as soon explain it to one who didn't. In fact, the children almost always laughed together following the mutual understanding, even though many researchers believe a joke explained is a joke lost (Smidl, 2003).

Literature and Reading

I will discuss Beverly Cleary's (1982) article first because her books that permeated my childhood were one of my primary sources of laughter. This successful children's author talks of how important it is to engage children through humor in children's literature and trusts that children would learn much more if they were allowed to relax, enjoy a story, and discover what it is they want or need from

books. They could learn to enjoy reading, especially if they find humorous books that make them laugh in the early grades. She describes a cognitive dissonance that makes children laugh:

To grow up is the ambition of normal children; and they want, and are sometimes starved for humorous books because they want the assurance they have grown...Laughter helps children on their way (Cleary, 1982, pg. 562).

Important in Cleary's analysis of children and books is that she found most children did not want to read about characters younger than themselves, and girls would read about boys, but boys would not read about girls. However, she found that these generalizations did not hold true if the books were funny, as in her books about Ramona Quimby (Cleary, 1982).

Shaeffer and Hopkins (1988) and Blos (1979) discuss the importance of making children laugh through children's books and feel that from books we can recognize our present cognitive abilities by drawing from our past experiences. They make note that we must know the current literary level of the child or it will be useless, specifically whether the child knows the difference between the literal and the figurative. With literature comes the process of prediction, and following the principle of incongruity put forth by researchers, they see that humor in books is discovered when children are not expecting a certain outcome (Shaeffer & Hopkins, 1988).

Language and Word Play

Language play, or a child's behaviors like joke telling, rhyming, making up nonsensical verses, or repetition of sounds increases dramatically over a child's

preschool and kindergarten years and has been shown to improve a child's literacy development and complex thinking skills (Varga, 2000). When conducting a study to investigate the processes by which children initiate, organize, and maintain language play interactions, children naturally used humor as a strategy in initiating and sustaining play with one another. Because varying abilities were seen at different ages and developmental levels, this could be a good way to assess a child's developmental skills (Varga, 2000).

Included in language play is the specific influence of name play, such as how children understand and play on people's names, and how names serve as a powerful catalyst for humor (Davids, 1987). This focus on names is one that has not been suggested frequently, though it is vital. Names are one of the first things that children come to know as definite, and are thus a focus of manipulation and making others laugh. With rhyming there is the chance that children can use this technique to make fun of others, though little derisive laughter in very young children has been documented. Perhaps young children are not yet capable of the ill thoughts that go along with making fun of someone (Ding and Jersild, 1932).

Learning Through Humorous Television and Movies...or Not

Up to the age of 7, most of what children laugh at is visual (Kimmins, 1922), which leads to one of the biggest concerns of parents and teachers; the effect of television and movies on young children, especially what and how much they watch. Three studies were conducted on the effectiveness of educational television programs, and all found that those programs with humor helped a child to maintain his or her attention for longer periods, as well as remember more information about the program

(Zillmann & Bryant, 1989; Zillmann, Williams, Bryant, Boynton, & Wolf, 1980; Wakshlag, Day, & Zillmann, 1981). This suggests that perhaps using the proper types of programs, in this case those that are humorous as well as educational, could help children learn and remember more information in a way that is easy and desirable.

Zigler, Levine, and Gould (1966) found that cartoons that make few cognitive demands on children in upper elementary grades were not as funny as they were to younger children, implying that matching or challenging a child's cognition is important in the consideration of using television or videos for learning. Once again, this supports Vygotsky's theory of learning, as having educational television material that is slightly above a child's level of development could facilitate a greater understanding and appreciation of the material that is presented (Vygotsky, 1978). Important to note is that Zillmann et.al (1984) found that young children might have difficulty determining what is real and reliable information in television, possibly making them unable to discount those things that may not be true. They discuss how children have limited information about many things that adults already understand, rendering them vulnerable to the things that adults show them and believe children should grasp. This illustrates that when it comes to humorous educational television (and television in general) it cannot be surely assumed that children are gathering the messages that adults assume they will comprehend, so this type of media should be used judiciously.

Creativity

Creativity and the creative process are ones that also cannot be defined easily, though they are surely and inextricably related to cognition. In several studies, Ziv (1976; 1980; 1983; & 1989) found that a humorous atmosphere filled with incongruity and the natural contagion of laughter, in these cases a fun mood created by humorous film clips, significantly increased creativity scores on later projects. He found that laughter responses to humorous stimuli increase creative or divergent thinking, though he does not believe that using humor with children will make every child more creative. This finding can be monumentally important, as children who are supported in their use of creative humor can come to be more critical and abstract thinkers; a skill that can help make children successful throughout their educational experience and lives.

Good for the Body and Soul: Physiological and Psychological Benefits

“Perhaps I know best why man is the only animal that laughs. He alone suffers so excruciatingly that he was compelled to invent laughter” (Ludovici, 1932, pg. 113).

The fact that physical and psychological suffering is inherent to being human provokes many researchers to question the effects that laughter and humor have on mental and physiological functioning and well being. I have included the psychological and physiological benefits of laughter as one category, as I believe that a person’s mind is inextricably linked to his or her body. My thoughts have been supported by the literature, as the studies of how laughter makes a person feel

psychologically are often discussed in combination with the physiological responses that occur.

Reducing Stress

Many researchers believe that humor and laughter are an important mechanism for dealing with many of the stressors that humans encounter in their daily lives. They support that even though people have very different reactions to all types of stress, laughter can be integral in maintaining psychological and physiological well-being, as laughter can help a person deal with the stressful impetus (Lefcourt & Martin, 1986; Lefcourt, 2001; Peter & Dana, 1982). In fact, Morreall (1997) goes as far to say that humor is the opposite of stress.

Martin and Lefcourt (1983) completed three studies to investigate the hypothesis that humor reduces the impact of stress, and found significant support that those who used or appreciated those things that made them laugh had lower values of stress levels attached to situations they considered worrying. However, in an attempt to replicate these findings, Porterfield (1987), found that this was not necessarily the case, and people who experienced higher humor scores experienced less depression overall regardless of their life stress. Either way, in both studies, humor and laughter affected a person positively.

Reducing Fear and Anxiety

Laughter can affect a person physiologically by reducing arousal, promoting relaxation, or reducing anxiety or fears (Masten, 1986). This decline in negative emotions due to laughter shows how laughter is not always a humorous response, as using humor and laughter with negative emotions may be considered a defense

mechanism. As Jaak Panksepp believes (2000, p.185), “When one laughs, everything appears brighter and when one is anxious, everything appears bleaker.” In theory, those people who always appear to be jocular and frivolously effervescent are those who usually have the most burdensome pressures or problems.

To look at how humor affects a person’s perception of fear, a study of 40 arachnophobic students was conducted and the results imply that using humor was equally, but not more effective as a non-humorous approach in desensitizing the participants in their fear of these creepy crawlies. This suggests that its possible use in decreasing fear is founded, though of course it is dependent upon the person, the context of the situation, and the degree of fear a person has (Ventis, Higbee, & Murdock, 2001).

Developing a Positive Outlook and Sense-of-Self

Laughter is like the rainbow which originates through a sort of contrast of sunshine with rain. The dark background is needed, otherwise laughter would lack color...Life is serious, and if we could see all the misery of life at once it would so oppress us that we would long to die (Carus, 1898, pg. 250).

As children grow, they necessarily become more aware of how they fit into the world, which challenges their development of self-esteem and self-image. By teaching children to use laughter to look at the positive and humorous in everything, they can learn to maintain an attitude that will give them a more accurate and non-devastating outlook, and help them develop a better foundation for constructively dealing with life issues (Michelli, 1998; Carlson & Peterson, 1995; Vande Berg & Van Bockern, 1995). A study by Sletta, Søbstad and Valås (1995) found that

preschoolers and school-aged children who produced humor had a higher self-perception of social competence and higher ratings of peer acceptance, suggesting that children who learn to use humor and laughter will be equipped with a coping skill that could aid them in developing a more solid psychological framework (Martin, 1989).

Being able to laugh at oneself is also seen as healthy and desirable, and psychologists often define an emotionally healthy person as one who has the capacity to laugh, put things into perspective, and separate genuine tragedy from mere annoyance (Rogers, 1984). Only by being able to laugh while distancing oneself from a situation, can a person obtain a more objective view of what is happening, in fact, laughing at one's self is a unique attribute in that it may be one of the most humbling, yet empowering things a person can do. It is the sign of a confident and well-adjusted child, adolescent, or adult who can learn to accept and take in stride the things that might be upsetting but are not the end all (Mahony, Burroughs, & Lippman, 2002).

Health Benefits

“A man who cannot laugh had better consult his physician. He is sick”
(Carus, 1898, pg. 251).

One can easily look at how hardy laughter affects the body. Laughter increases blood flow, pressure, breathing, mental functioning, immune system defenses, production of endorphins, and muscle tone. Laughing exercises the body's muscles and decreases stress hormones, which results in relaxation (Berk, 2001). Most research has focused on the neurotransmitters secreted by the brain that could

be useful in producing and supporting laughter. Overall, it is supposed that laughter may allow the brain to block the manufacture of immune suppressors, such as epinephrine and cortisol, and prompt the production of immune enhancers, such as beta-endorphins (Long, 1987; Lefcourt, 2001).

Because of the elusive nature of laughter and the complexity of the immune system, there is little hard proof to demonstrate how laughter and humor directly benefit health, though many believe they allow people to get fewer illnesses and recover from illness faster. Perhaps it is enough to leave it to those who have suffered from illness and know they themselves have benefited from laughter. For example, Norman Cousins (1979), describes how laughter helped him recover from a disintegrating collagen disease when he discovered that 10 minutes of belly laughter had an anesthetic effect and gave him at least 2 hours of pain-free sleep. The doctors took sedimentation rate readings of his collagen levels prior to, and several hours after the laughter episodes, and found that each time the rate dropped for the better (Cousins, 1979). One statistic says that 50% of all illnesses are due to lifestyle (Michelli, 1998), and this could suggest that adding more laughter to one's life could significantly decrease this chance of illness due to how one lives.

One study found that although younger and older groups of participants perceived laughter as beneficial to health, they varied in their opinions of what types of laughter were best (Mahony, Burroughs, & Lippman, 2002). When controlling for the idea that a person's expectations may account for the finding that laughter is beneficial to health, they discovered there was not a significant quantitative difference in a person's perception of its benefits. They do suggest, however, that the effects that

laughter brings may be qualitatively superior in a way that cannot be studied by the traditional experiment (Mahony, Burroughs, & Hieatt, 2001). Of course, believing that you will become well through laughter does not mean that you will, but it keeps open the possibility which not only affects the quality of life, but the quality of death (Long, 1987). Franzini (2001) does not argue that there may be benefits to the use of humor, however, he advises that more research and training be done before it can be used as a modality to help others.

Importance of Culture

“The perception of the funny is affected by time, place, age, class, race, and other conditioners” (Fadiman, 1972, pg. 87).

Laughter Through the Ages

The historical and contemporary uses, appreciation, and meanings associated with laughter and humor have surely changed over time. The examination of laughter can be taken back in history where it evolved from the labored breathing of physical play, the pant-pant in chimps, and the derivative ha-ha sounding pant in humans. As humans evolved to bipedal creatures, thus freeing the thorax is its role of support in the four-legged animal, human beings gained the breath control necessary for speech and the sound of laughter (Provine, 1993; 2004). Laughter then socially evolved even further when people organized into societies and developed improved farming mechanisms that allowed more time for group interaction and leisure (Panksepp, 2000).

In the infant, laughter is seen as emerging from the open mouth of the baby receiving food, which evolved as a facial expression from the pleasure of being fed. Thus, as it began as a social cue to gain happiness, it turned into a way to communicate an already existing state of happiness (Hall & Allin, 1897). Rothbart (1973) advances that laughter serves the purpose of letting a caretaker know that a given stimulus is within his or her limits or arousal, and that laughter usually occurs to a response we would consider pleasurable. Laughter denotes an important event between the infant and his or her environment and is a significant link between the cognitive and emotional growth of a child, especially between security and a sense of safe exploration. Once a child knows he or she is safe, it becomes a way of relating to others (Sroufe & Wunsch, 1972).

The Embeddedness of Context and Culture

It is fact that whereas most cultures have laughter, our varying life experiences, where we live, and the political, economic, and social climate of the time greatly affects those things that make us laugh. Giles and Oxford (1970) corroborate this idea of cultural difference by suggesting that what is socially acceptable in culture A, need not necessarily be acceptable in culture B, and what is seen as immoral at one time in history is later seen as commonplace in another. For example, a moral objection to laughing at others has not traditionally been a part of our American culture, and in the recent past it was common practice for the wealthy to go on excursions to the prisons to laugh at inmates, or to the insane asylum to laugh at the mentally ill (Provine, 2000). Other examples include the sick joke cycles that

proliferated during different historical times, including those about the Holocaust, Dead Babies, the Polish, and the inferiority of women (Dundes, 1987).

More benign differences can also be an important indication of how what we laugh at changes over time. For example, Fadiman (1972) believed that as time goes on and technology infiltrates our being, we will come to laugh more at objects than at people. He also proposes that laughter will continue to exist, albeit in a more mechanical than human condition, and more than 30 years later, one can see how this has happened. Brumbaugh and Wilson (1940) conducted a study of what characters in movies and radio children found funny. This result was important in and of itself in terms of my historical understanding of humor, as I had no idea who most of them were, therefore rendering me unable to make little sense of the results. Many researchers will concur that there are many types of humor that seem to transcend most times and places, such as physical and slapstick humor, though there is also much that evolves with the changing meanings of culture and society (Apte, 1985).

Laughter as Culturally Desirable or Undesirable

Laughter has very rarely been studied in children of Non-Western societies even though these studies are essential in understanding cultural diversity, and this lack of study probably has to do with many issues that arise concerning methodology and translation of research (Apte, 1985). Possibly the biggest historical debate is whether or not humor and laughter are positive and constructive, or negative and destructive to the individual person and society as a whole. After reviewing the varying literature I will say that both are true, as it always depends on the context of when, how, and where laughter and humor are used and with whom. Overall, when

national differences in sense of humor and laughter were examined, agreement was more common than difference in the appreciation of humor and in judgments of the origin of humorous items, though it is suggested that we need to focus on qualifying factors of humans such as variation in age, education, and social class, amongst others (Eysenck, 1944).

In some cultures, laughter is not perceived as a desirable trait, and it is not something that is cultivated in children (Apte, 1985). In studies by Alexander and Babad (1981), and Babad, Alexander, and Babad (1983) differences were found in whether or not children who smiled and laughed were professed as competent by their teachers. Israeli teachers perceived children who demonstrated these behaviors as *less* socially competent, whereas American teachers found that children who smiled and laughed were *more* socially competent. The Israeli goal to help children grow up quickly because the defense of their country depends on serious or competent adults, suggests that we need to be extremely sensitive to differing socialization goals in cultures other than our own (Sarra & Otta, 2001). Other cultural differences can be seen in the Dobuans of New Guinea who negatively value laughter and positively value dourness. A non-embracing attitude about laughter can also be found throughout the classical world and in classical Indian culture (Apte, 1985).

We also need to be aware of different cultures that may embrace laughter more or differently than our own. For example, the Pygmies of Central Africa are not the least bit hesitant about showing their emotions, and will laugh until they cry and can no longer stand, no matter where they are and what the context. Another example is the Saluteaux and Ojibwa Indians in the northeastern United States who restrain

almost every other emotion *except* laughter (Apte, 1985). Jenkins (1980) discusses a Balinese culture that embraces laughter in many aspects of their lives, especially making tourists laugh, though one clown expressed that he has to teach something through his laughter, giving the example that if a lazy villager sees others laugh at a lazy clown, he might not be so lazy tomorrow.

A tradition that still exists is one among the Greenland Eskimo, whose judicial proceedings consist of the two parties ridiculing each other until one collapses in humiliation, even for the case of murder. The outcome of a case is determined by the sole observation of which party receives more laughs, even if the accusations are slanderous (Morreall, 1983). One more example is a study that was conducted using Singaporean and American undergraduate students with the purpose of evaluating how cross-cultural opinions of sense of humor varied. Their results show that Singaporean students reported more conservative values and less use of humor for coping, whereas American students reported a greater appreciation of jokes with sexual content but less with aggressive content than Singaporean students (Nevo, Nevo, & Yin, 2001).

Ethnic and Socioeconomic Differences

When looking at laughter and humor, one must pay particular attention to differences in class and ethnicity, as it can be anticipated that the value of laughter would vary in different cultures as do language, manners, and habits of thought (McComas, 1923). It is true that periods of great comedy usually occur when social values are changing, and within the same culture, humor can vary by class. For example, it is suggested that the poor or working class may be more likely to laugh at

slapstick humor while the middle class will have a preference for long time-span jokes with more complex solutions (Giles & Oxford, 1970).

McGhee and Kach (1981) completed what was one of the first studies of looking at ethnic differences and socioeconomic class in humor development, suggesting that only in the past 25 years has diversity even been something scholars thought worth examining. Key to note is that their results found differences in black, Mexican-American, and white preschool children of varying socioeconomic status *only* in verbal forms of humor. They indicate that this is likely due to the fact that verbal humor has a higher cognitive component, and they come to equate low income with less opportunity for developing the same intellectual understanding as their white middle-class peers. Also possible is that our language and/or dialect differences in these types of groups that could make a researcher deduce there is less verbal understanding of cognitive humor in certain groups (McGhee & Kach, 1981).

McGhee and Duffey (1983) also found that children aged 3 to 6 have been seen to engage in and enjoy disparagement humor towards groups that are different from themselves or that they dislike. They propose that it is possible as the young child comes into contact with more and more subgroupings of people, it is this recognition of those who are different that propel him to seek those more like himself, and joke more about those who are different. They feel that this may subsequently help a child's self-identity to grow.

Gender Differences

A child's gender is one of the largest parts of how children come to define themselves, their roles, and their purpose within a world that continues to be

dominated by boys and men. Gray (1994) writes about laughter in women, with the sad truth that women have been greatly overlooked when it comes to their laughter and humor, which begins very early in life as they learn what is acceptable behavior for boys and girls to demonstrate. It is still the silly personality of boys, not girls, that is more accepted by adults and other children (Gray, 1994).

McGhee (1976) found that differences in humor between boys and girls begin by the middle childhood years (6-11) and that boys were shown to laugh more, try to make others laugh more, and showed more hostility in their humor. In opposition, Provine (1993) found that there are considerable gender differences in laughter, with females laughing up to 126% more than males, but when females do laugh it is usually *at* males, which is surely a factor of meeting, matching, ...and hence mating. Interesting, is that many of the humor differences found between genders is from laughter that comes from physical aggression (McGhee & Lloyd, 1982). This aggressive-type humor becomes more prominent with age, as seen in an ethnographic study of the hierarchies that 15-16 year old boys produce through the use of humor. It was found that cussing matches, insults, and pretend fighting were the primary categories of humor that boys used successfully to help give them status in a heterosexual group (Kehily & Nayak, 1997).

It had been noted that throughout life, girls and women continuously rate males as funnier than females (Gray, 1994). Nevo, Nevo, and Yin (2001) found that regardless of being male or female most students reported a male as someone with an outstanding sense of humor, and Cantor (1976) found that most people find it funnier when a woman is the butt of a joke. In Fern's (1991) study of identifying gifted child

humorists, she found significant gender differences in that almost 86% of those considered funny were boys.

Martin and Gray (1996) found no differences between men and women in how they rated the funniness of a tape, thus suggesting that a male's greater sense of humor is based on stereotypical perceptions rather than truth. In Nevo, Nevo, and Yin's (2001) study of Singaporean students, the authors believe their finding that men are funnier than women may be attributed to rigorous admission policies, hence creating a female sample that was composed of more educated and non-traditional women.

Of special mention to classroom humor and laughter is the class clown, and it seems that every class has at least one. Most feel that boys have more experience and encouragement to be silly, even though the class clown is usually seen as disruptive or annoying (Damico, 1980). Only a handful of studies have ever addressed this annoyance with findings that class clowns were primarily males, and more people respond to and tolerate the classroom humor of males than females (Damico & Purkey, 1978; Damico, 1980; McGhee, 1974a). Brown (1993) also found gender differences in what types of pictures 4 and 6 year-old children laughed at, though once again, these differences are attributed to the fact that boys learn to understand humor earlier, and it is more socially acceptable for boys to act up or behave in a silly manner.

Religion

*God himself must be somewhat of a humorist—else why the Duckbilled
Platypus (Baughman, 1978)?*

I debated whether or not I should include a discussion of religion, but once I contemplated its interconnectedness with my understanding and experience of the Appalachian culture in which my study would take place, I knew I had to at least give it mention. In all of history, religious preferences and the superiority of one religion over another has never been equal, and our personal views of religion inevitably impact our laughter in response to jokes about religion and the existence of God, amongst other things.

Abraham, the first to be called a Hebrew, was noted for his laughter and after receiving a message that his old wife was to have a baby he doubled over and fell on the ground, which resulted in the child being named Isaac, meaning laughter (Phipps, 1979). Overall in the Bible, laughter is seldom mentioned and when it is, it is a laugh of scorn (Apte, 1985) and Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit order made each member say, “I should not laugh, or say anything that would cause laughter” (Phipps, 1979). For a Buddhist monk in ancient India, laughing out loud was a serious offense requiring confession, though over time laughter has become acceptable and desirable. Incorrect perceptions of laughter in religious figures can also be seen in the Chinese figure of Buddha, who was in reality not the rotund, laughing figure that most of art portrays him as (Clasquin, 2001).

Though religion is a prickly subject, it is also a funny one...or not so funny one depending on who is making fun of whom. Mark Twain has written about its prickliness in the following excerpt:

So I built a cage, and in it I put a dog and cat. And after a little training I got the dog and the cat to the point where they lived peaceably together. Then I

introduced a pig, a goat, a kangaroo, some birds, and a monkey. And after a few adjustments, they learned to live in harmony together. So encouraged was I by such successes that I added an Irish Catholic, a Presbyterian, a Jew, a Muslim from Turkestan, and a Buddhist from China, along with a Baptist missionary that I captured from the same trip. And in a very short while there wasn't a single living thing left in the cage (cited in Hyers, 1982)!

At the very least, it is important to make readers aware that religion is an area that always needs consideration, especially as our lives and schools become composed of more religiously diverse populations.

Special Mention of Tickling

There may be no experience parallel to that of being tickled, and though the act of tickling is known to register as pain in the brain, most people become breathless with laughter when it is done to them (Panksepp, 2000). Monroe (1951) believes that tickling is the most obviously non-humorous stimulant of laughter, and though most of us laugh at being tickled, most disagree as to whether or not it is truly a humorous response, or one based in the historical fear of being harmed. The classical explanation of tickling is that the ticklish parts are those most likely to be attacked in hand-to-hand combat, and in the course of evolution came to mean a form of play (Giles & Oxford, 1970).

The biggest debate regarding tickling has been the question of why a person cannot tickle himself. It is this fact that implies that it is social cues and the emotional need for social interaction that guide our neural system, and that as

societies have evolved over the centuries, our brains may have been molded by social priorities (Panksepp, 2000). Harris and Christenfeld (1999) conducted a study to see if a person being tickled by a machine would have the same response as being tickled by a person, and found that people laughed as much when they thought a machine was tickling them. They concluded that laughing from tickling might be a reflexive response rather than an interpersonal one, though they also admit that the expectation of being tickled could be enough to make anyone laugh regardless of a real or fake stimulus. Another study showed more activity in the brain during externally produced than self-produced tickling, suggesting that the anticipation of tickling yourself cancels the response it would produce (Blakemore, Wolpert, & Frith 1998). I know I found that when I attempted to tickle a child, she or he always laughed if in a good mood, otherwise it was terribly unwanted and increased a child's agitation, thus supporting tickling as primarily a social experience (Smidl, 2003).

Say Cheese! Special Mention of Smiling

I also felt the need for a mention of smiling, as smiling is thought to be highly correlated to laughter. I do not know who decided that one should say, "CHEEEEEEESE!!!" when smiling for a photograph, though it is something said to make a person laugh and show his or her teeth in a cheesy display. Also a possibility is that the word cheese was chosen, because when a person says it drawn out while waiting for a camera flash, it bares the teeth and gives the face the look of smiling or being happy.

In definition, many would define smiling as a lesser form of laugh, despite differing opinions of their origins. Most researchers assume laughter and smiling are different intensities of the same response (Berlyne, 1972; Kuhn, 1994), though others who have studied primates have found they have different roots and purposes (Preuschoft, 1992; Van Hooff & Preuschoft, 2003). There have certainly been different historical meanings attached to smiles, though it is well known that the power of a smile can have an influential effect on another (Trumble, 2004).

A few reported studies on smiling could be important to further understanding its relationship to laughter. In a study of the influence of gender on smiling, Otta (1998) and Morse (1982) found that self-posed smiling in photographs varied by sex and age, with females always smiling more than men, and there was also a large decrease in overall smiling behavior as one aged. This is in contrast to most studies that say boys laugh more, though perhaps smiling is the behavior that is considered more acceptable for girls. A decrease in the frequency and ratio of smiling to laughter was found as a child aged, from 1 laugh to every 10 smiles at 8 months of age, to 1 laugh to every 3 smiles at 4 years of age (Ames, 1949). It was established that smiling occurs approximately 7 times more frequently than laughing, and children who were most likely to laugh and smile during their play were more active and had the most energy overall (Ding & Jersild, 1932). Lau (1982), and Otta, Abrosio, and Hoshino (1996) also discovered that people who smiled were rated as more positive, attractive, intelligent, and kind than nonsmiling people.

Jones and Raag (1989) found that smile production in older infants was contingent upon another person being present to receive the smile, thus demonstrating

that like laughter, smiling is primarily social. Kraut and Johnston (1979) discovered that social involvement was the major cause of smiling by watching bowlers who would smile when facing friends, but not when facing the pins. Cheyne (1976) and Spitz and Wolf (1946) determined that the functions of smiles changed as preschoolers aged, finding that the social smile increases in frequency with age, though a child also shows more discrimination in who he or she will smile at. Harter, Shultz, and Blum (1971) found that children both 4 and 8 years old smiled more when they got test items correct than incorrect, signifying that a sense of mastery or competence may cause a smile that is based on gratification.

Laughter and Humor in Schooling and Education

Any person who has been in a public school recently can see that learning is the most serious of businesses. Education is becoming more and more dour, pushing children to learn as many facts as fast as they can, often without a pause to look at what most educators feel schooling should be about; learning to love learning and the experiences associated with it. There is much controversy over how and what children should be taught, though this is not the point to explore here. The issue I hope to illuminate is that no matter what needs to be taught to children, laughter and humor can be part of the daily discourse of a classroom during all aspects of teaching and learning. Lloyd (1985) suggests that humor is a moral idea, one that is not right or wrong in a classroom, but one that depends upon the viewpoint of the person using or recognizing it.

The Greek word from which our American word “school” derives means leisure and the activities characteristic of a school in which leisure is employed, however, it is blatant that education no longer equates to leisure. No sooner does education “become formalized than it becomes solemnized” (Baughman, 1978, pg. 56). Though laughter and humor are not the panacea for this potential solemnization, they can be part of a solution that ameliorates some of this seriousness, and possibly lead to a healthier perspective and experience of schooling and education for both children and teachers. I have seen the usefulness of laughter and humor in the classroom firsthand, far more often than not, implying that schooling and education can easily be a laughing matter (Smidl, 2003).

As with every subject of study, there are always multiple views of its importance or success, and this is how the literature on laughter and humor in education falls. In trade journals, teachers who speak practically of using humor in their classrooms almost always laud its effects. In empirical studies, where the author is usually a researcher and not a teacher, the results are mixed, a few even reporting humor as detrimental to learning. In my opinion, there are three reasons why these mixed results may be so. The first possibility is that the style of reporting results in trade and professional journals differs greatly, as well as what publishers consider solid evidence of results. Second, is the fact that most reports of success using laughter in the classroom come from elementary and secondary classrooms, though most reports of negative results come from the reports of using humor in large groups of college students where the context of the social relationship is not present. Third, there is a difference between the teacher who reports his or her results from personal

experiences with using laughter and humor in the classroom, and the researcher who studies the same subject from an outside perspective (Bryant & Zillmann, 1989).

There is limited empirical information about how laughter and humor in the classroom can be beneficial, though this does not make the articles and books that have been written about practical applications of this subject less important or meaningful. This is where qualitative research becomes integral, as the environment of a classroom, how laughter plays out on a day-to-day basis, and what it means to those involved needs to be studied in multiple ways. In fact, for the teacher looking to use humor in his or her classroom, the studies are profound in that most do not speak of numbers a teacher has little use for, but give practical ideas and suggestions of how humor can be used in a positive way. Therefore, I have combined both empirical studies and practical applications of humor and laughter's use in this section.

What Makes Kindergartners Laugh?

Many authors give ideas as to what makes kindergarten children laugh. They are mostly in the silly stage where they laugh uproariously at nonsense, slapstick, physical clowning, sounds, songs, rhymes, pratfalls, funny faces, distortion of sizes, disguises, the unexpected, intense motor activity, simple enjoyment of anything, and a preoccupation with body excreta and bathroom functions such as passing gas and burping (Church, 1995; Poole, Miller, & Church, 1999; Honig, 1988; David, 1994; Nilsen & Nilsen; 1987). Kimmins (1922) sees children as being amused by action, noise, dramatic effects, people falling down or bumping into one another, the grotesque, and dressing up and playing a role. Enders (1927) found that sound, in

combination with movement, produced the greatest amount of laughter in children aged 2 to 5, and McComas (1923) acknowledges that sounds that distress the adult delight the child. Most comprehensive is a list given by Blatz, Allin, and Millichamp (1936) about what children laugh at based on their numerous observations of children from birth to age 7, all of which have been found in later studies of children's laughter. They grouped all of their findings into the category of physical experiences, which includes sensory experiences; physical functioning; bodily movement and satisfaction; objects; the presence of people; and ideational experiences which include stories and jokes.

By the age of 6, Bariaud (1989) notes a change in the types of things a child finds funny, changing from self-produced and inventive funniness, to a type of humor that is more standard, such as ready-made jokes. Duffy (2000) speaks of how understanding on the part of the teacher is integral in trying to understand the things a child says and laughs at. Essentially, most authors will agree that kindergarten children can and will laugh at anything and everything.

It is Piaget's theory of cognitive development in children (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969) that most researchers turn towards to explain what a child will find funny at different ages (Tamashiro, 1979; Krogh, 1985; McGhee, 1971). For example, a child still in a preoperational cognitive stage will not get the following joke:

Customer: "Waiter, I am late you know! Will the pancakes be long?"

Waiter: "No sir, round."

Without an understanding of simple logic and reversibility, a child will be unable to decipher the double meaning of the word "long" in this joke, and though the child

may still laugh because she knows it is a joke, she will not be able to understand the meaning (Tamashiro, 1979).

Adults and teachers who are interested in helping children develop a healthy sense of humor must be aware of the many developmental aspects to accommodate their cognitive, emotional, social, and overall developmental needs (Martin, 1989; Tamashiro, 1979). Once a teacher knows a child's developmental level, he or she can make better instructional decisions about what is important and relevant to the child (Tamashiro, 1979; Krogh, 1985; Poole, Miller, & Church, 1999). Important is that teachers do not define the same things as funny as students do, so an understanding of the way children think is monumental to a successful laughing model in the classroom. When teachers supported playfulness, creative thinking, and had an open-minded attitude about teaching and learning there was more laughter (Bariaud, 1989; Brumbaugh, 1940). Not everyone has the capacity or willingness to attempt to make others laugh, and not everyone will laugh at what the instigator attempts to produce laughter with, deducing that humor is a skill that needs to be practiced and refined based on those one wishes to amuse (Franzini, 2001).

Why Laughter and Humor in the Classroom?

“Humor [and laughter] in education help us get the larger view of life, the incomparably more enthralling view, the view to start motions of wonder and reverence within the deepest of self. (Baughman, 1974, pg. 68)

Mastering Learning

Many progressive teachers see how humor enhances learning by creating an enjoyable and accepting classroom where children are encouraged to explore their

ideas in a creative way (Franzini, 2002). For humorous learning to occur, Burt and Sugawara (1988) assert that mastery of concepts and skills must be a major goal of the curriculum. What children laugh at in a classroom depends upon them being able to master the new and interesting, while simultaneously demonstrating knowledge of the known (Blos, 1979). Welker (1977) wrote how humor can be a social mechanism that helps students gain interest and combat boredom, which in the educational field may be one of the most important conditions for optimal learning. When boredom occurs, learning does not, and teachers need to be willing to use all techniques at their disposal.

In terms of how laughter and humor impact testing, McMorris, Urbach, and Connor (1985) discovered that when humor was incorporated into items on an 8th grade grammar test, scores did not improve, however, anxiety decreased and humor was reported as favorable by the children. Vance (1987) established that the use of humor helped promote recall and retention of material on tests in 1st graders. Terry and Woods (1975) found lower test scores in third graders when given a humorous test and mixed results for fifth graders, though there was no discussion of the type or level of humor that was used in these test items. Important is that children should be relied on for their opinions of what type of things are enjoyable and could most stimulate learning, rather than a teacher assuming what a child finds amusing. Bradford (1964) contends that whatever is learned is better, more surely, enduringly, and usefully learned if from the experience of search and discovery and if pleasure is taken in learning. For practical examples of how teachers can use laughter and humor in curriculum refer to Baughman's (1974), Klein's (2003), and Loomas and

Kolberg's (1993) books that give real stories of the positive effects humor has had on children. Silberg's (2004) book gives over 300 suggestions of games and activities that could inspire children to laugh and learn.

Mastering Mistakes

Brumbaugh (1940) found that contrary to other studies, children were less likely to laugh at the misfortunes of others as they grew older, but in early grades academic mistakes were a large source of laughter. Many children often fret over the many things they do incorrectly, but as they are acquiring new skills, the fear of making mistakes can be lessened in the early learning environment (Welker, 1977). Perhaps teaching children that we are all imperfect and making mistakes is one of the most important parts of learning can help children persevere, and rather than being embarrassed by their fallibility, they can learn to take it in stride. Welker (1977) wrote that the teacher should teach that to err is human, and in many cases humorous, and knowing how to appreciate the humorous side of mistakes is integral.

Baughman (1979) thinks the teacher can be the best example of learning to laugh at oneself, as children are outstanding imitators, and learning to laugh at yourself is most helpful when we make mistakes. Learning to laugh at yourself can be a positive step in learning to appreciate yourself and gather experiences that feed into who a person is, and hopefully see that education does not need to be a boring experience. Baughman (1979) feels that when there are laughing people in a classroom, things certainly seem less boring, and the day you have your first real laugh at yourself is indication of growing up.

Mastering Conflict

Laughter can be used as a means of resolving problems that further teacher and student goals, especially interjecting humor at critical points when attention may be waning. Millard (1999) focuses on laughter as a strategy for diffusing difficult situations and minimizing behavioral problems, and discusses how humor can be used in teacher-student and student-student relationships. McNinch and Gruber (1995) performed a study to assess teachers' attitudes towards humor in their classrooms and overall, teachers were not found to support the use of humor as much as one would think in the solving of classroom problems, with most reporting that more traditional routines were most helpful in instruction. They also concluded that teachers who worked with younger children believed humor to be a more useful tool for dealing with classroom behavioral issues than those in the upper primary grades. It has also been suggested that a teacher who can laugh at herself can help to put the student and teacher on equal ground, though only in situations where a teacher's control of the classroom is not suspect (Woods, 1983).

An important implication for Fern's (1991) study when looking at the class clown, is that perhaps the things that are considered behavioral problems can be better redirected into positive and creative directions. Baughman (1979) asserts that class clowns are often peaceful disrupters, and most youth are taught to believe they must always be serious when learning, and teachers and students can tolerate each other's blunders if they keep the laughable in mind and overall.

Mastering Coping Skills

Woods (1983) suggests that though much humor in school is in the realm of play, it is often used as a coping behavior, a means of adjusting to new situations that otherwise might end in failure of task, self-doubt, or a glitch in the social order. At the heart of coping is a preservation of self, and flexibility, laughter, and humor are a large part of this preservation. It can strengthen the relationship between student and teacher, and provoke the creative and adaptational aspects of its coping nature (Ziegler, Boardman, & Thomas, 1985).

Humor and laughter may be used as forms of resistance and can be powerful resources in enabling students to cope with school life, including playing with the authority that controls them (Woods, 1983). Important is that school is a sanctuary for many children who have difficult home lives, making it even more important to integrate humor and lightheartedness into their classroom experience (Farris, Fuhler, & Walther, 1999). Brumbaugh (1940) makes a good point when she discusses how many outside influences are affecting children's emotions, and this is a time when teacher guidance is central. Adults and teachers have a handicap in that they have often forgotten the spirit of play in children, which they must work at to remember how important it is.

For the teacher, humor is both delicate and valuable, and it can be a liability or an asset depending on how it is used. Humor can make the heavy lighter, can help children maintain a sense of proportion that is often distorted, or help them see something in a new light. For further information about an already developed curriculum using humor, look into Project Funny Bone (Fern, 1990).

Mastering Relationships

Baughman (1979) and Berk (2002) contend that teaching with humor is an art and science, one that keeps students alive, attentive, and expectant, though the real purpose is in establishing a relationship through understanding and enjoyment. In school, children can help us see the connections and relationships that are logical to them and highly laughable. By engaging children in laughter in the classroom their often innocent, yet remarkable view of the world teaches us that nothing should be taken for granted, and children can learn to use this technique when relating to others (Chenfeld, 1990).

The teacher needs to learn to provide multiple opportunities for these laughter-producing interactions to happen, and not chastise children for their need and desire to relate to others in this way (Franzini, 2002). A teacher who makes her students laugh is genuine and invites spontaneity, intuitiveness, and risk, all of which are essential in developing positive relationships. Only once a teacher can acknowledge and laugh at her own shortcomings can she maintain a better perspective in the challenging classroom environment and teach children to laugh as they relate to others.

Whether humor is an escape or not, it is surely a tonic to the teacher as well as to those he teaches. The teacher may at times be considered an ass, but he will never, never be a pompous ass (Baughman, 1978, pg. 55).

In an article by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (1988), laughing and joking with young children is a way that can be expressed as a tone setter by the adult, which the child will learn to follow. If the adult can set an

example and encourage a child to imitate and initiate play there will be much time for laughing, joking, and enjoying each other within all relationships that are present.

Mastering or Knowing the Self

Education is not only a process of coming to know material, but coming to know oneself, and if a child can encounter teachers who make learning a fun and laughable adventure, he or she can come to develop a better and more positive sense-of-self. Most children enter school with enormous expectations, and are thrilled at the experiences that lie ahead. It is only time in an oppressive system that changes students' attitudes and subsequent ideas and expressions of themselves. A person with a laughing philosophy of life can take his duties seriously but not mournfully. Baughman (1979, pg. 30) deems that humor is one of mankind's most democratic experiences, and can help a child learn more about who he or she is.

Mastering Reading and Social Ideas

One of the primary benefits of laughter and humor in education is particular to coming to appreciate books and reading. Triezenberg (2004) discussed humor enhancers in the study of humorous literature, and found that finding the humor in literature can help children come to terms with many social issues, especially combating stereotypes, which is especially integral for young children as they are coming to recognize their own personal characteristics and the characteristics of others. Triezenberg's study (2004) of children in grades 3 through 6, showed evidence that the majority of children enjoyed humorous stories and fairy tales more than other types of stories. Brackett (1933) found that laughter decreased during routine activities and that there was a high relationship between the amount of

language and laughing, suggesting that finding new ways of teaching could be monumental in helping children learn.

Klein (1992) discovered that book humor not only supports children's cognitive learning, but their social and emotional development by allowing them to acknowledge and understand incongruity and concepts from an outside perspective. Through books, children can look at the absurdity of situations and view them in unthreatening ways. For example, books involving situations that involve breaking social rules can be appealing to young children who are struggling with this concept, and can promote them to begin to learn about the complexity of the social and relational world (Klein, 1992).

Books for children should be carefully analyzed for those things that may cause laughter, and books with different types of laughter-producing scenarios should be used to appeal to children at different levels of understanding (Triezenberg, 2004; Bateman, 1967; Willis, 1999; Stephens, 2000; Jalongo, 1985; Alberghene, 1989). If a funny book fails to amuse, it is most likely a poor match to their developmental level. Munde (1997) discovered that humor was the strongest preference for reading material in children, though adults often choose books for children that they find funny, and what a child finds humorous may be very different. In one of the first studies of humor in literature, Wells (1934) found that 7th, 9th, and 12th graders generally preferred absurdity followed by slapstick, satire, and whimsy, though overall she found that boys preferred absurdity and slapstick and girls preferred satire and whimsy. Alberghene (1989) states how the things that children are most likely to laugh in children's books and literature are the funny incident, incident entanglement,

the comic pictorial image, and the sense of superiority, ludicrous nonsense, and subtlety. It is also suggested that what different-aged people find humorous in books often coincides with the particular conflict that those in different stages of Erik Erikson's theory would suggest (Nilsen & Nilsen 1982; Goldhaber, 2000).

Laughter and Humor as Disruptive in the Classroom

Given our high-pressured and high-achievement society, many would regard a suggestion or attempt to use humor and laughter as unproductive or frivolous. There is occasionally the belief that humor is disruptive to the educational process, which can be true in some situations where humor is not being used productively, but hurtfully (Fern, 1991; Littleton, 1998). McGhee (1989) and Fabrizi and Pollio (1987) found that though humor is beneficial for social development, there may be a period of time when a child's laughing may be seen as an undesirable or disruptive behavior, and often what the teacher considers hostile laughter will be seen as a discipline problem (Tamashiro, 1979). Fern (1991) believes in dispelling the myth about funny students, as children rated most other children in her study as being popular and fairly well-adjusted children, but teachers described them as restless and talkative.

Conclusion

This section on laughing and schooling in education proposes that laughter and humor can be beneficial, though it is not to imply that if a teacher does not use them in curriculum that his or her class will not be successful. It does, however, suggest that we need to begin to look at other ways of relating to students, especially as our educational system continues to focus primarily on tests and outcomes, rather

than relationships. New ways need to be considered in how to overcome some of the difficulty that is associated with the process of growing and learning (Martin, 1989). Walter (1990) believes that education is too important to take seriously, and when people take anything too seriously, they put on blinders, which causes them to miss the important aspects of what is going on around them. With a reduction of stress in teaching and learning, there is more energy left to teach, create divergent thinking, and thus stimulate learning in a variety of subjects and ways.

I have discussed much of the literature that has been written about the theories of laughter and the developmental benefits of laughter and humor to children, and how they could be related to education. It is important to note that no true prescription for the use of laughter and humor in a school or classroom can be given and because students, teachers, situations, and relationships vary from setting to setting, the focus must be placed on each teacher to decide how to apply it to a particular group of children in a classroom (Aho, 1979).

It is also important that continued research efforts are necessary to enhance a teacher's knowledge of how to apply laughter and humor, and recognize how they can be valuable for a child's overall development. By learning about the benefits of these phenomena, teachers are in a better position to foster the holistic development of each child. I cannot say it more profoundly and succinctly than Dale Baughman (1979, pg. 30). "We had better find more effective ways to relate, to motivate, to inspire. **If education doesn't make it, nothing makes it.**" Laughter and humor can help education make it.

CHAPTER THREE

Research Methods

Quantitative or Qualitative Research

I never had to give more than a fleeting thought as to whether I would do quantitative or qualitative research. My most important consideration in choosing a qualitative approach was that I have been a preschool teacher and pediatric occupational therapist, and found the descriptive and reader-friendly aspects of qualitative studies easiest to apply and relate to my own practice. So when I began my dissertation, I wanted to write in the way that made sense to me, but could also reach others who worked with children.

I knew that utilizing a qualitative approach would help me give more meaning to my research findings by using myself as the main instrument of data collection, while focusing on the meaning and personal context that the participants brought to the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005b). I also knew I wanted to write a dissertation that best captured the personalities of my participants, myself, and the truest nature of the relationships I was hoping to investigate. In addition, the esoteric nature of my research subject did not warrant a method that was conclusive, but open-ended, especially because the relationships embedded within the context of laughter still need to be described richly and fully (Creswell, 1998; Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996).

Question of Field of Thought

Which “ology” a researcher chooses can influence his or her study. Choosing an “ology” will provide the categories and theories that help define the subject of interest, and hence shape the ways in which we come to describe our experiences (Eisner, 1998). I knew that a study of laughter could proceed in one of two ways; by studying why something is funny, as those in the fields of philosophy and anthropology have, or begin from the laughter itself, or the person laughing, as the fields of psychology and sociology have typically done (Gray, 1994; Bruner 1990). After looking at the different fields of thought on laughter, I realized that my way of thinking about research combines the primary tenets of all of these fields, and the primary method I chose had to allow for multiple ways of thinking to be expressed (Fine, 1983; Roeckelein; 2002; Apte; 1983). I knew I could not solely claim a single one and needed a method that allowed for a blending of “ologies,” and thus, I incorporated all fields of thought into my literature review and study.

Coming to a Design

As a new researcher, I felt the need to follow the paths of those taken before to prove that what I was doing was authentic, but I also believed that any given method would only be the starting block of my study. While investigating qualitative methods, I quickly became exhausted by the notion of claiming one method overall, especially because I know all methods can be meaningful if they are used honestly and no single method can lead to all of the answers one is seeking.

There is no cookbook approach as how to produce a perceptive, insightful, or illuminating qualitative study of the educational world, and it is not possible to predict the course of events that will occur, as there are always emergent conditions that could not have been anticipated (Eisner, 1998). It was the flexibility within the methods I chose that I felt would allow my dissertation to be the most comprehensive, authentic, and meaningful thing I could write to tell the truest stories of the interactions I experienced in kindergarten. I also knew I needed to use methods that would allow me to change and reform my strategies over time. I had questions and a plan to begin with, though this evolved as I came to realize the individual circumstances of each child's life and his or her personal approach of relating to the classroom teacher, their classmates, and me.

To choose the method that was the best fit for my study on children's laughter I considered many qualitative methods; I took classes and read extensively on ethnography, case studies, grounded theory, portraiture, narrative inquiry, and phenomenology as possible frameworks (Ellis & Bochner, 1996; Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005b; Frank, 1999; Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Holliday, 2002; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; Merriam, 1998; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). After much thought of what my questions were and how I could best approach them, I decided that my study would best be conducted by using a combination of portraiture, ethnography, and case study.

Portraiture

Portraiture is a method that is inherently laden with the core quality required for authentic research and writing; a true love of the subject that is to be breathed and

worshipped (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). It is a yielding and forgiving method, and is solidly grounded in art and science, these qualities of which envelope the scientific rigor and aesthetics required to meld these seemingly diverse constructs seamlessly together. This blend allows the direction of the research, questions, impressions, and ongoing meanings to be created and recreated as the participants grow throughout the process of a study. This was especially important in a study of children and teachers, who are in a state of constant developmental evolution.

Borrowing its name from the visual arts, portraiture is a research methodology that provides detailed accounts of a phenomenon in artful narratives that function themselves as works of art (Davis, 2005). Acknowledging researcher voice that will resound throughout the portrayal is particularly significant in portraiture, and this was concurrent with my views of how a study should be written (Davis, 2002; Davis, 2005). Portraiture uses, outside-in writing, by supporting that the researcher write in a style that brings the project context to life, while bringing the reader into the world of the concept or subject being studied (Pickeral, Hill, & Duckenfield, 2003).

As the scope of research is unfolding, the context in which it occurs is often seen as an obstacle to a study's authenticity, though it is quite similar to the anticipation and meaning that comes with sharpening the contrast of a forgotten photograph from years past. The meaning and importance unfolds slowly and unknowingly at first, with the shapes and forms gradually attaining clarity. It is capturing this context that helps to create a detail-rich picture of the complexity of humanity, in this case the children and teachers who are connecting through laughter in the classroom (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

From the perspective of portraiture, finding what works creatively in education is an approach that is not often utilized (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). It helps to depict examples of success, and embraces the goodness of an educational environment that is always present, yet overshadowed, by the dysfunction of a precarious system. Hence, those who use it can begin to obtain a more affirmative view of how to enhance that which is already working in the classroom, rather than focusing on the negativity that often makes those involved in the educational system feel powerless to do little, if anything at all. This view of educational goodness does not deny that there are things wrong with education, in fact, portraiture assumes that difficulties are intrinsic within any system of study, but it provides a more optimistic point at which to start and build upon (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Ethnography

Ethnography can be defined as the art and science of interpreting and describing a social group or culture, while engaging in interactive research with the participants one is studying (Ellis & Bochner, 1996). The researcher examines the groups' observable and learned patterns of behavior and their ways of life. It embraces a holistic perspective, and studies the group in its full contextual and temporal significance by embracing sensitivity to place and time. It maintains that things are studied in their natural state, and the phenomena are examined without intervention or manipulation. Participant perspective is integral, and there are always the multiple voices of the researcher and the participants simultaneously and nonjudgementally. It is a method that becomes more detail-rich as the process

unfolds, as more is discovered about the participants and their lives, and the findings are written with thick description (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996).

A focus on culture is key to ethnography, and in my study it was the classroom culture I was interested in describing, including how the relationships and interactions embedded in the daily practices of the schooling experience unfolded with laughter each day (Frank, 1999). Ethnography helps to extend the classic definition of culture as being something more than a person has. Culture is what happens to you when you encounter differences, become aware of something new in yourself, and work to figure out the meaning of these differences. Culture is an awareness, a consciousness, one that reveals the veiled self and opens paths to other ways of being (Frank, 1999).

Case Study

Case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied (Stake, 2005; Stake 1995). A case can be simple or complex; it could be a study of a single child, an event, or a classroom with multiple children. A case study is both a process of inquiry about the case and the product of that inquiry (Stake, 2005; Merriam, 1998). There are different types of case studies, though they all seek to gain a better understanding of an issue or group, or provide insight into an issue and help facilitate our understanding of that subject (Stake, 1995). This fit my research, because I knew I was interested in studying a couple of children who represented different aspects of the laughing spectrum, but I also wanted to study how these individual children fit into the larger group.

Setting

Important to the methods I chose, was that they view the relationship between the researcher and the setting as something that needs to be respected and cultivated. When I started to think about where my study would take place, I knew it would be within the vicinity where I lived. Since I had lived in Southwestern Virginia for the past 7 years, this was the place I was personally and emotionally closest to, and felt I could complete the most authentic and convenient study in this location.

Next, I needed to choose a kindergarten classroom in one of the elementary schools in the area. I knew I wanted to be in a school with an already well-established sense of community and a student and family-centered principal and teachers, and Cartwright Elementary sounded like a perfect fit. I contacted the teacher and the county and received permission to begin my research, though a change in administration at the time my research was to begin delayed my research by one semester. Cartwright Elementary is a school that serves children pre-K to fifth grade, has a total of 210 students, and 18 full-time teachers. I will embellish on the setting in Chapter 5.

Participants

Since I desired to study the interactions within an entire classroom, I knew I did not need to choose my participants, only the classroom that would be my focus. The classroom makeup initially consisted of fifteen kindergarten children, nine boys, six girls, one male kindergarten teacher, and myself, though early in the semester two of the male students moved. I knew that this male teacher-led classroom was not the

norm, but also knew that a male kindergarten teacher is quite unique, thus allowing me to study something that I might not ever get a chance to investigate again.

Though it could be questioned that my sample is not representative, qualitative research does not assume that it will be, and my purpose was to describe laughter events and meanings in this particular classroom. I will tell more about my participants in Chapter 4.

Collecting Data

Fieldnotes

I planned that my primary method of data collection would be my fieldnotes, and it ended that this was almost my sole method because this is what worked best (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw 1995; Wolcott; 1999). Though I attempted to write things down as they were happening, the nature of constant activity in the kindergarten classroom often prevented my ability to fully record incidents as they were happening. Most often, I would take abridged notes at the time events occurred in the classroom, and I was usually only able to fully expand on my notes at the end of each day when I was uninvolved with the children. When I did find time to write during the school day it was during the activities that I was less occupied in and was able to sit back and watch, for example, physical education or music. At the end of each week, I handwrote my notes into a more comprehensive form, because of the sad truth that I still do not know how to type well. After this handwriting, I typed them into my computer without losing the thoughts that typing them initially would have done. Though many would see this handwriting notes as an extra step, I knew it was

the only way for me to write freely and completely while addressing my typing disability. However, after more than 900 pages of legal-sized handwritten notes I became much faster on the keyboard.

Personal Journal

New to me as well as the field of qualitative inquiry in general, is Richardson and St. Pierre's (2005) work that purports writing is a method of inquiry and not solely the end product of an investigation. Through writing, an investigator can learn more about herself and her research topic, and this will subsequently result in creating a more authentic study. They negate the traditional scientific thought that writing should only be done when you know exactly what to say, and support writing as a general way of coming to know more about yourself and your subject (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005).

I have kept a personal journal for many years, and knew this would be an important conduit into the many things I was thinking and experiencing in kindergarten. The contents of this journal inevitably changed, as my research created a completely new situation in my life upon which to reflect. For me, writing down my uncensored thoughts and worrying that someone may see what I wrote was the hardest part of research. My own thoughts became vulnerable by the possibility of others reading them.

Interviews With Children

Doing interviews with children is a daunting task, especially since the imaginative age of kindergartners lends itself to possible misinformation. Though many will say that children of this age lie frequently, I do not see it as such. Their

dialogue and monologues are meaningful insights into their view of themselves as children in a world where they are trying to find their meaning, while simultaneously engaging in the magical universe of imagination (Engel, 2000).

Goodwin & Goodwin (1996) talk about the potential difficulties of interviewing children in the following quote: “Physical, social, cognitive, and political distances between the adult and child make their relationship very different from the relationship between adults...one can never again become a child. One remains a very definite and readily identifiable ‘other’” (p.134). It is difficult to evaluate the stories a child tells when we no longer have the mind of a child, but if we pay intimate attention, we can get much closer (Engel, 2000).

Often the reason we fail to glean information in our discussions with children is because we take them out of their environment to impose something on them that they do not know, fear, do not relate to, or care little about. It took getting to know the children to determine the ways that worked best to interview them, and often I used the power of play to delve into the many things they were thinking. I found that giving children more specific cues about the information I was seeking helped them more comprehensively articulate and replay the event. I was able to check the reliability of their stories, as I was usually present, had seen the event occur, and could verify the facts.

As children of this age still do not have an accurate perception of time during, between, and after events, I also tried to ask them about situations as close to the actual event as possible, as too much time elapsing could change the memory of what had happened. I compare this to when I wake up from a vibrant dream in the middle

of the night, replay it in my head, and tell myself I will remember it in the morning. Of course by morning the vague outline is still there, but much of the nuance is lost.

Audiotape

In order to capture many of the conversations I had with the children without having to look away to write, I used a small cassette recorder. As I have experienced before, regardless of my attempts to familiarize the children with the cassette recorder prior to collecting data, this is one device that they never seem to tire of. Many times I tried to audiotape, but just as soon had to surrender my recorder because of the children's fascination.

Photography and Short Videos

When I got my digital camera for a cheap price when I invested in a laptop, I thought nothing of using it for my research, though after using it to take pictures of the school and children, I started thinking about exactly how much it made things different in research. I took hundreds of pictures though inevitably felt that these digital pictures erased the wonder and purposeful intention involved in pictures taken with a real camera. Next time I will use a camera with film.

I was also able to take 30-second videos of the children with my camera. Early on I had decided not to use a video camera to document the children, because I felt it would detract from how the children would normally react and relate. Because the children were used to having their pictures taken, I thought nothing of using my digital camera for short videos. I used these short videos for reviewing particular laughter situations, though I do not feel they were a crucial part of my research.

Audience

One of the most salient ingredients of my chosen methods is in the telling of the stories of participant's experiences in ways that are meaningful to them and those who read it (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; Davis, 2002; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Stake, 2005). The descriptive and unpretentious writing style that they facilitate allows a more eclectic audience to be addressed, and simultaneously informs and inspires readers who are from various backgrounds to address the things in their lives that they find important. I was unsure who might possibly read my dissertation, however, I wanted to write it in a way that was potentially readable by anyone, which my methods allowed me to do. Overall, I feel my dissertation could most be appreciated by educators and parents, though scholars could also find it useful.

My Role in the Research

Since I was interested in understanding laughter in the context of relationships in the classroom, I knew my role in the research was extremely important. I decided to use participant observation, an ethnographic technique that serves to allow the researcher to observe and participate simultaneously, as to better understand the participants thoughts, feelings, and perceptions about the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 1998; Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996; Wolcott, 1999). There is a range of participating and observing behaviors, which fall on a continuum including mostly observer, observer as participant, participant as observer, and mostly participant (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996).

The children and classroom teacher immediately treated me as a complete participant, and I was almost always directly involved in what the children were doing. I was rarely ever only an observer. When I was sitting back and watching, the children constantly looked at me, waved to me frenetically, and screamed to me on the playground; therefore I was always drawn into the events that were occurring even if it was not my intention.

Ending Research

Before I started my research, I was worried about how much time I should spend in the classroom each day, how many days I should go each week, and for how many weeks I should continue. I did not know if I should focus on one time of day or all times, and I was unsure if I should go with the children to art, PE, music, or lunch. Because I instantly found that each event in these children's day was influenced by each preceding one, as evidenced by the things they talked about over the course of the day, I decided that the days I spent in kindergarten would be full ones that included all of the daily activities of the children. So I attended kindergarten 3 full days per week, sometimes more and sometimes less depending on my schedule and other work obligations. After 4 weeks, I decided that I would go until the school year ended, as dictated by an unknown number of future snow days, which were plentiful. I did not foresee that at any time I would reach a point where the stories I would collect would cease to be important for gathering a better understanding of these children and their laughter, and I thought witnessing the end of the year and transition out of kindergarten would be quite an event to document.

Analyzing Events and Writing Stories

In qualitative research, data collection and analysis are closely related, and therefore, analysis occurs continuously throughout the entire data collection process as well as after it is over (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). I wrote my reflections on events at the end of each day, and so the thoughts I had about what interactions meant became embedded in the experiences that they represented, inevitably shaping the direction of future experiences and thoughts about them. In other words, it stood that each day my story about the children and teachers continued to build, grow, change, and increase in complexity.

Analyzing my data continuously as my study progressed was aided by writing down and thinking about all of the new questions that I had at the end of every day. By looking at these questions or starred items in my notes, I kept reflecting on what I found exciting, interesting, different, or similar. I made outlines each week and continued to build upon the outlines, while organizing my notes through a process that separated my data by themes, events, and participants.

Following data collection and analysis, a subsequent portrait, case study, or narrative is one that captures the breathing essence that is often lost in the arduous process of categorizing and analyzing data. It is difficult at first to decide exactly what things might be the most salient, though there is a point where the haze dissipates and it is suddenly and thankfully visible. After much reflecting and analyzing, the stories and meanings of the teachers and children gradually unfolded with clarity.

Research Biases

I feel a discussion of biases in depth is not only necessary for an ethical study, but an authentic one. This admitting that I had biases that could potentially affect the reporting of my results was initially one of the hardest parts of research. I knew I was a firm believer in the public educational system; however, I acknowledged that it was not a foolproof system; nor am I a foolproof researcher. Ultimately the limitations in my study were my limitations of myself that were formed from my personal compilation of experiences that I have integrated into my understanding of people throughout my life.

One of my initial biases was thinking that children could do more than most people thought, and that they couldn't do a lot of what many expect them to do before they are ready. Another concern was that I am inherently an introvert, and though I relate to children quite well, I am not as adept with adults. I knew that this could affect the interactions and conversations I had with adults over the semester, though I worked hard to overcome this and be friendly with people of all ages. I also had a bias that the lower income children would produce less laughter, because I thought that their less than ideal economical and living conditions would make them less capable of laughter. I soon saw how some of these biases were true of some children, though squashed in others, and I always tried to keep an open mind.

My last consideration that I only recognized when I began my research was in making sure to report on things that took place in the classroom while looking at them as they were, not as I would do them or would have wanted them to be if I were the teacher. Though the classroom teacher and I had many similarities, there were many

questions and comments in my journaling that questioned certain practices, and I had to push my personal opinions aside to look at his classroom as things existed.

Trustworthiness of Data

Qualitative research extends beyond the normal quantitative criteria of generalizability, reliability, and validity, and in qualitative research it is the case that each researcher must search for and defend the criteria that apply best to his or her work (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). Guba and Lincoln (1985) offer the trustworthiness criteria as more appropriate than the usual internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity used in quantitative studies, and they define trustworthiness as, “The quality of an investigation and its findings that make it noteworthy to audiences” (pg.164).

Guba and Lincoln (1985) use four criteria that parallel the traditional ones of reliability and validity: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In these terms, I ensured that my study had credibility by keeping my objectivity, recognizing and reflecting on my research biases, becoming intimately familiar with my topic and setting, and carefully recording and transcribing my data. I addressed transferability by comprehensively reporting my research methods and results with a focus on the fact that I was often describing events from a child’s point of view, providing thick description in my writing, and triangulating my data sources including my informal discussions, fieldnotes, and journal. I focused on dependability by using multiple methods of coding my data including fieldnotes, informal discussion, and a personal diary in a variety of settings, and reflecting on the

multiple meanings that each of these contributed to my findings and subsequent report of my results. I also addressed its confirmability by attempting to relate my questions, findings, and interpretations to the ways my data could be understood by multiple readers while maintaining personal reflexivity throughout. I always tried to keep in mind that I knew I would interpret my findings in one way, but they could and would be interpreted in multiple ways depending upon the individual person who was reading the things I had written (Guba & Lincoln, 1985).

Van Maanen (1988) states that reliability and validity are overrated and apparency and verisimilitude are underrated. Since the results of a qualitative study can never be definitively reported, a qualitative researcher needs to more fully address the truth within the stories he or she reports. Overall, I felt that my chosen methods and acknowledgment of possible obstacles, biases, and multiple viewer interpretations made my study the most authentic one possible.

CHAPTER FOUR

Children and Teachers

This was the only place in my dissertation I could put the children and teachers who let me enter their lives for half of their kindergarten year; they had to come first. I knew that only with a complete discussion of my participants' personalities foremost, could my readers come to identify with my further descriptions of the school environment, the children and teacher's relationships, endeavors, and the meanings of our time spent together. I feel this is the most significant chapter, as without my willing participants, one could easily say that everything would have been much different. After spending time with them I knew that my participants deserved to be written about in depth, as they are what this entire dissertation is about.

I shortly came to know who these people in my study were, though this is not to say that even after spending much time with them, I really knew them at all, and I could only know them as they allowed me to be a part of their school experience and classroom lives. After a few discussions with them, I became overwhelmed by the complexity of their lives at such a young age. After two weeks, I knew that a few lived in affluent neighborhoods and had parents who were prominent in the community, but an equal number dwelled in older, more run down areas and had working-class parents. Children from each of these groups had different living arrangements and resided either with only a mother or father, or had stepparents and stepfamilies that they split their time between. One came to school hungry and

disheveled often wearing the same pants of the previous day, and others were groomed and bright. Some carried more money in their wallets than I do, and one came with no lunch or money to buy it. One told me about her favorite part of David Letterman from the night before and another told me about what he reads with his mom before bed. When talking about pets, one girl shared news of getting a new “wiener dog,” as she hilariously explained it a “dog son,” whereas another girl spoke of how 2 of her dogs died when her “house burned up.”

Within one week of knowing them, it seemed that two laughed constantly, six frequently, four occasionally, and one never laughed, and I was excited to see what this meant. I came to see that I had a sample of thirteen extremely diverse, interesting, and intelligent children, all from different backgrounds, and all with highly variable life experiences and personalities. However, because of their date of birth and where they lived they had come to spend 35 hours each week together in Aaron Silver’s kindergarten classroom, an experience that I know will affect all of their lives in some way forever, even if on a small level. I was unsure what would happen over the next few months, though the one thing I knew for certain was that I had much to experience, and even more to learn.

My greatest difficulty in this chapter came in trying to do these individuals justice as I tried to capture who they were as I met them, but more complicatedly who they became during 400 hours of interaction together in the kindergarten classroom over a 5-month semester. My second challenge, one that I met surprisingly, was in coming up with aliases for them because their birth-given names stuck in my mind as who they were, and I had to learn to picture them with names foreign to me, yet that

suited them. When I asked the children what they wished to be called, I did not use their answers for the sake of the hilarity as well as my attempt to make those reading my dissertation feel its authenticity. I conclusively did not think that Patrick's idea of Rufus Wobblehead would work.

I was initially going to include each child's photograph to show a physical glance at who they are, but as a further attempt to protect their identities, I tried to come up with a more creative way to show them. Hence, I engaged them in a task where I had them draw themselves from their photograph, and it turned into a project that yielded much information and fruitful, laughable interactions about how the children saw and subsequently described themselves.

Following are the striking teacher and children in my study, their self-portraits, how they described themselves, a depiction of their overall personalities, and a brief description about their primary relationships in the classroom. And I am in there too.

AARON



Figure 2. Sarah's portrait of Aaron

How he describes himself:

Activist
Eccentric
Learner
Musician
Teacher

Interests:

Astronomy
Cats
Learning
Love and peace
Playing guitar and music
Politics
Reading
Spending time with his son and daughter
Teaching kindergarten

Physical Appearance:

I did not initially get Aaron's hand drawn picture of himself due to my procrastination in asking for it and his subsequent procrastination in doing it, so I drew it myself.

Aaron is a tall, over 6-foot man of average build, with a thick goatee-style beard that fully covers his chin. He has long graying hair, and though it is always tied back in a ponytail, there are always stray hairs that he smoothes down when necessary. He has smiling, friendly, dark brown eyes shrouded by oval glasses, a welcoming face, and a smile that could never be mistaken as anything but genuine. He was most commonly seen in jeans and long-sleeved button-down shirts with sneakers.

Personality:

It is difficult to describe the humble man who has dedicated over 30 years to teaching kindergartners. Aaron is one of the few people who I know is comfortable with himself and what he believes in, though I also know that he would be modest about being disclosed as the fabulous teacher in my dissertation. He is open, malleable, flexible, liberal, respectful, and accepting of all people and children, no matter what their background or ability. He is not the traditional teacher in any sense, and has no control freakishness about him, in fact he was always open to all of the children's ideas and commentary, or a change in routine. He is the most patient teacher I have ever seen, especially with children of this age, and he is never outwardly frustrated or raises his voice, even during situations that most would consider exasperating. He is honest, true, and good-hearted as they come, and he shares himself and his life with the children. He is not fond of paperwork, technicalities, and organization, as evidenced by his messy and cluttered classroom, though this does not matter as his classroom works well. He is brilliant with so many things that the children cannot help but learn, and at the very least, learn to love their first experiences with school.

Primary Relationships:

Family: Aaron often used his children as sources of stories and his son and daughter had both been to his kindergarten classroom to meet the children.

Children: Aaron has positive, respectful, and reciprocal relationships with all of the children, and he firmly believes in treating all human beings equally, never showing preference for one child over another. He spent many hours teaching them to talk about, rationalize, and solve their conflicts, and to think about what was happening inside and outside of their immediate worlds. Because I felt all of his relationships with the children were equitable, I will not go into detail about how he related to different children.

Me: My relationship with Aaron was close without much verbal communication, as it was often not necessary. After a few discussions it was obvious that our philosophy of living, life, and what is important to each of us was similar and we had an immediate intersubjectivity. There was a knowing that we had the same beliefs and value system, felt the same about children, and the politics of education. We often talked as things were happening throughout the day or on the playground if I could get out of pushing the tire swing.

ABIGAIL

Age: 5 years, 7 months



Figure 3. Abigail's self-portrait

How she describes herself:

Cool
Friendly
Fun
Good sister
Happy
Nice
Silly
Smart

Interests:

Anything pink or purple
Babies
Cats and kittens
Cookies
Family
Friends at school
Horses
Playing outside
Princesses
SpongeBob Squarepants

Physical Appearance:

Abigail's shoulder length flaxen-blond hair with straight bangs shines like the sunrise that you see on the morning when you are grumpy about getting up too early, and so it surprises you that you find her so awakening that it takes away your need for coffee. When she was focusing, she would haphazardly push back her hair that was tickling her face, showing her tiny pair of stud earrings. Her almond-shaped eyes are always full, deep, and inquiring and she has distinctive creases in her temples when she laughs. Abigail is of average build and height, often clad in colorful matching shirt and pants outfits. Her smile makes those around her laugh at her with adoration, and as you can see, her gaping smile is perfectly represented in her self-portrait.

Personality:

Abigail is an absolute pleasure to interact with and talk to, and she has refined the art of snuggling on one's lap. The sweet, shy, and quiet Abigail is gone, and she has grown into a confident and outgoing child who makes friends quickly and easily, not like when I last saw her in my preschool class two years earlier. I remembered her as introverted and reserved, often clutching onto her mother so she would stay close by. Now Abigail is spunky and energetic, but also listens well and meticulously follows the rules when she senses it is something of importance. She never got the talking to that many of the other children seemed to, and she always went with the flow of what was happening without complaining. Her curiosity was overwhelming at times, and she asked many questions and shared many real and pretend stories. She shows a sense of empathy, understanding, and insightfulness uncommon to a child her age. When I was sad on the last day of school she exclaimed, "Don't worry! I will see you next year!" I will be in first grade. Do you know where the first grader's classroom is?" I made sure to tell her I would do everything I could to find it.

Primary Relationships:

Family: Abigail is a child whose relationship with her family is a part of who she is at school. She is greatly involved with her immediate and extended family and talks about them often. Her older sister is at the same school, and would make special attempts to visit Abigail in class, always hugging or kissing her. Abigail was particularly excited about the new baby who was still unborn at the time that school ended, especially the name debate that was taking place. It was common for her aunt, mother, or grandparents to come to school to eat lunch with her.

Classmates: Abigail was most commonly seen with Lindy and Karla, though she would frequently play with any combination of girls. She would talk to all of the boys, and play with them on occasion, especially on the playground.

Me: My relationship with Abigail remained constant over the semester once I had realized that she had changed and did not need coddling. On most days she boasted to everyone else in the class of knowing me for longer than anyone else. She often wanted to spend time with me whenever I had it, though she was never jealous of my relationships with other children. Abigail is mature in her sense of how relationships work, with teachers, adults, and other children needing to divide their attention amongst many, and she is always patient until it is her turn.

ADAM

Age: 5 years, 5 months



Figure 4. Adam's self-portrait

How he describes himself:

Crazy
Funny
Goofy
Happy
Insane
Silly
"You know!"

Interests:

Building ships and rockets
"Kid"ergarten
Kidding with his dad
Laughing and being silly
Playing on the playground
Star Wars
Superheroes, especially Batman
Video Games

Physical Appearance:

Adam has intense brown eyes with thick eyelashes set on a full, round face and short, silky, roasted coffee bean-brown hair cut short in front with no bangs. He is stout but not heavy. His wide smile would show his two rows of perfectly aligned baby teeth, until he finally lost one on the bottom. Even when he was not smiling, which was rare, he still had an upturned mouth that made him appear like he was grinning and happy. He was frequently dressed in T-shirts with Donald Duck or superheroes, snug-fitting pants, and sneakers with the laces flopping about.

Personality:

Adam's predominating personality trait is his happiness, and he is as cheerful as a young child could be. He was one of the few children that was naturally and almost always in high spirits, by my interpretation, which is most likely a product of his inherent silly personality and the supportive home life he has. He was constantly laughing and smiling, and all it took was the slightest act of silliness to make him giggle uncontrollably. When he got into any trouble at all, it was his funny shenanigans that precipitated a stern teacher response. I always felt that Adam had way more soul than one would think his body could handle, much of which escaped him in numerous ways; the primary one being a love of the absurd. He appears as healthy as a child could be, always energetic and active, and he always came to school with a healthful packed lunch. He is extremely cooperative, outgoing, friendly, affectionate, and easygoing, and rarely had difficulty negotiating different ideas in his play or activities with others. I always thought of him as solid, yet needing occasional intervention and guidance.

Primary Relationships:

Family: Adam was another child who spoke of his home life frequently, and his mother was always present for field trips or events, and his father occasionally picked Adam up from school. He often talked about the silly things he did with his father, and was proud his dad had given him the name, "Fartman."

Classmates: Adam never showed a favorite child to play with, but chose his interactions based on who was playing or doing something that interested him the most. Because his favorite activities usually involved the types of games that the boys were more interested in, he played primarily with the boys.

Me: Adam and I hit it off right away and he was one of the few with whom I immediately and continuously had a joking relationship; he was one of the few who usually got my attempts at playful kidding. Because of this relationship, I played on his natural sense of humor every time I was with him, and we had many ongoing interactions that helped to build our relationship daily. I felt our relationship was immediately secure, and therefore we solved problems and talked about everything easily, including superheroes, fighting, conflicts with others, guns, silliness, and of course, farting. Because I knew him as the happy child, I had to redefine our relationship during the few instances when he became upset at something.

ADDIE

Age: 5 years, 7 months



Figure 5. Addie's self-portrait

How she describes herself:

Cute
Good
Lovable
Nice
Silly
Sweet

Interests:

Being at school
Being with her mom
Bratz
Care Bears
Coloring and drawing
Dressing up
Eating lunch with her friends
Playing with dolls
Spending time with me (Sarah)

Physical Appearance:

I immediately wanted to know Addie with her sweet smile and short, brown chopped and shaggy hairstyle. Her brown eyes could not be missed unless you are away from her and now that I am, I can still picture them clearly. She made others aware of her gray front baby tooth and always told me “I don’t care. It will fall out someday,” and I stopped noticing it because if anyone could smile with her eyes it was Addie.

Before she laughed, her face always reminded me of the look people get when they have held their breath as long as possible and cannot possibly do it for one more second. She is of slender build, active, though not athletic and when she would come to school in less permitting shoes, she would often abandon them for her sneakers.

She was usually seen in pants or jeans and t-shirts adorned with flowers, cats, stripes, or other designs.

Personality:

Addie was always passionate and ready for anything and everything that came her way, and when there was something new she had trouble withholding her excitement, showing it by hopping around like a frog from lily pad to lily pad. She is a child who loves to learn new things and play new games. She is one of the most selfless young children I have encountered and she is extraordinarily giving, always wanting to share her lunch or snack with others. She would rarely say no to a child who wanted to play with one of her treasures she had brought from home. She was an excellent practical problem solver and whenever anything was wrong, she had the right ideas about what would fix or ameliorate the situation. She is exuberant and usually happy, never cried except once when her finger was slammed in the door. She exudes confidence and well-being and was obviously secure in her classroom as it existed. Addie is also cuddly, affectionate, friendly, loving, and loves being close to others. She has a great sense of humor, though her laughter was usually in response to others’ actions or mishaps.

Primary Relationships:

Family: Addie lived with her mother, father, and younger brother, and would occasionally talk about something she and her mother had done together. Once in awhile her mother or father would pick her up from school wearing their work uniforms looking tired, though they were always happy to see Addie.

Classmates: When playing with the class she usually ended up in the group of girls or a combination of them, but she would also play chasing games with all of the boys or play quieter games, such as board games with Don Jeffrey or Isaac. She was one of the only children who always made attempts to interact with everyone and played easily with everyone during all types of games.

Me: After I almost lost her drawings Addie had asked me to hold within 2 hours of first meeting her, and we conducted an investigation to find them, Addie became one of my primary sidekicks. If I did not look busy, she would often choose to play with me, though she did not try to take attention away from the others. She always wanted to hold my hand in line, and would sit by me at lunch or in my lap whenever possible.

BRADY

Age: 5 years, 7 months



Figure 6. Brady's self-portrait

How he describes himself:

Brown eyes
Brown hair
Freckles
Goofy
Ridiculous
Skinny
Tall

Interests:

Building with blocks
Cars and trucks
Chasing
Going to art
Making things crash
Motorcycles
Running
Screaming

Physical Appearance:

Brady has short, mussed, chestnut-brown hair, a freckle-spattered forehead, cheeks, and nose, and he always told me he got new freckles when he got in trouble. He often had a surreptitious look about him; the same cunning and wide-eyed look that my cats give me when they knock something over and have created a mess that I have yet to discover. He was at least as tall as the average second grader, and taller than all of the other kindergartners by several inches, though I only realized how dramatic the difference was when he stood next to others in line. He was usually seen in pants, jeans, or shorts, and plain colored collared shirts. He has speckled hazel eyes and two perfect rows of baby teeth that lasted throughout the semester.

Personality:

Brady did not always emphasize the things he loved, but I knew he was excited about much. One time in art when the teacher was focusing on combining colors and lines, Brady said emphatically, "I was BORN to do that!" He was still somewhat egocentric and often engaged in unfair things such as excluding others from games or not allowing them to play with his toys, but then came to me for the unfairness when others told him he was being unfair. He was one that often got into trouble daily because of his talkativeness and dislike for classroom rules, often complaining when he got in trouble. Overall, he was happy and playful, though got upset easily when things did not go his way. He is highly energetic and active, and would often be an instigator of active play in or outside the classroom.

Primary Relationships:

Family: Brady's family was absent in the classroom and he did not speak of them often, though he lived with his mother and father.

Classmates: Brady almost always chose the boys to play with, though he did not frequently engage with Jeremy or Isaac. He was the child who appeared to like those things that are usually considered boy things, such as building and crashing bridges and playing with cars and trucks. He would only interact with the girls if they were willing to run and shoot things, which none of them showed a primary interest in.

Me: Brady was the first to arrive in class on my first day and he was completely uninterested in me, though he was quite excited about being back to school. I asked him his name and he told me, though he did not ask mine and did not acknowledge me when I told him. I had very little interaction with him from the beginning despite attempts to engage with him, and our relationship was slower to develop from the start. It was only after I was gone for a week with a multitude of kindergarten-induced sicknesses that upon my return, he ran into my arms and stated, "Hi, Sarah. I missed you," and then held my hand throughout the morning. Otherwise, he aloofly ignored my presence. Later in the semester, he came to me for various teacher things, especially those incidents where a teacher was needed to solve a difficult situation.

CHARLIE

Age: 5 years, 5 months



Figure 7. Charlie's self-portrait

How he describes himself:

Cool
Friendly
Hilarious
In trouble
Mad
Playful
Silly

Interests:

Eating
Football
Friends
Karate
NOT his baby sister
Playing superheroes
Running
Soccer

Physical Appearance:

Charlie is a handsome boy with deep, dynamic brown eyes that he always reminded me were the same color as mine. He would always exclaim, "Brown eyes are the best!" He has short sandy beach, brown hair that was always messed up and he always ran his hand through it when upset. When one sees him, it is obvious that he is well taken care of, arriving at school groomed and tucked in, even though it only lasts minutes. He is fit, athletic, and extremely active. He has suntanned cheeks with flawless skin, small almond-shaped eyes, and despite the self-portrait he drew of himself as a snowman, he is in fact a boy.

Personality:

The first thing I can say about Charlie is that he is passionate and emotional. He was one of the two children who most reminded me of myself as a young adult, getting upset easily, always wanting what was right though not always practicing what was right, though for him this dichotomy is due to his young age and difficulty controlling his emotions and angst. He was always trying to be good but demonstrated the difficulty of restraint when he was upset or angry. We often talked about the things that got him in trouble and he told me one day, "Sometimes I do things that I know will get me in trouble but not too much trouble." He was one of a few children who cried easily on a daily basis at school, usually in response to things being taken from him, or needing to share things that he had no intention of sharing. He is very silly sweet, affectionate, sensitive, and playful with others, though has difficulty reading the social messages of others when they do not want to play, leaving him feeling rejected.

Primary Relationships:

Family: Charlie's family was involved in Charlie's school life, primarily because his father dropped him off and his mother picked him up each day, and usually he was dropped off after the bell and so his father would walk him into class. One time his father came for career day, and Charlie stood proudly next to him the entire time. Charlie's parents were two of the few whom I met and spoke to often during my semester in kindergarten.

Classmates: Even though Charlie usually played most with the boys, he was a child who was friendly to all of his classmates at some point in the day. He wanted to play with everyone, but he would often change activities and social groups quickly because he got easily frustrated.

Me: Charlie and I also had a unique relationship because we are a lot alike. Right when I saw him and asked him his name he said, "Chachawee," so quickly I couldn't understand it, and then he began to chuckle. I laughed, and said, "Hi, Chachawee." He laughed harder and said, "NO!!! CHARRRRLLIEEEEE!" From then on we would often kid around, and making him laugh was often a good way to distract him from being upset. This was Charlie, and because I could personally understand his conflicts, it was easy to be patient with him.

DON JEFFREY

Age: 5 years, 10 months



Figure 8. Don Jeffrey's self-portrait

How he describes himself:

Good
Good friend
Nice to people
Quiet
Smart

Interests:

Animals
Family
Going to church
Playing with his dad
Shrek
Soccer
Spiderman
Video games

Physical Appearance:

Don Jeffrey has short, sandy brown hair with a right side cowlick where his hair pokes off in different directions. He has oak-brown eyes that were always watchful of his surroundings and stable in their expression. He is a strikingly handsome and well-dressed boy in untied Nikes, khakis, and T-shirts. He is fit, slim, athletic, healthy, and energetic. He has a deep olive skin tone and healthy complexion. He had the type of smile that was more deliberate, one that could be seen slowly getting bigger and bigger, as though he was trying to keep it under control.

Personality:

Don Jeffrey initially struck me as quieter than most of the others, though this changed over time when he became more comfortable around me. He is independent in his actions and thinking, and his self-portrait shows his true personality as an individual and creative thinker. Don Jeffrey is one of the hardest to describe, and I kept coming back to him, probably because he was one of the most well-adjusted children in the classroom. He knew the rules and practices of the classroom, followed them, and was upset when others did not. He is especially moral at an early age, always contemplating right from wrong and good from bad, and he seems to have an internal standard that he tries to uphold on a daily basis. He is extremely adaptable to changes in routine and is stable in his emotions, usually happy and rarely sullen. He was a silent leader to many of the other children, and would always offer support or friendship. He fits in so readily and easily and is so amenable to changes in routine that he is easy to overlook.

Primary Relationships:

Family: Don Jeffrey is another child whose parents were completely involved in his schooling experiences. His mother and father always came to evening events, came to school to go on field trips, came to eat lunch with him, or bring cupcakes for the class on his birthday. He talks about them and the things they do together on a regular basis.

Classmates: Don Jeffrey was friends with all of the other children, and when a child asked which of his friends in the class he was going to invite to his birthday party, he responded with, "All of them," and I later found out he had invited the entire class. He was a child who would rarely exclude anyone from a game but would quit games with others that were not being played fairly.

Me: At rest time there was a computer group and a reading group and it so happened that Don Jeffrey was the only child not designated to one of the first groups, and so it was the two of us in the classroom. At first, he would rest quietly, apparently pondering those unknowns that kindergartners deliberate, but after two weeks he began to ask me questions about what I had been doing there. Soon I never wrote during rest time, because despite the fact that they were supposed to be resting, most used it as a time to goof off or whisper to their friends. It soon became our routine to lie on our stomachs on our Shrek and Strawberry Shortcake towels exploring the nature of superheroes, ogres, video games, and monsters, which I knew little about.

ISAAC

Age: 5 years, 8 months



Figure 9. Isaac's self-portrait

How he describes himself:

"I don't know."

Interests:

- Board Games
- Bugs
- Building in the sandbox
- Dinosaurs
- Drawing
- Reading
- Stars and the Solar System
- Writing

Physical Appearance:

Isaac is the smallest child in the group by height and almost by weight, smaller than many of the preschoolers who would come to our class for music. He has short, almost black hair cut close to his head, and cola-colored eyes that appeared to be filled with hesitation and insecurity, and his facial expression rarely varied. His eyes were active and watching as much as they could take in from his position that was usually on the outskirts of activity. Midway through the semester, he had his left ear pierced, in which he wore an oversized 8-ball earring. He was often dressed in one of three or four shirts, and one of two or three pair of pants.

Personality:

Isaac is the quietest child I have ever been around who has the capacity to speak, and I never once heard him speak in a group of more than 3 children. Initially, he was seemingly indifferent to everything that was going on in kindergarten, yet I soon discovered how perceptive and observant he was when he talked one-on-one. He was always quiet, yet watchful, and stayed this way throughout the semester of my research, though he did open up more over time showing his intelligence and excitement when books or art was involved. I am unsure if he should be described as shy or insecure based on his limited interaction with others, though it seems he is both. His love of drawing shows through in his self-portrait, as you can see in the background of his picture. After he drew his picture of himself, he immediately turned the paper over to draw roads, which he then drove one of his single possessions over, a little car that he carried in his pocket. He was not a child of affection, though the times when I asked if he wanted to sit on my lap and read, he always did.

Primary Relationships:

Family: Isaac never openly spoke about his family, and only made mention that his uncle had pierced his ear when I asked about it. At the time he lived with his mother, and no one from his family ever came to the school or events.

Classmates: Isaac's closest relationship was with a boy who moved two weeks after Isaac had started playing beside him and holding his hand in line. Isaac was always accepted as part of the kindergarten classroom and group, and though a few children ignored him, none were ever mean. He was not discriminated against because he was smaller or quieter, and it was frequent for other children to join him when he was playing a board game on the floor alone. Though Isaac rarely initiated interactions with other children, he paid close attention to them.

Me: My relationship with Isaac was the one I had to be most patient with, and because of this and the fact that he rarely laughed, I decided to expand on it in Chapter 6.

JEREMY

Age: 6 years, 6 months



Figure 10. Jeremy's self-portrait

How he describes himself:

"Give me a break!"

Glasses

Grumpy

Loose teeth

Nice

Short hair

Tired

Interests:

Board games

Camping

Cars and trucks

Playing his harmonica

Riding in trucks

Running

Shooting guns

Video games

Physical Appearance:

I immediately adored Jeremy with his tiny, compact form; he was wearing a pair of snug blue jeans and a tucked in shirt with a belt, and I immediately thought I could carry him with one arm. He has slightly bent glasses that hang askew on his face that he used to strengthen his eye muscles and fix the slight crossing, though he would usually take them off and misplace them several times throughout the day. He has short, dusty brown hair and eyes set on a petite head and face. Jeremy was fit and athletic, and he was a child who usually preferred running to walking. If he could not run he was surely speedwalking with his arms swinging and hips swaying.

Personality:

On the first day back after the holiday break, Jeremy sat apparently shy until he whipped out his harmonica, gave it a few puffs, cackled riotously, and I found he is not shy at all. Jeremy is a wonderful and terribly challenging boy, and it was within one day that I realized what a stubborn, fiery troublemaker he is. His changeable emotions require much patience and attention from the adult, and I was thankful knowing patience is a virtue that I have. Jeremy has anger management difficulties and has trouble controlling his temper when he is upset, and when he is upset it easily escalates into tears or a body-shaking, flailing rage. He is moderately impulsive and has difficulty with cooperation, compromise, sharing, and taking turns, though was highly engaging and excited when others would participate in a game he had created. He has many qualities of a perfectionist, especially in his art projects that he would often start over and over until he was happy with what he had done. When he was excited or happy, he showed his passion, creativity, and silly sense of humor. This was his second year in kindergarten.

Primary Relationships:

Family: Jeremy spent his time between two families and lived with his mother and stepfather, or his father, stepmother, and stepbrother, and the things he did with his family always excited him. His parents were never seen at school, but on Monday morning he always had multiple stories about his busy weekend.

Classmates: Jeremy would play with anyone who was willing to build a race track or tower as tall as it would possibly go, drive things on it, and then crash it down, and because of these interests he often ended up playing with Adam. It seemed that Adam was usually unbothered by Jeremy's outbursts, so Jeremy ended up engaged in play with Adam for longer periods of time than with other children. He did, however, play with most of the other children except Patrick and Isaac.

Me: My relationship with Jeremy varied based on whether or not I would appease his requests. Occasionally he asked me if he could do something that I knew Aaron would not allow him to do, and when I told him he couldn't, it could take him up to several hours to acknowledge me again, though over time this lessened. From the second day I spent with him, I was the one who was waking him up from the nap that he usually took at rest time, and he was ALWAYS cranky when I did it.

JULIA

Age: 5 years, 4 months



Figure 11. Julia's self-portrait

How she describes herself:

Cuddly
Funny
Good friend
Good sister
Happy
Smart
Super

Interests:

Barbies
Bratz
Care Bears
Cats
Coloring and drawing
Friends at school
Painting
Playing outside
Princesses
Puffy Amiyumi

Physical Appearance

Julia's brindled blondish-brown hair is the color that the wanting adult strives for but simply cannot get from a box. Bangs touching perfect eyebrows, and when they became too long she would tilt her head back so she could see past them. Her perfectly-shaped green eyes are flecked with gold like a cat's, seemingly angelic and always inquisitive. Her innocent and perfect smile would melt even the hardest of metals into a cool puddle with her one bottom tooth missing, which she showed with pride. She only wears pants and T-shirts, and wears a lot of pink and stripes; only once a skirt, which made me laugh, as I was the same until I was 25. She has a flawless complexion with a ruddy nose and cheeks when she would play in the wind and cold.

Personality:

Julia is loving, playful, intelligent, mischievous, cunning, independent, and exuberant about life, which in my opinion is just how a girl should be. She is the second child who most reminds me of myself, everything I wanted to be as a child and want to be now, and perhaps this is the reason I got to know her personality more than some of the others. She was one of the two girls who frequently made definite attempts at making others laugh, and her sense of humor, silliness, and sense-of-self was unmatched by most of the others. She often got scolded for talking when she shouldn't be talking or not paying attention, though was never upset or cried at the consequences. Once she looked at me with rolling eyes and said, "I can't believe I got in trouble AGAIN. I will see you after my time out!" She was highly adept in social interaction, surveying difficult situations with rationality, and understanding that sometimes things do not go your way. She is creative and artistic in the way she approaches everything she does, and almost always demonstrated forethought before acting. Her decorated self-portrait occurred when she found my stamp markers and wanted to make herself "more pretty and more colorful than a normal kid."

Primary Relationships:

Family: After a few days Julia tells me that she lives with her daddy and not her mother, and has an older sister at the same school. Once in awhile we would see her sister in line or on the playground, though they would not acknowledge each other.

One time during the semester, she took extra days off to visit her mother who lives 5 hours away, but when I asked her about it all she said was, "It was fun."

Classmates: Julia was a child who enjoyed playing with others, boys and girls alike, in small or large groups, but she also enjoyed playing by herself. She would ask others to play when she wished, play with others when asked, or politely refuse if she wanted to play alone. She easily got along with others in all situations.

Me: My relationship was close with Julia from the beginning, and because she was so easy to relate to and laughed so much and so easily, she is the second child I chose to write about further in Chapter 6

KARLA

Age: 6 years, 2 months



Figure 12. Karla's self-portrait

How she describes herself:

Caring
Chubby
Gay
Girl
Intelligent
Nice
Sensitive

Interests:

Chess club
Coloring and drawing
Dancing
Dressing up
Family
Listening to country music
Painting
Singing

Physical Appearance:

Karla has shoulder-length blond hair the color of the endless fluttering cornfields that dominate the landscape of the vast Midwest, and her blue eyes are the color of the ocean when looking through a glass-bottom boat where you can see the dancing life underneath. She was always well-dressed, usually in skirts, dresses and tights, though she occasionally wore pants or jeans. She is heavy though active, and was one of the first to run and climb on the playground when the weather permitted. She has freckles on her nose and under her cheekbones with a pale complexion and reddish cheeks. Aaron always told her he knew when she was kidding or joking because of her enormous grin.

Personality:

Karla really needs no introduction, as if she were here she would give you her own. She was never shy, and always assertive and ready to give a response or opinion even if she did not know the answer; some would call her a know-it-all. She was extremely confident and secure with herself and her position in the kindergarten classroom. She was always the first to tell you right from wrong, and possibly her morality had come into play earlier than the other children because of an older sibling. She was also highly emotional and easily saddened when things did not go her way and would whine or cry frequently when she was upset or mad. She is also loving, empathetic, sensitive, and observant, much more so than most of her classmates, and the evidence of her sensitivity came when we were at the Science Museum and watching a movie on the life of bugs. At the end of the movie most of the children were cheering when the grasshopper ate the butterfly, but when I looked over at her I saw her crying. She gazed at me with rolling tears and said, "I just wish the butterfly didn't have to die." Her sensitivity and empathy definitely helped to teach others about love, fairness, and truth.

Primary Relationships:

Family: Her status as the one who knows in the classroom most likely comes from her upbringing in a upper-middle class household with supportive parents. Her parents were minimally present at school, occasionally coming to eat lunch with Karla, but she talked about them often, and once she cried for 2 hours because her dad had come to say goodbye before he went on a business trip. Her older brother was at the same school in 4th grade, though she rarely came into contact with him.

Classmates: Karla was a key player in the class, and was often the child who kept conversations intact and persevering. She was friendly and motherly to all of the children, but she did not complain when others mothered her back. She most commonly played with Lindy and Abigail, though was often seen playing with all of the girls. She also enjoyed engaging in running games with the boys.

Me: Karla and I also had a positive relationship though she used me secondary to Aaron, only coming to me when he had told her no. Perhaps it is her self-confidence and secure home life that made us less interested in each other, and I always felt that she did not need my attention as much as some of the other children. Occasionally she wanted to sit in my lap to cuddle, but often she saw me as the adult who could rectify some sort of injustice that had occurred.

LINDY

Age: 6 years, 4 months

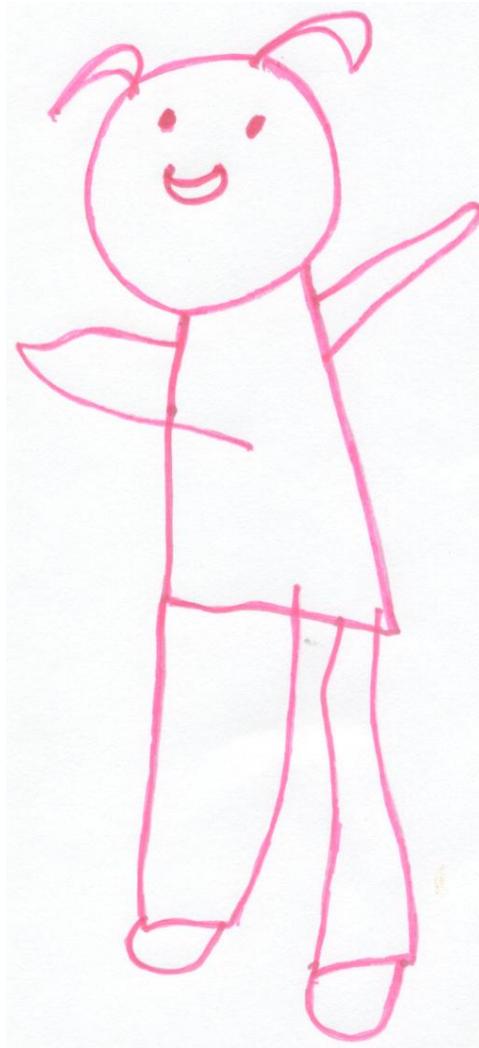


Figure 13. Lindy's self-portrait

How she describes herself:

Beautiful
Blonde hair
Blue eyes
Crazy bad
Funny
I can't pay attention
Loony
Skinny
Squalling
Tiny

Interests

Being a girl
Being with her mom
Books with girls and princesses
Doing makeup and hair
Drawing and painting
Going to her dad's house
Playing princesses
Pretending she is the teacher
Sleepovers

Physical Appearance:

Lindy has blonde, shoulder-length hair with bangs that are parted on the side and fall into her blue eyes when she is not wearing one of her prized headbands. She was quite petite, though older than most of the others and she had already lost her front four teeth that were growing in all directions. She is stunningly beautiful and her facial expressions and body stance were often serious and grown up, and the way she would roll and assume her crossed-arm stance reminded me of a defiant teenager who will not succumb. She was usually dressed in jeans and T-shirts of different designs, though she really only liked to wear what she called, “girl colors.” She focused on her hairstyle and its adornments constantly as well as her shoelaces, usually fiddling, worrying, or complaining about them numerous times a day.

Personality:

Lindy is as sassy as a young child could possibly be, and her tone of voice reminds me of being yelled at by a fuming parent. She is demanding, defiant, devious, grumpy, independent yet needy, moody, fiery, and horribly difficult. However, she is also playful, loving, observant, intelligent, and *extremely* funny with a keen sense of humor. She is expert at being in kindergarten since this is her second year, and I immediately knew that if any child would be manipulative she would win the grand prize, and she did. She acts like a queen, wants others to treat her like a queen, in fact, I think she really believes she is a queen. She wants special privileges, and when she is denied, she cries or pouts until she realizes she will not get her way.

Primary Relationships:

Family: Lindy had a very close relationship with her mother, talked about her often, and her mom was almost always present for class trips. Her mother dropped her off in the morning and picked her up a little early in the afternoon and she was one of the few parents I spoke with weekly. Her mom was always open about her life as well as things going on with Lindy. Her dad lived closed by and she would often spend weekends at his house.

Classmates: Lindy always chose the girls as her primary playmates, especially Karla and Abigail, though she would let some of the quieter boys like Don Jeffrey and Isaac join as long as she could remain in charge. Essentially, Lindy enjoyed playing with anyone who she could order around, and so was most often seen with the most passive children available at the time.

Me: Lindy and I had an excellent yet frustrating, interesting yet volatile relationship. I chose Lindy as one of the children to write a short case study about in Chapter 6 because she is an example of how laughter and humor can be used with a difficult, yet intelligent and humorous child.

PATRICK

Age: 5 years, 10 months



Figure 14. Patrick's self-portrait

How he describes himself:

Funny
Good reader
Good writer
"I am Han Solo" (Star Wars)
Light saber expert
Secret spy
Silly
Smart
Spiky hair

Interests:

Drawing
Funny stuff and playing jokes
Going to art
PE and recess
Playing superheroes
Reading
Spaceships
Star Wars
Transformers

Physical Appearance:

Patrick is a boy with short, blondish-brown hair the color of a ripening banana and green eyes the color of new growth after a frigid winter. He has the slyest smile I have ever seen, like the clichéd Alice in Wonderland broad-faced Cheshire Cat who would disappear and leave only a gargantuan toothy smile. His eyes were always thinking and plotting about what would come next. Patrick is tall and thin and usually clad in pants, T-shirts, and sneakers. He is healthy and extremely active, usually appearing at school with scrapes and bumps from playing the endless Star Wars daredevil.

Personality:

Patrick can be deemed the class clown of kindergarten, and I suspect that as long as his lightheartedness continues this will persist throughout his schooling experience. Mostly he engaged in slapstick silly types of joking, as is characteristic of kindergartners, but it was always constant. Because he was the only child in the class who had already learned to read, he was becoming adept at jokes and wordplay, even though many of the other children did not often get his jokes. He is extremely intelligent and perceptive and always had much commentary to add on EVERYTHING, and his comments are always insightful and matter-of-fact. Patrick is one child who would rarely take anyone seriously, even when a stern voice suggested it, and would often concoct white lies to manipulate others. One day he had pink eye, but came back from the nurse told a story saying it was OK, he can stay because he had already gone to the doctor and it was only his allergies, but soon enough the nurse came looking for him. He is free-spirited, independent, happy, open for anything, and *always* adventurous.

Primary Relationships:

Family: Patrick was another child whose family was never present in kindergarten, though he spent time with his mother and stepfather, father and stepmother. When a new half sister was born he did not share the information with the class because there was not much to tell, as all she did was cry and eat.

Classmates: Patrick would also play with anyone who was interested in playing what he wanted, which was usually Star Wars. He was the one boy who made special attempts to play with a couple of the girls, mainly Sabrina, and often they were a pair in most activities throughout the day even though Patrick was the one who initiated their interactions.

Me: The way in which Patrick and I interacted became quite different over time. Because his sense of humor was so endowed I began my relationship with him as a constantly joking one, however, because he ALWAYS wanted to joke, he had a hard time distinguishing the times when I was not joking. Just as soon I had to become more reserved in order to communicate with him, which was quite difficult after always being playful. In fact, I was never fully successful, and overall he was the one child most independent of everyone else.

SABRINA

Age: 5 years, 9 months



Figure 15. Sabrina's self-portrait

How she describes herself:

Friendly
Kid
Long Hair
Nice
Pretty
Tall

Interests:

Barbie
Bratz
Doing her nails
Dressing up
Girl things
Her boyfriends on the bus
High heels
Playing with her dog and hamsters
Putting on makeup

Physical Appearance:

Sabrina has waist-long light brown hair and eyes, and her multiple hairdos of ponytails, newfangled braids, and barrettes always suggested to me that there was someone meticulously caring for her every morning before she went to school. She is tall, lanky, and beautiful, looking much older than she is, as evidenced by high-heeled brown boots and occasional adult-style clothing. When she would laugh she would show her mouthful of silver fillings on her remaining baby teeth next to the permanent ones that were poking through.

Personality:

Sabrina is hard to describe, as she is the one child whom my impressions changed the most from my initial thoughts. At first I felt Sabrina was the most serious girl though this was incorrect, especially as she became the one female who interacted in the silliest way with the boys. She is self-assured and confident and I never saw her cry, complain, whimper, or really be bothered by anything at all. She was the one girl who had a different boyfriend every week and she always seemed to know that there would be someone to give her undivided attention. Sabrina is greatly loving, nurturing, independent, and easily adaptable to varying social groups. She is collaborative and acquiescent, seemingly just happy to be in kindergarten with her friends.

Primary Relationships:

Family: Sabrina did not speak of her family often, though when she did it was about something silly or funny that her mom, dad, brother, or “dog son” had done. They never were seen in the classroom but her grandfather, “Pawpaw,” drove the school bus that she rode on each day. She would often get excited waiting to see if he would be driving our bus when we went on fieldtrips.

Classmates: Sabrina was a child in the classroom that seemed to be liked by everyone, though she was usually not the one to initiate interactions with the others. Someone was always asking her to play something she was interested in, and therefore did not need to make attempts to interact as much as the other children.

Me: She was the one child with whom I interacted with less and less over the semester, and though she initially came across as one that was most interested in my presence, she was the girl who initiated the least amount of interaction with me. When we did spend time together we always had fun, and would call me, “My Sarah.” Occasionally she would come to sit on my lap, but most of the time she was more interested in the other children and the happenings of the classroom.

SARAH

Age: 30 years, 10 months



Figure 16. Julia's portrait of Sarah

How I Describe Myself:

Emotional
Nurturing
Open-minded
Passionate
Practical
Silly

Interests:

Cats and dogs
Children and early childhood education
Collecting lawn ornaments
Cooking
Hiking and camping
Playing darts
Reading
Seinfeld

Before I could draw a picture of myself, Julia drew a picture of me that made me realize that my research was more than about finding answers; it was about enjoying and learning from these magnificent children. I could not draw anything comparable. I was sitting next to Julia when she was drawing, when she looked at me with her ever-soulful eyes and handed me her picture.

Sarah: "What did you draw?"

Julia, "It is a picture of you."

Sarah: I studied it intensely and said, "What am I wearing?"

Julia: "Cowgirl boots. I like it when you wear your cowgirl boots."

Sarah: What are the green shapes beside me?

Julia: "They are watermelons in your garden. I think you would like to grow things."

Sarah: "What is on the end of my fingers?"

Julia: "You have painted toenails but you have boots, so I painted your fingernails."

Sarah: "Why are my hands so big?"

Julia: "Because you love us a lot and hug us a lot."

Physical Appearance:

I cannot describe myself with the zest that I do the children, because I do not see myself in the spectacular light that I do them. My appearance is mostly nondescript, though hopefully those who love me would contest. I am of average height and build, 5'4" and 125 pounds on a good day when I am not slouching or eating too much. I have long straight brown hair that I usually cover with a bandana so I don't have to fuss with it. I have brown eyes surrounded by dark circles from my life of insomnia that I still refuse to cover with makeup, though my glasses work just the same. I dress in whatever I think will be the most comfortable, and it rarely matches.

Personality:

I am a child of a middle-class upbringing, born in Denver, though I lived most of my life in Ft. Lauderdale. My adolescent and adult existence has been one that is filled with disharmony, broken relationships, a divorce, a fight with alcohol, the reidentification of self that comes with acknowledging these limitations and struggles; a reevaluation of who I am and want to be; this cannot be separated from my research or personality...these things have made me the person I am. I am moody, yet passionate about the things I love, and I cry and laugh easily at everything and nothing. I am still coming to figure out what being an adult means, and I question daily how I can shape my life to live the way that will make me happiest. I desire simple, practical existence and want as few possessions as necessary. I am inherently introverted and reclusive and despise being the center of attention. I talk to my cats and dogs more than people, but I am an attentive nurturer and friend to those who can get past my fickle emotions and understand me. I am open-minded, flexible, liberal, and logical in my thinking with keen common sense, yet I am horribly disorganized. I know that whatever I do in my life, I need to work with children to be happiest, as this is when the most positive aspects of my personality surface.

Primary Relationships:

I will discuss my relationships with my participants throughout the rest of this paper.

CHAPTER FIVE

Setting

In Appalachia: Southwestern Virginia

During my third week in kindergarten, Aaron was doing a lesson on the senses while prompting the children to make books about their answers. There were 5 children in a group sitting around the table. Aaron called on Jeremy and asked him what his favorite thing was to taste, and quite contrary to the ice cream, candy, pizza, and cookie answers of the other 4 children, Jeremy shouted, “DEER MEAT!!!!” Three of the 5 children, all boys, roared until they gasped, while slapping each other on the back. They were unable to completely stop laughing for the next 5 minutes until the activity was over, and for the rest of the week these 3 boys kept shouting and laughing at each other, “DEER MEAT!!! DEER MEAT!!!”

This scenario was funny and meaningful for many, many reasons, but the most important for me, was that it made me conscious that Jeremy’s answer was an excellent example of the differing ways of thinking and experiencing for some of these children I was spending time with. Through humor and laughter, Jeremy was perfectly expressing a tenet of his culture. I embarrassingly remembered my first impression of the “country” accent when I moved here 7 years ago, and have since seen that the image of Appalachian people as poor, backward, “hillbillies” still predominates many people’s thinking. It made me see I needed to learn more about Appalachian culture and people, to always be aware of how the presence of this different culture might influence my study.

Appalachian Characteristics Common to Cartwright Elementary

Most challenging to describing the characteristics of this region is that the elementary school where I did my research is 7 miles from a major university, thus influencing how much of a general description of Appalachia could be specifically applied. When speaking with Dr. E. Satterwhite, Assistant Professor of Appalachian Studies at Virginia Tech (personal communication, February, 16, 2006), she corroborated my dilemma that no description could be applicable to every area in the Appalachian region, and to decide which ones could be best applied to the school and area where my study took place.

Geographically, the Appalachian Mountain Chain extends from Alabama to Canada, but in defining the borders of this region, the definitive boundaries vary based on whether cultural, economic, or historical criteria are also incorporated (Keefe, 2005). Williams (2002) feels there is a core Appalachian region of 6 states that fit the majority of criteria, including Georgia, North Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, Tennessee, and Kentucky. When I began to find out more about the children's lives, I discovered that several of them had experiences that were quite different from most of the children I had previously interacted with in my life. For example, a few of the children's parents hunted, fished, or raised livestock for their meat, also known as forest farming, and made it a family event (Williams, 2002). Two children expressed being around guns in their houses, and one child talked about his experience shooting a gun with his father. Also unique was that many of the children's family dynamics were not representative of the traditional modern family. The majority lived close to their extended families, with 2 of them living with at least

one parent and a grandparent, thus supporting the traditional Appalachian values of a strong sense of place and family with little, if any, migration from the place of birth (Williams, 2002).

It is hard to say exactly how learning more about Appalachian culture affected individual components of my study, though I do know that thinking about my biases and finding more information about the region helped me learn not to perceive one culture as superior over another, but to learn to view varying cultures as different ways of thinking (Keefe, 2005). For example, I had to put my own feelings about children and guns aside and appreciate that for many families guns are part of a way of everyday life, and children are taught to use them from an early age.

Cartwright Elementary School

Cartwright Elementary is a small, rural school in Appalachian Southwestern Virginia, serving only 210 students in grades pre-kindergarten to fifth. There are 18 full time teachers, many who have known each other for almost a decade. The building is nondescript and easy to ignore when driving past, and though I had been by it at least two dozen times in the years before, I could not picture it on my way there. The classrooms buzz beneath a one story, red brick, L-shaped exterior, with large, multi-paned windows symmetrically spaced along the front. Though unremarkable, you know it cannot be anything but a school. A small flagpole in front waves it red, white, and blue, and a billboard lets parents know report cards are coming home next week. It is surrounded to the left by a pasture that houses several amiable horses, and a large field encompasses a playground and track to the back.

Most of the nearby houses are not clustered neighborhoods built all at once, but older and newer houses and mobile homes of different sizes sit spaced along roadkill-dotted, winding roads. In sight is a gas station/market combo that is the daily morning meeting place for 5 or 6 of the local men to gather outside for their coffee, showing the area's small, yet established community. Flowers and bushes unknown to my classification dot the landscape and exterior, giving one the impression that Cartwright Elementary is an ordinary but well-loved place, though in my opinion there is nothing ordinary about it.

My first day of research in Aaron Silver's classroom starts. I arrive at 8:25 and pull up in the parking lot feeling like it is my first day of kindergarten twenty-five years ago. Will the kids like me? What will the teacher be like? Will I fit in? How will the day go? What will be for lunch? These were the very same questions I used to have as a child, and the kindergarten memories I have creep up and flash through my head like a flickering movie, though I do not have many. I sit in my car for a few minutes making sure I have everything, checking several times while trying to get in the final bit of caffeine that I am sure will be my last for the rest of the day.

I follow the signs on the outside of each door that warn the visitor to check in at the office. The school is smaller than I thought it would be, and there is not a grand sign that says, "OFFICE." Was the office at my elementary schools really bigger or was I only smaller? I turn the first corner and find it and tentatively walk in, introduce myself, and am told I can go down to the classroom at the end of the hallway to find Aaron. I peek into the cafeteria, which doubles as a gym, and then I walk down the hallway that I will walk up and down at least another thousand times

over the next few months. I notice the glaring fluorescent lights, the chatter of 2 teachers in the hallway, a bus full of tiny bodies with oversized backpacks pulling up outside, and the shiny, gleaming floor that only appears to be slippery.

Aaron Silver's Classroom

All it took was walking into Aaron Silver's classroom to know that I was in the right place, both physically and mentally. I had not yet met him, though it would be hard to mistake the mostly gray, 50+ man with his hair pulled back in a ponytail and sitting in a child-sized chair as anyone but the kindergarten teacher. I introduced myself and when he told me to make myself at home, I knew that I was already there and warming myself by the fire. He shook my hand and seemed aloof, though now I know this perceived aloofness is only his experience in dealing with any number of teachers, people and researchers in his room over the past 30 years. We talked briefly about my project, and he told me to let him know if I needed anything. I had everything I needed; I was back in kindergarten.

I walked around looking at the octagonal-shaped room, noticing the high ceilings with exposed beams. A series of 4 to 5 foot high shelves run 2/3's through the middle of the classroom, creating a faux-wall and two independent classrooms, yet they are still open at the front. In the mornings the children could play on either side, but despite this freedom, most stayed with their particular class and classmates.

After glancing at the overall structure of the classroom, I was stunned because there were not rows of desks in front of a chalkboard with little space for moving about. There were 5 hexagonal shaped tables put together in the shape of 5/6's of a

hexagon, with tiny chairs lining the inside and out. The tables are towards the back of the classroom with expansive space all around. There is a row of cubbies in the back that are stuffed with old papers and coats, crayons and other kindergarten supplies. A fake Christmas tree with no ornaments stands between the two rooms, seemingly misplaced. I felt moderately overwhelmed by all of the colors and toys and books that were crowding the shelves, and then I remembered what it was like trying to keep a classroom organized. For a brief look at the philosophies of Cartwright Elementary and Aaron's classroom, refer to Appendix B.

A Typical Day in Kindergarten

If a person has not been in kindergarten in 25 years, as I had not, there is no way to accurately guess what it will be like. Even though Aaron gave me a schedule of the weekly happenings and I almost got the routine down after 5 months, little that happened within the day was ever completely routine, and many components of the routine varied slightly each day. Here is a general picture of the daily schedule in Aaron's kindergarten classroom to help the reader better grasp what this particular classroom was like. Important to note is that when I started my research it was already the second semester, and therefore the children already knew their schedules and what would occur throughout the day, so they were always helpful in letting me know how the day would unfold.

In general, the day's events happened like this:

8:30 to 9:00- Children arrive

The children come in, backpacks get hung up, folders and toys get taken out, and the children play until the bell rings.

9:00 to 9:20- Lunch count, Attendance, Pledge/announcements, Show and tell

The children sign up for what they want for lunch, attendance is taken, the Pledge and announcements come on, and the children have show and tell.

9:20 to 10:00- Free centers, Language arts, Social studies, or Science

Depending on the day, either free centers or academic lessons would happen. During free centers the children could play with what they wanted, and during academic centers they would participate in 2 of the 3 language arts, social studies, or science centers being led by Aaron and the other kindergarten teacher.

10:00 to 10:10- Cleanup and Bathroom

Children would put toys away and walk as a group to the boys and girls bathrooms.

10:10 to 11:10- PE, Art, Music, and Snack

Depending on the day, the children would go to PE, Art, or Music, which was preceded or succeeded by a 20-minute snack.

11:10 to 11:30- Language arts guided reading

A book of the week would be read and given to the children, and they would engage in activities related to the book.

11:30 to 11:45- Math

The children would do counting or sorting activities.

11:45 to 12:15- Outside or Circle

Weather permitting, the children would go outside, have free play inside, or have something unique like career day.

12:15 to 12:30- Cleanup and Bathroom

Children would put toys away and walk as a group to the boys and girls bathrooms.

12:30 to 1:00- Lunch

Everyone would go to the cafeteria for lunch.

1:00 to 1:10- Bathroom

All would leave the cafeteria together as a group and go to the boys and girls bathroom before heading back to class.

1:10 to 2:00- Rest, Computer, Reading groups

All children would do these three things almost every day, though they were split into 3 different groups and hence separated, which caused different combinations of children to be present in the classroom at varying times.

2:00 to 2:30- Music with Aaron or Story

Three times a week Aaron would play guitar and sing songs with both kindergarten classes and a Pre-K class, and twice a week the other kindergarten teacher would read a story to both kindergarten classes.

2:30 to 2:45- Pack up

The children get their backpacks and coats and they pack away any papers that need to go home.

2:45 to 3:30- Outside or Circle activities

Most children go outside to play on the equipment and run, some choose something quiet inside like reading or drawing, and a few do something quiet outside like hangout on the steps to the classroom door or play in the sandbox.

3:30- Go home

Children who ride the bus wait for their bus number to be called, and those who go home or to after school care at day care centers wait for their ride.

CHAPTER SIX

Isaac, Julia, and Lindy: Three Case Study Portraits



When attempting to describe humor in the context of the classroom, the first thing that was evident was how individual children interacted with me differently. Some were interested in being around me when I had time, a few demanded my time when I did not have it, and a couple paid little attention to me at all. After further analysis, I realized that each child's varying way of interacting with me had much to do with different key issues or emotional needs that they needed fulfilled in order for laughter to occur.

Following are three short case study portraits of Isaac, Julia, and Lindy, three incredibly diverse children who had different ways of relating to me and others, with or without laughter. Isaac was of interest because he was a reserved child who appeared not to have strong ties to anyone, and I only heard him laugh 2 times. With him, I had to redefine the way I usually interacted with children, especially when using laughter or humor. Julia was a child who I had a secure relationship with from the beginning, had numerous positive interactions with others, and I chose her because she was exceptionally easy to get along with and represented laughter in the classroom to the fullest. I chose Lindy since she was the laughing, yet horribly difficult child who required a lot of attention and patience, though a thoughtful

approach to the use of laughter was successful in decreasing her difficult behavior while making our relationship more positive.

Isaac



Key Issues: Trust and Security

How does a researcher describe the child who rarely laughs or smiles? This is Isaac, one of the children I came to adore the most, and I wondered why he was the subject of my thoughts when I was not at kindergarten. I suppose as my study was on laughter and I find it so essential to happiness, I felt he was one of the most enigmatic, as I only saw him laugh two times. I wanted to understand more about why he did not laugh, what things might make him laugh, and see how I could hopefully help him develop this important trait.

Two weeks after I began my research, I was dumbfounded at the boy who still did not talk to me or participate, and began to closely watch Isaac's interactions with others and his environment to try to and discover the best way to reach him. I found that he was almost never the initiator of any type of interaction with others, and was extremely hesitant and passive in his school environment. For example, one day Isaac accidentally got skipped when cookies were handed out at snack time, though he did not let anyone know. I was amazed he could have sat so patiently with his hands in his lap waiting for someone to notice, especially because I knew he did not eat breakfast, and when he got his cookies it was obvious he had been quite hungry.

Isaac avoided any activity where he could possibly be the center of attention or fail, such as when Sensei Daniel came to teach the children karate, and Isaac stood watching intently with his arms by his sides for 30 minutes. I also NEVER heard him sing or move his mouth to words during music and finally one day he told me, “I do not know how to sing.” After watching him closer, I saw that sometimes he would participate when there was a more chaotic or familiar environment and he knew he was not being watched as much by others, such as when the entire class was running around on the playground. Several times he caught me watching him and immediately stopped what he was doing, so I had to learn to be more discreet. He was always encouraged by all of the teachers, and he was never forced to do things he was not comfortable with or punished for not participating, which seemed to work well by taking the pressure off of him.

Because Isaac’s level of participation was so minimal, I found the slightest interaction to be monumental. For example, even though Show and Tell was something that happened each day, Isaac only brought something from home two times throughout the semester, and both times he held the item up for everyone to see but did not want to say anything about what he had brought. I began to feel like a lot of Isaac’s hesitation and passivity came from less life experience, less positive reinforcement and attention, and less ideal home circumstances than most of the others. During one of my first attempts to play with Isaac, he was standing near the sandbox watching others. I asked him if he would like to build a sandcastle with me, he nodded yes without looking at me, and sat down with his hands folded in his lap, seemingly lost. I inquired, “Have you built a sandcastle before?” He wagged his

head no, so I started making one and talking about what I was doing so he could watch. After focusing intently, he picked up a shovel and began copying everything I was doing, move for move.

I knew I needed a different way of interacting with Isaac, but was perplexed how to do it. Because I am affectionate and playful with the children, and children usually open up to me easily and immediately, I had a different challenge with Isaac who did not respond to my overzealous attempts to engage in conversation and play. I could not walk up to him and tickle him, put my hand on his shoulder, make silly faces at him, or tousle his hair like I did the others, as I had already discovered that too much attention made him withdraw. I wondered how I could give him self-confidence building attention without making him feel insecure or self-conscious.

The Day He Talked

Since Isaac was a child who had more difficulty getting his basic needs met at home, this became integral at school, and he seemed unable to participate or open up in any situation that was too new, different, or could result in failure, essentially any situation where he felt insecure or had a lack of trust. I soon discovered that even though Isaac was not an active participant in his environment, he was an extremely active observer. One day at rest time I had lost my favorite pen and looked for it for 10 minutes before giving up. There were only 3 of us in the room and I sat down frustrated, looked at Isaac and said, "I lost my favorite pen again." It became obvious just how perceptive he was when he pointed to the shelf where I had set it down 2 hours ago, and then nonchalantly went back to looking at his book. Because I knew he was always paying close attention to others, I decided to attempt to interact with

him using parallel play and the things he seemed to love the most, while waiting for him to be comfortable enough to initiate discussion or interest about what I was doing.

I soon learned that the way to connect with Isaac was through reading and drawing, as these were the activities he always did by himself at rest time or at the end of the day. For several hours over the next two weeks, I sat close to him with books or paper and read aloud or talked about my drawings, without letting him know I was paying attention to him. Finally, one day I was talking to myself about the planets I was drawing, and pretended I was bothered because I had not left enough room for the sun. He got up from the table, chose a book on outer space from the bookshelf, came and sat back down, looked at me with his wide-brown eyes and said in his little voice that clearly annunciated every word, "I want to draw the planets." I asked if he wanted to use my crayons, and he bounded up to grab his crayon box and pencils out of his cubby, and he spent the next 10 minutes showing me the array of colors. We drew together for the next 20 minutes, and he told me where the sun and all of the planets should go. From that day on, almost 4 weeks into the semester, Isaac always asked me if we could draw.

The Day He Smiled

The next week Isaac and I were reading a Mary Had a Little Lamb book that had things hidden behind doors. He covered up one of the doors and asked me, "What do you think is behind here?" I would say, "A dinosaur. A hamburger. A monster," and each time he kept replying, "Nope. Nope. Nope," while waiting for me to give up so he could open the flap and disclose its secret. I pretended to be

exasperated because I could not guess the right answers, and by the 3rd page he looked at me with a huge grin and said, “Guess what is under here?” It was the first time I had seen his teeth. During rest time, we read the book and played the same game for another 30 minutes and he never tired of it, smiling every time he got to show me what was really behind a door. When he smiled, I thought his single smile to be worth 10 laughs in the average child. Perhaps he smiled because he got to be the one who could confidently give me the answers when I pretended to be wrong, or maybe he was finally comfortable and happy receiving attention. Either way, after this interaction, I saw his teeth almost every day.

The Day He Laughed

One week later, I heard Isaac laugh for the first time. He was waiting for his ride at the end of the day, and he and two other unfamiliar children began running around the classroom. The two older boys began chasing Isaac, and when they did he began running, laughing, and screaming with joy. I was stumped as to whether I should let this go on because he was actually laughing, or put an end to it because running in the classroom was against the rules. The three boys started walloping each other with their backpacks, and I knew I needed to end it before someone got hurt. I caught him and asked if he was ready to go home and he dutifully followed but glanced at me and stated, “But I want to play.” I told him we could play tomorrow and he agreeably said, “All right.”

I wondered what it was about this specific interaction that propelled him to laugh, and I deduced that it was a combination of being mostly free from the adult’s watchful eye, having less people around overall, and being in a playful, non-pressured

situation that was solely based on fun. It is also possible that he felt more able to be himself with children he did not know, did not know him, and gave him no pressure to participate.

Isaac's level of interaction and self-confidence grew considerably over the semester, with teachers as well as other children. Once I interacted with him in an undemanding way with little pressure to perform, he felt comfortable and secure, began to trust me, and exposed me to a very perceptive and intelligent child. The way he spoke to me when we read books changed dramatically, as initially he would only speak concretely about what was occurring on the pages such as, "The dog is putting the baby in the tub. The dog is eating the bread." At first, when I began to ask him questions about things he was drawing or reading, for two solid months he responded, "I don't know." He always answered so quickly that it was obvious he had not thought about it, assumed that he did not know the answer, or he knew and was fearful to answer. After time, he began answering my questions when I would pretend I did not know things, and he started to inquire about things in his books, often incessantly. It seemed as though he was trying to get a lifetime's worth of questions answered in one day.

By the middle of the semester, it became obvious that Isaac was seeking positive feedback, attention, and approval when he was engaging, especially those tasks that took physical skill like throwing and catching a ball. Frequently I would feel a tap on my shoulder or hear his voice in the background declare, "Hey, look at this! Hey, look at what I can do! Hey, look at what I built! Hey, look at what I have!" He also became more affectionate and comfortable interacting with me and

others, and by the end of the semester he would occasionally hold a hand in line, sit on my lap to read, tell me he wanted to sit by someone at lunch or music, or ask others if they wanted to play a game.

Isaac is an example of how my usual attempts to engage a child with playful joking or laughter was not initially successful, and a non-intrusive approach had to be used in order to help him develop what I found to be the prerequisite skills for laughter and humor; a sense of trust and security. Once some of his basic needs were met, he was better able to show his personality and engage more playfully. Though I only personally heard Isaac laugh one more time that semester, he became more interactive, more playful, and he smiled often.

Julia



Key Issue: Companionship

Julia is the easy one, and by easy I mean she was always effortless to get along in every situation throughout the day. She was also simple to make laugh, and she made others laugh just as easily. At first meeting, I felt that Julia and I had a unique relationship, and though the process of coming to know another is certainly challenging, we were immediate companions. I wondered what it was about her that made me immediately drawn to her, especially wondering how Aaron managed to have equal relationships with everyone. On the first day of the semester, I saw Julia

glimpsing at me questioningly, glancing at me as an outsider who she wanted to find out more about. Tilting her head sideways to look at me, bending over in her chair while peeking at me through her hair, showing me her playful and shy smile without exposing her teeth, glancing away when she sees me making eye contact with her. She would hold my gaze a few seconds longer each time until she caught me staring at her with my eyes wide, she grinned at me widely, exploded with laughter, and pulled her chair up next to mine, all without words. And there she sat next to me for the rest of the year when there was room.

Julia is a child who loves giving and receiving attention, though she is not demanding, never fought for my affection over the other children, or complained when I spent time with others. She seemed to know and respect me immediately, and though she always came to me for a hand to hold, a lap to snuggle on, or an ear to relentlessly tattle and gossip in, she also listened to me like a teacher and rarely had difficulty with my multiple roles in the classroom. When I spent time with her she was always genuinely happy just to be spending time together and having fun. Soon I felt that even though she is a child, her personality was quite similar to my adult personality, and this allowed us to be ourselves with each other in an easy and comfortable way. We had an immediate intersubjective understanding.

In contrast to Isaac, Julia was secure in the classroom, self-confident, independent, and willing to embrace anything new or exciting, even if she made mistakes while doing it. She had positive and interactive relationships with the other children and Aaron, and it appeared she trusted others easily and immediately. Because her basic needs of trust and security were fulfilled and she seemed to have an

inherent easygoing personality, mere companionship was Julia's only prerequisite to accepting and using both laughter and humor, which were natural and effortless for her.

Jokes and Rhymes

I knew Julia laughed easily and she knew I laughed easily, and so much of how we interacted and how she related with others had an element of playful laughter and humor. Following are a few of the jokes, rhymes, and games that she used to initiate or sustain interactions with others and make them laugh, which was usually victorious.

Pop Culture-Literally

Julia walked up to Addie and me and said, "Do you want to hear my rhyme?" Though the rhyme was not necessarily funny in itself, the animated way in which she told it made us laugh, and when I had her repeat it over and over again more slowly so I could write it down, she became giddier each time. The first time I asked her to repeat her rhyme slowly she laughed, rolled her eyes and said, "I remembered it the first time." The fact that she recalled it as a child, and I could not grasp it as an adult made her laugh. In fact, a lot of laughter between us stemmed from the many things she knew and had to teach me, giving her a sense of a more equal relationship than usually occurs between teacher and child. Here is her rhyme:

"Coca Cola went to town
Me and Red shot him down
Dr. Pepper fixed him up
And now we're drinking 7up

7up rolled down the mountain
Now we're drinking from a fountain
Fountain broke
No more coke
Crispy Creamy
No caffeiney
YEAHHHHHH!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

April Fools

Because Julia was becoming so fond of jokes and tricks, and April was on the way, I decided to ask her about April Fools Day. I queried, "Do you know what April Fools Day is?" Julia looked at me, laughed and retorted, "Your shoe is untied!" I immediately looked at my shoe and then realized that I was wearing my cowgirl boots. Without answering my question, she demonstrated the knowledge of April Fools Day and the joke by playing a joke on me. This became a lasting gag for the rest of the semester because after she tricked me once, I fell for her untied shoe gag one more time that day, and fell for the, "You have something on your shirt," gag once, whereby she would flick my nose when I looked down...just like my dad used to do when I was little. The last time she got me that day was with the, "Your zipper is down," gag after which she would poke my stomach when I looked down. She was thrilled that she had really tricked me. For children, this duping of the adult seemed to be extremely important, as most children look up to adults and enjoy it when they have bamboozled the smarter adult who is usually the fooler and not the foolee.

Pull My Finger

Body humor is not just for boys, even though it is definitely more common in a group of boys than girls, and I think one of the reasons I got along with Julia so well was that we are both highly fond of it. One day at lunchtime, Julia started to laugh with no provocation, and we ended up in a game of pull my finger, another game my father tortured me with as a child.

Julia: “Pull my finger.”

Sarah: I start to laugh wondering if she understood what this means. I start to approach her finger with my hand and then pull it away and say,
“Nooooooooooooo waaaayyyyy.”

Julia: She throws her head back excitedly, shrieks with laughter and says,
“Come on, DO IT!!”

Sarah: I reach across the table and pull her finger and she opens her mouth pretending to burp. I say, “What are you supposed to do when I pull your finger?”

Julia: She covers her mouth, laughs riotously, and screams, “You poot.”

I laughed because I think farting and word poot are funny, and I think Julia was pleased that I think farting is funny and was willing to pull her finger. The game continued for the remainder of lunch with Julia manufacturing a variety of fake burping and farting noises. Once she burped for real, which made her laugh even harder, and then she exclaimed, “EXCUUUUUSSEEEEE MEEEE!”

The Moon is Your Pants

The children had been learning about the solar system and on this day, we were in a group listening to a book about the moon. Julia was sitting on my lap when she looked back at me and started giggling, but when I asked her why she was laughing she whispered, “I’ll tell you later.” For two minutes she couldn’t stop chuckling and obviously could not wait any longer to tell me. She turned and cupped her hand over my ear and after three attempts I discerned what she was saying.

Julia: “The moon is your pants.”

Sarah: “What do you mean?”

Julia: “A moon is your butt.”

Sarah: “WHAT????”

Julia: “A moon is when you pull down your pants and show your butt.”

I had to do everything I could not to die laughing because I did not want to disrupt the group. This scenario is an excellent example of a child learning the correct and incorrect times to use humor and laughter. Julia knew she had something hilarious to tell, but initially tried to keep it to herself because she knew it was group time and she was supposed to be listening. Even though she could not restrain herself, she was aware that it was not the ideal moment, because when she could not control it any longer, she told me with a whisper.

Beep, Beep

It is before morning group and Julia is being her silly, playful self. She had been sitting on the floor playing with blocks of all shapes and colors when she comes to me holding two yellow triangular ones. She arranges them in multiple ways and

finally forms them into what looks like a beak, placing them against her nose. “Beep, beep. Beep, beep,” she screams while flapping around like a bird with the flu. I pretend to be afraid. She howls and then looks at me and says, “I am going to peck your head like worms.” She pecks me on the head with her blocks while pretending my hair is worms, and I fall on the floor covering my head, which instigates a happy screech. This went on for 5 minutes until morning group started when she sat in my lap on the floor. She hid her blocks under my leg, but every time she had a chance she took them out from their hiding place, made them into a beak again, and continued pecking me, though in a more discreet manner since it was now group time. She whispered, “Beep, beep. Beep, beep.”

Julia is a child whose ability to laugh at herself and others assists her success in the classroom, especially in getting along with teachers and children. Not only does she use laughter and humor to connect with others, but in the context of rules and routines in the classroom, she is developing an awareness of the appropriate times and places to use it. During classroom lessons she was always one of the first to find the amusing in the material they were learning, and it appeared to always give her a positive attitude about everything she did. She was also becoming adept at using laughter to question the practices of the classroom, and at the end of the year after the moment of silence that happened each day in the announcements, looked at me matter of factly and declared laughingly with her hands up, “I know we have to be quiet but I still don’t understand what we have to be quiet for!”

Lindy



Key Issues: Power and Control

On my first day in the classroom, Lindy stormed in, put her hands on her hips and said, “Who are YOOOUU?” I said, “My name is Sarah. Who are YOOOUU?” “Lindy,” she replied and demanded, “What are you doing here?” She was the only child to approach me immediately, knowing this was her domain and I was an outsider, in fact, it was her second year in kindergarten and she knew the classroom well. She was not shy about an intruder in her space and she wanted me to know it.

I came to love this spunky Lindy, though she was exasperatingly infuriating and difficult, and was desperately seeking personal power and control over herself and those who she felt controlled her. My first involved experience with her came less than a week into my research and it was her turn to sit on my lap during music with Aaron, or rather she demanded it was her turn, yet she would not let me have any fun. Aaron would play his guitar and sing but when I rock back and forth to the music she tells me to stop because I am bothering her. When I tap on her back in tune to the music she screams, “STOP!” When I sing she hollers, “Stop singing!” and when I keep singing she demands, “Will you just leave the singing up to the kids?” When I begin rocking, she says, “Cut it out! You are making me fall.” Finally I state, “Lindy, why are you sitting on my lap if it makes you unhappy?” I did not find

the things I was doing disturbing, in fact, any other child sitting on my lap enjoyed it, and when I stopped tapping on their legs or back they begged for more.

Lindy is desperately craving attention, yet she wants the adult to know that everything must be on her terms. One day she asks if she can sit on my lap at music and I told her, “Nah, I feel like singing today, and it makes you upset when I participate. You can if you want to sing with me.” She squinted her eyes, balled her fists, called me mean, scowled, and stomped away. I saw her look back at me to see if I was watching, and I ignored her piercing stare. Later she approached me and giggled while looking at my feet, “Ya know what? It is OK if you want to bounce when we are singing at group time.” When she realized she could not tell me what to do, she was willing to relinquish her control and demands of me in order to sit on my lap. That day I watched her struggle to keep a straight face during some of the songs and when I said, “You almost laughed,” she emphatically stated, “I DID NOT!!!” and she crossed her arms and would not let me see her face for the rest of music. Over time I kept joking with her during these attempts to control situations, and though it took time to break down her defenses, it eventually almost always worked.

Lindy’s mother was one of the few parents I got to know fairly well over the semester because she dropped off and picked up Lindy every day, came to school fieldtrips, and came to eat lunch with her when her work schedule allowed it. It was obvious that Lindy was well loved and cared for, however, it was also apparent that despite this, her life was not always routine or easy. Her mother often told me about how exhausted she was. She had worked as a cashier at Kmart and then took a factory job for more pay, which required she work nights while leaving Lindy with

her grandmother, and then she slept during the day when Lindy was at school. Soon after, she took a job at McDonalds when she could not tolerate the night schedule while simultaneously trying to raise Lindy. Lindy's dad lives close by and she often goes to stay with him on weekends. Her mom told me about Lindy's Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and all of the medication changes she had endured over the past year, and Lindy's constant emotional turmoil represents this, as for a long time she was usually quite moody. Brooding, angry, low self-esteem, everything is unfair, she is bored, hungry, not hungry, tired but not tired enough to rest, and not able to sit still.

Lindy is completely aware of her medication and one day at group after being complimented on how well she was paying attention she says, "I am a much better listener when I take my little blue pill. I can be much more quiet," though occasionally it seems as though she uses the knowledge of her difficulties as an excuse to misbehave. She always told me how sick she felt because of her pill, though she usually had nothing physically wrong with her and seemed to just be vying for attention, or trying to get out of things she was required to do.

Not only did Lindy want to control me, but the other children in the classroom, and oh, the tattling when she did not get her way. Whether she really wanted my attention or not, she would fight for it if someone else had it, bullying me to NO end and whining relentlessly. Her faces kill, and how a 6-year old learns faces that can fill a person with emotion to the nth degree I will never know, though it is quite obvious she has practiced. At times she made me fearful of confronting her, and I had to develop assertiveness, a skill I do not inherently have and am not good at

when I try, though I knew I could not let myself fall prey to a petite, yet fiery kindergarten child. I needed some control too.

Hair and Shoelaces

Another source of contention on a daily basis was Lindy's difficulty not perseverating on things, and in some aspects of her life she is a perfectionist, unable to move on until she is satisfied with the outcome. She would wear her headband to school and ask me no less than 25 times throughout the day how it looked. Was it straight? Was it OK? Could she go and look at it in the mirror in the bathroom down the hall? No, not the one in the classroom, it HAS to be the bathroom mirror! She is the same way with her shoelaces, which she constantly unties, and then wants me to retie for her in an impossibly special way. She needs to be the one to tie the first knot, while I am responsible for the second knot, and sometimes she pulls on her laces so hard I can hear a thread tear. I always hope her knot is successful, otherwise we will have to start all over again.

I often used laughter and humor to distract her from these things, and luckily they often worked, though these were the times it was so challenging to be patient. When difficult situations would occur, I learned to act as ridiculously as I could in order to make her stop. After several incidents where she was worried about how her hair looked, I put mine up in awful ponytails sticking out everywhere and kept asking her how they looked. After 10 times she sighed and said, "Sarah, I told you they look silly," and then she wanted hers just like mine, never complaining, but smiling the rest of the day. Once after undoing and redoing her shoelaces so many times my fingers were raw, I stole the laces, which made her crack up incessantly, and stop

focusing on having her laces perfect. From then on, she would kid with me by pretending she was removing my laces when I was not looking, and when I caught her she giggled and giggled.

Mrs. Lindy

I discovered that a positive outlet for Lindy to feel a sense of control and success was in letting her play the teacher, which she wanted to do when she grew up if she did not work at Kmart. She becomes the epitome of bossy, telling the other kids what to do, usually Karla, Abigail, and Don Jeffrey because the others were at their reading or computer groups. Lindy often wanted to read a book to her “class” but would usually never get around to it, and it was evident she just wanted to be the boss and tell everyone else what to do, what to read, and how to act. All of the children always found it hilarious, thus reinforcing and fulfilling Lindy’s need for control and power by actually allowing her to play the role of the adult. Having needs met during this game, she became more easygoing with others, and after a few weeks would even occasionally relinquish her control and allow others to play the teacher.

Lindy also used her issues with control to try and manipulate and ask me if she could do something that Aaron had already told her she could not do, though this ended after Aaron caught her bossing me around a few times. She gasped, opened her eyes wide and said to Aaron, “I didn’t know you were there,” and then she laughed, and just as soon she got quieter and more polite. Aaron and I both learned that when Lindy asked us if she could do something, we immediately queried the other if she had come to us already, though instead of getting upset, Lindy found it

humorous that we had discovered her plot. She had already negotiated the structure and roles of the authority figures around her, and knew she could try to manipulate me, though after time had passed she treated me the same as Aaron...almost.

Unfortunately, because of my gender, I inevitably was always the one who was privy to her maddening bathroom adventures when she pretended she could not turn off the water, or was locked in the stall and could not get out.

Showing Off

Lindy can be considered the classic “show off,” and when she has anything a child does not have or can do something someone else cannot, she makes sure to tell or show you. Everyone, except Sabrina was in their computer or reading group and Lindy was being rambunctious showing her gymnastics moves. She was pivoting around in a circle with one arm down on the ground, doing cartwheels and flips, and laughing. She opened her eyes wide, saw me sitting quietly, and said, “Have you been watching me the WHOLE time?” I laughed and said, “Yep.” Aaron walked in and Lindy stated to him, “Sarah was watching me and I didn’t know.” She kept laughing. I felt that Lindy had already been pegged as a grumpy and difficult child and knew it, so she was always surprised when she got caught having fun since she worked hard at letting others know she was miserable and unhappy. When I caught her it was obvious she really enjoyed being silly and loved laughing. I was thrilled the day she stomped up to me with her little legs that were the size than my forearms and declared, “Do you know why I am being so funny and silly today?” I said, “Why?” Lindy replied, “Because I am happy today and I am going to laugh and be happy all day.”

When She Laughs

Despite my description of Lindy as a difficult child, she was also extremely endearing and often hilarious. I felt this surreptitious glance of her silly side was a huge piece to who she really was, and it allowed me to use this to my advantage. When she received positive feedback for showing her funny side she loved it, and showed it more overall, realizing that she could do positive things to gain attention. Using laughter and humor with her eventually provoked her to use it as well, and we learned to interact more positively and successfully, with better communication and fewer tantrums and conflicts. It became easier to make her laugh, listen to directions, and follow the rules.

When she was doing something she was not supposed to be doing, it was catching her off guard that made her giggle, such as the day she was not supposed to be hiding in the teepee and I peeked in through the top without her knowing I was there. She was trying to dupe me, and was expecting me to look through the lower hole, but when she looked up she was wholly stunned to see me looking at her from the top. When she saw me she gasped, started laughing, and came out without me having to tell her it was not her turn.

After awhile I deduced the easiest way to make Lindy laugh was to tell her not to. If she was grumpy I would say, "I hope that whatever you do, you do not laugh today," and when she was already laughing I would tell her not to laugh anymore because laughing is no longer allowed in school. It would make her roar on and on, and the more I would tell her I really, really meant it, and the more I would pretend to look angry, the more she would laugh.

Conclusion

I found that different children have varying thresholds for laughter, as well as emotional issues that need to be addressed before laughter can take place. Isaac was a child who needed to feel safe, secure, and trusting in his environment before opening up to others. Julia, who already knew trust and security, needed mere companionship to laugh, and she is an excellent example of the child who almost every teacher and classmate can easily relate to through laughter. Lindy is a superb case of the child who has difficulties interacting with others because of her desire to always have power and control, though she could usually be thwarted with a little extra patience, definitive boundaries, and absurd and surprising behavior on the part of the adult.

Though I established that laughter was ultimately universal in this group of children, it is certainly a behavior or trait that needs to be nurtured based on the individual personalities, needs, and interests of each child in the context of the classroom. Using laughter and humor are never completely successful, though they can help the relationships and self-confidence necessary for learning and life success to develop to their fullest capacity, as well as make their experiences in the classroom the most positive ones possible.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Laughter in the Group

The laughing group has been found to be a stirring and dynamic one. When a cluster of 13 children and 2 teachers come together at once, there is a constant exchange of interactions between any number and combination of participants. Following is a description of the morning group time when Aaron and the entire class of children came together in order to prepare for the school day, which was always filled with fun, laughter, and meaningful conversations. The nuances of relations and laughter in a group are intricate and deserve to be explained as flavorfully as is possible, so it was my objective to document and describe how the group came together, the laughable interactions that ensued between the group members and how they unfolded, and the potential importance or meanings entrenched in the exchanges. I also wanted to explore how laughter in a group could be important to the classroom experience.

Poopy, Groupy Time

It is 8:52 on a Monday morning in March and Aaron tells the children to clean up and bring a chair to circle for group time. Don Jeffrey sighs, “Awwwww,” and declares, “We have to clean up, it’s poooooopy, groooooooupy time.” And so you know, for a kindergarten child, poopy does not necessarily mean something is bad or undesirable. The children start to clean up, though it is still a process that needs much monitoring and encouragement, as they are easily distracted. Lindy and Julia are chanting, “Boys in the toilet. Girls flush them down the toilet!” It makes Don Jeffrey

irritated and he comes up to me to tattle. I tell him to ask them to stop if it bothers him, though Charlie and Patrick have already started in with, “Girls in the toilet. Boys flush them down the toilet,” which of course sounds like the taunting nanny nanny boo boo’s of our childhoods. Lindy and Julia are thrilled the game is being reciprocated, and they screeeeecchhh with laughter and start skipping around the classroom chanting. Don Jeffrey says, “Stop, I don’t like that.” Julia giggles, puts on a playful scowl, puts her face within 2 inches of Don Jeffrey’s with her hands straight at her sides, cocks her head back and forth, and says with a pretend voice that evades description, “It was only a joke.” Don Jeffrey waggles his head back at her in agreement without saying anything, and he is obviously no longer bothered.

It is easy to observe that boys tease girls and girls tease boys when they like each other, and though many might find it inappropriate or annoying, I think this playful joking banter could be tremendously important in helping young children develop good relationship skills. They push their level of joking to the limits, and learn about understanding people and multiple ways of relating to others. They have to negotiate the limits of playful interaction, learn about the appropriateness of joking from non-joking, and learn about respecting another person’s emotions and needs within relationships. Children have to discern different ways of communicating with different people, and ultimately laughter and joking with each other teaches them about empathy, reciprocity with others, and having fun while interacting.

Lindy, Julia, Don Jeffrey, and Charlie go to get their chairs to form a circle for group. Lindy looks at me from across the circle and says with a toothy grin, “Can I call you Saryup? Like syrup. Saryup on my pancakes.” Julia screams, “SARYUP!

GIDDYUP! GIDDYUP and SARYUP!!” and she and Lindy rock in their chairs while shrieking with laughter. Julia is sitting by Don Jeffrey and he teases her by stealing her baseball cap, but she is adept at her classmates trying to provoke her in this way, so instead of getting upset, she tries to make him wear it while he playfully fends her off.

Today I sat down in the circle to watch before the children came, which had never happened. I later became enlightened that when I was already sitting quietly, the children did not have the same zest for wanting to sit by me as when I was the last one standing when they would beg me to sit by them. It was OK if they did not want to choose to sit by me, but they were adamant that I choose to sit by them.

Brady is getting something off the floor to put away when Patrick sits on his head and says, “SQQQUUUAACKKKKKK!!!! I am waiting for my eggs to hatch!” Brady rolls onto his back clutching his stomach with maniacal laughter. Patrick goes over to the table to get a chair, limping like a pirate with a peg leg, clenches his hands and shouts, “ARRRRGG!!!” and hoists his chair over his head with the legs poking up. He carries it over and drops it by Aaron’s with a thud, way harder than is necessary. Aaron comes around the corner and Patrick hollers in a singsong gameshow host voice, “It’s Mr. Silvy!” Brady clunks his chair down next to Patrick.

Adam comes to group from the office scuttling like a crab, commando crawls through the teepee, slithers over to a chair Karla has just pulled up, and plops in it laughing at her. Karla starts to gripe, “That’s MY chair,” but Adam is already on his way to get his own and pulls it up next to me. Karla sits in her chair with a grin, seemingly pleased that she did not need to break into a full gripe so early in the

morning. Addie pulls up a chair to my left and lays her head on my lap and says, “I feel sick.” I ask her if I should call the ambulance and she laughs lifting her head, smiles, and replies, “I am not THAT sick.” Using laughter and humor with a sick or hurt child seems to work wonders, especially for distraction and calming purposes. Sabrina has her arms full of stuff for Show and Tell so Abigail hollers, “I’ll get your chair,” and she drags them both bumping behind her. She puts them side-by-side without an inch of space between them, and she and Sabrina start looking at what treasures they brought from home. Though some of the children will often sit next to certain others if there is room, they are usually rather unparticular and there is no discernable pattern in their daily sitting pattern, other than Aaron, whose chair stays in place.

Isaac pulls his chair up next to Aaron’s and sits quietly as Aaron sits down. The last to get there is Jeremy, who comes leaping down the 2 steps into the classroom, pulls up a chair and sits down, declares that he forgot his folder, runs and sails back up the steps to his backpack hanging outside, hurdles back down the steps again with his folder and a thump, yells “HIIIIYAWWWW!” and parks himself out of breath and laughing, while the children express amusement at his escapade. Group has formed.

Lunch, Attendance, and Announcements

Each day when the children come in they are supposed to sign up for what they want on the lunch chart, though most forget and do it as soon as they get to group. Brady is the first to have forgotten and Aaron says, “Brady, today you have a choice of a hamburger, chicken nuggets, or a salad. That’s what we called them when

they are our friends; we call them nugs. The kids all start calling the chicken nuggets, “nugs,” in exaggerated voices, “Yo, nugs. Give me some nugs. I want NUGS!!!”

Even Isaac is smiling.

Aaron says, “What is a hamburger? Is it ham?”

Brady: “Cow!”

Karla: “EWWWW!!!! Yuck!!” She makes gagging sounds, which are followed by a cacophony of retching and laughter when most of the group imitates her noise.

Aaron: “Shouldn’t they call it a cowburger?”

Brady: “No nugs for me. I am signing up for a cowburger,” chortling.

The rest of the children either sign up for a cowburger or chicken nugs, and this joking about what is on the menu each day remains constant into the cafeteria and throughout lunch. Then it is time to take attendance, and it is up to the kids to figure out who is missing, and though they are supposed to raise their hands, someone always shouts out who is absent, while the others vocalize their, “Awwwww’s,” to show their pleasant displeasure. Of course, whoever guesses who is missing first jumps up and down, claps, and hoots in some manner because he or she has won.

Next, a door holder and line leader are chosen for the day, and the angst of suddenly having to sit as quietly as possible without bursting in order to be picked is evident. Karla gets to be line leader and she smirks while looking around the circle, and Charlie pounces out of his chair into frog position and screams, “YESSSSSSS!” when he finds out he is the door holder. Of course these jobs require that the children be on their best behavior for the remainder of the day.

The announcements come on, beginning with the Pledge of Allegiance, which is always something that the children say with flair, and on this morning it was slaughtered in more way than one. Patrick says it is his fake, deep, and booming voice, standing at attention like a soldier with his hand over his heart. Charlie whispers it as fast as he can, looks around the circle smiling, and snorts while covering his mouth when he sees me grinning at him. Julia practices her humorous knowledge of letters and language by changing the first letters of the words to B's, missing some of them beneath her giggling. I bledge ablegiance to the flag of the Bunted Blates of Aberica. And boo the bepublic for which it bands. One bation bunder Bod. As he often does at the end of the pledge when it says, "With liberty and justice for all," Aaron says, "We hope." Though this is a time when disciplining the children's antics would usually be common, Aaron allows the children to demonstrate their creativity within limits, and I find allowing some of this silliness is something that works particularly well for his group. In fact, if a kindergarten teacher does not let many things go, I believe the disciplining would be continuous throughout the day.

Show and Tell it All

Here is where the fun begins and the funny things never end, though some days I think if I see one more motorcycle, Brat, superhero figure, or Barbie doll I am going to shriek with aggravation, as the children often bring in the same types of things day after day. During show and tell, each child discloses a story about something he did over the weekend or night before, and shares a toy if he brought one, though most bring a horde of things that they cannot carry in their little arms all at once.

Aaron always begins Show and Tell, and today he says, “This weekend I cleaned a lot of litter boxes (he has 12 cats), got outside a little because the weather was nice,” and then he looks at me and says, “I better be careful how I say this, I went to see Meet the Fockers.” Over the semester, I came to call the copious things that Aaron said that cracked me up, Aaronisms, and I came to see how much of our relationship was based on the things he joked about that were above the children’s level of understanding. I became aware that it was these quips without direct communication that clued me in to how similar our philosophies of teaching, learning, and life were, and they were one of our primary means of understanding each other. Usually they were about things in the news, especially politics, though they could, and did extend to any realm. These things always made me laugh and understand Aaron better, and when I would laugh it let him know that I understood and corroborated his thoughts, developing an intersubjectivity with little direct communication.

One of the most persevering topics of interest in kindergarten is a child’s gender. Boys know they are boys, and girls know they are girls, and this seems to be the largest factor underlying how they define themselves and others. They are focused on which characteristics are common to each, as well as what things boys and girls enjoy. Though many parents and teachers try in their everyday lives to make these differences as minimal as possible, they are nonetheless present and peskily swarming with flies.

On my first day in kindergarten, the presence of boy things and girl things in the children was palpable, and the three girls sitting in a row were the first, horrifying

clue. Pink, pink, and oh, that looks pink to me. There is no such thing as unisex lunchboxes, backpacks, or clothing in kindergarten, so even if the children do not learn about boy and girl things from TV and movies, they are inundated with them when they come to school.

There is Dora the Explorer, who lets girls know that they can be explorers, but they will be better at it if they are wearing a mini skirt. Shirts are obscured with white, fluffy cats with ostentatious jewelry and hair bows, or tough, chiseled superheroes. Can't cats be boys? Can't superheroes be girls? When I ask the children about cats and dogs they tell me that cats are for girls and dogs are for boys. All of the boys report liking dogs better than cats, and all of the girls report liking cats better than dogs. There are girl colors and boy colors. There are girl toys and boy toys. The children are essentially divided by their need to know who they are and how they belong, which is all influenced by popular culture's definition of what being a girl or boy means.

One day for fun, I decided to ask the children about their knowledge of the word stereotype.

Sarah: "What is a stereotype?"

Lindy: "I have a stereo. It plays tapes and records."

Julia: "Yeah, but I have a CD player now."

Don Jeffrey: "No one listens to records anymore."

Karla: "I listen to the country station."

Patrick: "Stereos are out!"

Karla: She laughs and says, "Mr. Silver says it means you should not make

fun of anyone.”

They were starting to figure it out.

Aaron is skillful at using laughter and humor to get the children to talk more in depth during their school day, especially at Show and Tell when he can give each child individual attention. He especially uses laughter and humor to elaborate on topics that will challenge their ideas of how they define and come to know concepts of things and what they mean. Believing that everyone is equal, Aaron uses the children’s focus on boy and girl things and the humor inherently involved in this topic, to aid them in thinking more about these differences.

Patrick was the first child to talk about his weekend, and he reports that he spent time with his dad and his stepmom, and got a new transformer toy because he was good. He proudly holds up his transformer and demonstrates its multiple contortions and removable parts. As he does almost everyday, Aaron naturally brings up the idea of stereotypes.

Aaron: “What makes an action figure an action figure and what makes a doll a doll?”

Jeremy: “Action figures have muscles.” He shows his biceps giggling.

Adam: “Action figures have costumes.”

Patrick: “Boys are action figures, girls are dolls.”

Sabrina: “When an action figure has outfits it makes it a doll.”

Patrick: “Dolls are for giiirrrrrllls.”

Sabrina: “Dolls have dresses.”

Aaron: “It is just a name. They are really the same.”

The children express their disagreement with their “Nahhhhh’s, No way’s, and Uh Uhhhh’s,” and much laughter, though they have still heard what Aaron has to say.

It is Brady’s turn and he exuberantly states, “I saw a king cobra at the zoo this weekend.” Jeremy slaps his own knee and cackles, “Did it have a crown?” The whole group starts laughing, except Isaac, though he is smiling and attentive. Aaron asks him what else he saw and Brady shouts, “Monkeys.”

Aaron: He inquires, “How are people different from monkeys?”

Adam: “It’s so we have clothes so we don’t show our privates. That’s how we are different.” The group roars when he says the word “privates,” knowing what he is referring to.

Abigail: “We are different colors.”

Addie: Raising her head from my lap she states, “We don’t have tails.”

Charlie: “We aren’t hairy.”

I mutter, “Welllllll,” and me and Aaron laugh.

Aaron says, “Our brains are different, we look in the mirror and know we are people and know who we are.” Aaron makes a point to tell them people are all different and you should never laugh at people’s bodies.

Adam had been gone for a few days on a trip with his parents and brought back some seashells from the Florida beach that he was carefully setting out on the floor. Brady wanted to hold one immediately, but Adam was not done with his display, so he gets perturbed when Brady tries to grab one. Brady looks at me with exasperation and says, “SARAH, Adam is being shellfish!!” He did not understand the joke he had made but when I laughed and explained it, he and most of the group

also laughed, and he declares with large eyes, “I didn’t even MEAN to be funny.” For the rest of the semester whenever a situation arose when a child was not sharing, I would tell them not to be shellfish, and the children would often laugh and solve the problem. More important to Brady, was that he was obviously pleased and felt successful by making others laugh, and he was able to understand the hilarity when I took the time to point out how what he said was creative.

Adam also discloses that over the weekend he had to go to the hairdresser with his mom so, “she could get her hair back to brown.” I start laughing riotously knowing that few adults would appreciate their child blatantly telling their secrets, and it causes many of the others to giggle, even though I am not sure they know why. They figured that if I was laughing it must be funny, so they would laugh too. Adam is wearing a Donald Duck shirt and Aaron asks, “Do you know the names of Donald’s nephews?” The children are guessing. They say, “Huey and Louie.” After many attempts someone says, “Chewey.” Karla bursts out laughing, “It’s not Chewey!” and when Aaron says, “Dewey,” the children all laugh screaming, “Awwwwwww!” Aaron takes out the globe and points to Florida and says, “Florida is in the United States. What place is not in the United States?”

Charlie: “What about Missouri?”

Aaron: Missouri is a state in the United States. Under his breath he mutters,
“Welllllll.”

As usual I find myself having to stifle my laughter.

It is my turn and I tell everyone I went hiking with my dogs on the trail where I lived. When Aaron asked which trail and where I lived, I told him where the trailer

park I was living in was located. Jeremy gasps with his eyes wide, and says, “YOU live in a trailer?” “Yes, I do, I replied.” He states with hysterical conviction, “I didn’t think teachers could live in trailers.” Jeremy already had a stereotypical idea of who could and could not live in a trailer, and thought that teachers somehow surpassed living in something that was not a real house and where poor people live.

Addie was not her usual excited self because she reports that she was sick all weekend and still feels bad. She tells how she watched the movie *Saw*, where people get cut up, but it is just pretend and she was not afraid. She rests her head on my shoulder and smiles at me. Patrick is talking incessantly and making silly faces, and does not respond to Aaron’s attempt to make him respect and listen to others. He loses his chair, which is quite common, and has to sit on the floor in front of it. As he goes to sit on the floor, Brady pretends to hit him and Patrick collapses to the ground with his eyes fluttering like butterfly wings, and pretends he is getting shocked with Brady’s touch. ZZZuuuutttttt. ZZZappppppppppp. He flails about as he always does. Lindy is chuckling and says to Patrick, “You’re funny.” He does it one more time, seemingly to impress her further, ZZZaaaaaaaatttttt!!

Abigail is up next and she has a SpongeBob cookie dispenser filled with cookies that yells, “YUMMMMMMMMM!” amongst other ridiculous things when you lift its head to get the cookies out. Don Jeffrey announces, “SpongeBob is going to marry Miss Nelson,” a character in one of their favorite books, especially his. Aaron retorts, “No one knows who SpongeBob will be marrying. I am chuckling again since last week Aaron told me about the controversy over SpongeBob and the church, because SpongeBob and Squidward wanted to adopt a child on one of the episodes.

Abigail has much to tell today, and talks of how there was a baby shower for her mom and future baby brother. Aaron inquires, “What is a baby shower? Does that mean you put the baby in the shower and turn it on?” Abigail throws her head back showing her toothless grin and giggles, “NOOOOOOOO.” It is when you buy things for a baby that isn’t born yet.” Abigail finally tells how it was her grandpa’s birthday and he had a birthday cake. Aaron questions, “Were there candles?” and tells how his own children put candles all around his cake and it turns into a big fire. The children’s eyes are wide thinking about a cake on fire. He ends with, “Getting old is dangerous,” and remembering my 30th birthday and projecting the conflagration in future years makes me chortle.

Next is Sabrina, and I realize it is the Tokyo Brats I detest so much. They have short skirts, big red lips, tons of eye makeup, slender waists and big breasts, high sexy boots, and though I thought feet were a prerequisite to wearing shoes of any sort, the Brats do not have any, only stubs beneath their boots. These are the things the children know about and love, and they are also the things that I know nothing about, which they find amusing and subsequently tell me ALL about. Sabrina shows everyone her Brats. Charlie looks at Sabrina’s weird Brats and says, “That freaks me out.” He and everyone laugh, except Isaac, though he smiles. Charlie says, “How about everyone just be quiet?” Most of the group laughs harder because he says it playfully, knowing he is the center of attention with his comment. Aaron says, “You know when I was growing up, being a Brat was not a good thing,” and I concur that being a brat was something that got me a scolding. The children laugh at this, possibly because they are realizing the contradiction between the name of one of their

favorite toys and what the word brat actually means. Sabrina is also excited that she got new makeup.

Aaron: “Why do people wear makeup?”

Sabrina: She says emphatically, “To make them pretty.” She bats her eyelashes.

Patrick: “Because they want to get married.”

Aaron: He states with conviction, “You are the same whether you wear makeup or not.”

This morning Sabrina also has big news; her hamsters had babies. The brother and sister, that is. Aaron and I laugh again. She has her nails painted and shows them off. Brady looks at his nails and Aaron says, “Did you get new nail polish too?” He yells and smiles, NOOOOO!” Aaron says, “I was making a bad joke,” and laughs.

Next is Lindy and she has a Barbie look alike, and I am assured that Barbie’s official takeover of the world is imminent. She presses a button on her doll’s back beneath her long, blonde, thick, flowing hair, and the doll starts singing a throat-slicing tune. Don Jeffrey slaps his hands over his ears, and giggles, “Whoa, turn that thing OFF!” The group continues to laugh. Lindy says, “We had a sleepover and they had chicken soup because we were all sick.” Aaron laughs, “Chicken soup is the Jewish antibiotic.” I laugh because I have never heard this before and I find it amusing. The group experience carries over into future communication, and later in the day Lindy and Abigail are giving the Barbie thing a makeover. The Barbie thing now has a boyfriend doll thing, a toy left over in a cubby from a different day. I ask Lindy if the boy was getting a makeover too. They chortle, especially Lindy, and she

declares, “No, how could a boy get a makeover? Then it would be like, “Hey look at me, I’m a girl.” She says it in her deeper boy voice and is laughing really hard exposing her half grown in teeth.

It is Karla’s turn and she says, “I got my ears pierced.” She has placed rubber bands over her ears, though Aaron misses the joke because he cannot see them. She and Lindy start chuckling and Karla says, “They are not real. I was only joking.” I laugh at her creativity and tell her they are beautiful and ask if I can wear them sometime. She giggles, “No, they are my FAVORITE!” Lindy interjects with, “When I got my ears pieced I was squalling!” Aaron and I laugh at her use of the word squalling because it is a word uncommon to kindergartners and she said it in a squalling way. Karla then discloses how someone at her babysitter’s had diarrhea and Aaron humorously replies with, “Sounds like a hot time.” Most of the children laugh because she used the word diarrhea, and they begin to disclose their own personal experiences with the affliction. Lindy randomly comes out with, “You can’t say cuss words because it is against the law.” Karla retorts that her mom says she can say, “HELL YEAH!!!!” at school if it is OK with Mr. Silver. Karla is wearing a shirt that says, “It’s a GIRL thing!” and Aaron asks her what it means if something is “a girl thing.” She replies, “It means that only a girl can do it.” Aaron states, “You might want to ask Sarah about that because I think she would feel differently.”

Jeremy talks about his weekend out with his family camping and how they grilled hot dogs by the truck. I say, “You grilled your dogs?” He catapults out of his chair laughing and screams, “That is crazy!!!! We ate hot dogs. My dog was not even there!!!!” He tries to sit back down but misses his chair and falls on the floor on

accident and everyone, including Jeremy, roar. A couple of minutes later he does it again, this time on purpose, and then Karla does it and pretends it was an accident. Wild fire. Then Julia. Then Adam. Then Brady. Always Charlie. Never Isaac. Aaron has to tell them to all sit down and stay in their chairs, which they do with wholehearted guffaws. Adam continues to laugh and make the farting noises with his mouth that he has been making intermittently throughout group. Isaac is interacting by tapping Don Jeffrey on the lap lightly and smiling. Aaron had expressed to me that he was a little worried that when Isaac did start to come out it would be in a negative way, though that remains to be seen.

It is Charlie's turn and he reports how he went on a soccer picnic. Aaron asks, "Does that mean you eat while you are playing soccer?" Charlie giggles and says, "NOOOOOO!!!" Aaron replies, "Do you eat roasted soccer balls?" Many children laughingly scream, "NOOOOOO!!!" Charlie states, "You play soccer and *then* you eat!" Charlie then shows his collection of race cars that he brought and pushes them back and forth to a couple of children and Aaron says, "If you are a racecar driver you have to be able to turn L really well." I laugh knowing that neither of us have an appreciation of racing.

Julia has her notebook and tells how she wrote in her diary and played with her older sister over the weekend. She throws her hands up and laughs while saying, "That's *all* I have to report," something I often said when it was my turn to talk and I had spent the previous night writing.

Don Jeffrey has a batmobile that he pulls out from under his chair and all of the boys go, "Wooooowwwwwwwwwww! Let me see it! Push it to me!!" Don

Jeffrey pushes it too hard and it flips over. Many of the children start to laugh, “WHHOOAAA!” He pushes it again, and this time he pushes it hard to make it flip on purpose, and the kids continue to giggle and try to grab it. He had received positive reinforcement from the others in the group, and wanted to duplicate the experience for further feedback.

Last up is Isaac who holds up a classroom dinosaur book he had been reading at the beginning of the day, and Aaron asks him to open it and show his favorite dinosaur. Aaron asks, “Which one is that?” but Isaac only shrugs. He does not like to talk in front of the group, but I am ecstatic because this is one of the only times during show and tell that he shares anything at all.

Conclusion

And this is group. Filled with banter, joking, fun, and almost constant laughter. It is 9:23 and the day has barely begun but the children are awake, happy, laughing, and ready for their day. I know it was always my favorite part, and it morning group appeared to set the pace and disposition for the rest of the daily happenings.

I thought about what these interactions meant, and though they appear at first to be quite simple, the exchanges are complex and rich with many of the answers to why laughter is important for children. At group time I found that almost everything had the potential to be a source of laughter, and coming together as a class seemed to increase the likelihood that someone’s sense of humor would be stimulated, thus always giving individual children the positive feedback and attention from Aaron, me, and the others. This opportunity to have interactions with their entire class of

varying personalities was an important key in the children learning to relate to each other positively and meaningfully with frequent humor and laughter. Perhaps this suggests that if a teacher wants to stimulate the most laughter, the group is the place to do it, and one could assume that the more common group is, the more prevalent laughter will become.

Key to the success of laughter in this particular group is that Aaron has a silly personality and a definite dynamic that works, and in his classroom everyone is treated as an equal and with respect. Using laughter and humor may be a conundrum for a teacher who is worried about things getting out of control because it is true that once children start laughing and joking it can be near impossible to stop, though I question who would want to stop positive laughter in the first place. There was definitely a different laughing experience between Aaron's group and the other female kindergarten teacher's group, who had a much less silly and humorous way of interacting with children. I *never* heard the other classroom roar like Aaron's. I considered the possibility that Aaron's gender could have an affect on the children's laughter, and though I am sure it conclusively does in some ways, the children laughed just as frequently with me when I was silly. Thus, teacher gender probably has a lesser affect on young children's perceptions of who and what is funny, than it does older children's, and it seems that young children do not care who is producing funny things... as long as someone is.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Laughter Over Time

As I discovered in past research, there are many things in a child's daily experiences that are novel or fun and deserve to be laughed about, even if they are not necessarily funny to the adult. In fact, for a young child, almost everything has the potential to be new or funny. I saw that much of what the children laughed at over the semester was instantly comical but ephemeral, though there were a few novel experiences that grew into themes and demonstrated continuity. Within these themes, it was not an initial incident that was laughable on its own, but these situations increased in hilarity as they continued to develop more context to other events, and further meaning over time. It is how this continuity was created, and the meaning and significance of these continuous situations that are the focus of this chapter.

My Notebook

My first story about new and laughable things was concurrent with my fresh presence in the classroom, a period when I was utterly frazzled, yet invigorated about being in a new setting with children again. It was a time when I had but a mere hunch of what I was doing and how things would unfurl, and somehow I had forgotten how much I love my subject of study. It was the children who reminded me, and instigated the laughter that ensued over the entire semester over something so ostensibly common and simple; my research notebook.

As I was trying to gauge how much of my personality I could show and get away with, I was quite reserved and hesitant as I waited to find my place. As the children were trying to figure out who I was and how they could best interact with me, I was doing the same with them, but all it took was the first child showing some interest in my belongings that prodded me out of my unlaughing rigidity, which luckily was on my third day in class.

Since I was 6, I have been in search of the perfect pen and notebook, and nothing has changed for me as an adult. Before my study began, I spent an embarrassingly hefty amount of time trying to pick these items, especially the notebook that would hopefully inspire me to write great things. I lugged the legal-sized pad I had chosen for two days, wholly annoyed that I kept setting it down and misplacing it. I had entirely underestimated how much I would need my unbound hands for corralling children, tying shoes, or building sandcastles. I finally found a tiny pocket-sized black book and bought all 23 of them on the shelf. I knew I needed to carry my notebook with me everywhere, and had to adjust my pocketless wardrobe accordingly, since I was convinced things would definitely happen if I did not have it with me at all times.

On my third day when I had my new compact notebook, many were inquisitive. Jeremy immediately interrogated, “Why do you have a new book? Where is your big book?” As soon as he noticed it, the other children’s interest was stimulated, and I told them I needed something smaller that I would not have to carry. I was entirely dumbfounded that they paid so much attention to my new teeny one

since none of them seemed to have noticed my big book just 2 days earlier, but within minutes it became the object of fascination and laughter for the class.

I am not overemphasizing the commotion that my notebook incited. The children were suddenly hounding me, hanging on me, watching me write while playfully trying to grab it, wanting to see it and desecrate its pages, of course with my new favorite pen. I was initially exasperated about their enduring curiosity because I thought it was interfering with my research, but then I saw that this *was* my research. It was perfect. I loved that they were interacting with me, and the magnitude of their interest and laughter made me see that this was definitely going to be something to follow for as long as it continued. The children were enthralled and *needed* my notebook for their own, wanted to keep it in their pockets to hold for me, or put it in their backpacks to keep safe. It was unbearably hilarious to them when they grabbed it out of my hands or pocket and I would chase them to get it back. It became their preferred funny game, as well as their favorite way to capture my attention.

By the end of my second week Addie came to school with a notebook, by my third week Lindy and Patrick had notebooks, and by my fourth week 5 more had notebooks, 3 of which I made from drawing paper after they requested it. I was dumbfounded and questioned, “What exactly do they think I keep in my notebook? Why is it so interesting?” so I asked them, and realized that their impressions were quite humorous.

Sarah: “Why do you want to write in my notebook?”

Karla: “It looks fun and important.”

Sarah: “What do you think I write in it?”

Lindy: "Secret teacher things."

Sarah: "What kinds of secret things?"

Lindy: "You write about the bad stuff we do like when we are mean or talk back or don't listen so you can give it to the principal."

Sarah: I say with a chuckle, "Is there anything I should write in my book about *you* today?"

Lindy: She covers her mouth and laughs, "No, I have been good all day."

Sarah: "What else do I write?"

Julia: She giggles and playfully strokes my hair, "You write about princesses and princes."

Sabrina: "You write about your husband."

Sarah: "I don't have a husband."

Lindy: She laughs and inquires, "How come no one wants to marry you?"

Sarah: I howl, and then tell her that is a subject for another day.

Jeremy: "It must be secret because you hide it in your pocket! Let me see it!"

He laughs hysterically and tries to wrestle it away from me, and Lindy, Sabrina, and Julia start jumping up and down, clapping their hands, and laughing.

Though there were many quarrels about my notebook, especially whose turn it was to coddle it, this undying theme caused continual laughter. I had to try and find a fair way for all of the children to have personal time with the book that I needed to record all of these funny things, because they argued who would get to write in it during lunch, at rest time, and any other time of the day. We ended up writing down whose turn was next, in my notebook of course. When things got too wild, all I had

to do was tell the next person he could write in my book if everyone whispered instead of yelled. Whoever's turn was next always laughed wildly with pleasure and was then eager to immediately shush everyone so he could have his turn.

Valentine's Day came, and though I am personally disgusted with the idea of this sappy greeting card holiday, the kids love it, especially because it is a time for them to let each other know about their enduring, yet fickle crushes. I also remembered how much I loved it as a child, so I concluded this would be a good time to give them their own books so they would LEAVE ME ALONE to write, and I could document my curiosity of what they would do with their own teeny notebook.

I could not be there on the actual day, so I dropped my valentines off thinking Aaron would give them to the children with the others, but he set them aside for me to hand out. When I came into class 2 days later, Karla was waiting for me and instantly screamed, "Can we have our Valentines now?" They had been asking incessantly for two days about the packages I had left, and the anticipation was literally killing them, as Patrick so flamboyantly demonstrated when he feigned choking and falling to the floor when I told him, "Not yet." All day I joked that they would have to wait until next year since Valentine's Day had ended. They laughed, and it made them declare over and over, "NOOO, we want them now!" which turned into the guffawing chant, "We want them now! We want them now!" until I happily surrendered.

They were all elated about their little black books, except Abigail who stated, "I already have a diary." I told her that she could keep it and save it for later when she had finished writing in hers, though just as soon she was writing in her new one with the others. I was entirely astonished at how appreciative some of the children

were when the next day Charlie, who had been absent when I gave them out, said in his emphatic and sincere voice, “Sarah, you gave me a book. THANK YOU!” Lindy was also thrilled and proclaimed, “You *finally* gave us books like yours!”

Many of them kept them as close as possible, but by the very nature of children, half of them had misplaced them within two or three weeks. Many carried their books with them conducting their own research, and many giddily pretended they were writing secret things about me. Some made the books their diaries, keeping the content to themselves, but many were eager to show me all of the letters and words they had written, or pictures they had drawn. They loved to sit on the floor alone with me or in groups to help them write and draw, or to copy what I was doing. Surprisingly, though 7 of the children still had their teeny notebooks throughout following weeks, they continued to want to write in mine, and I saw how a large piece of their interest in my notebook and the laughter that came from it, was a desire to interact with me. They were using it to build our relationships.

Isaac had been sick at the time I gave the notebooks to the children, so I wondered what would happen when he finally got his... and then I saw. He carried it with him whenever he was allowed, and he was the only child who had filled every page, and had never misplaced his book by the end of the year. Since he loved writing and drawing, it was the perfect place for him to do these things with the unassuming privacy that he needed and desired to successfully participate.

Meanings

The first important implication for the laughter that surrounded my notebook is that children really love novelty, and something novel that is common to a group of

children gives them something to share that is only theirs, and creates a shared secret or ritual that they all take part in, though in different ways. The excitement and laughter and pleasure of novelty allows the interaction to continue for an undefined, yet lengthy period of time, essentially until the stimulus is removed, or the children no longer consider something novel. Something that is new to most participants in a frequently interacting group is rare, but when it happens it gives those involved a commonality, which becomes the instigator for many future interactions or conversations. With novelty comes laughter, and with continuous novelty comes continuous laughter. Perhaps finding those things that are novel to an entire group and creating shared experiences is one way to provoke more involved and enduring interactions with others.

I also found that for children, much happiness and subsequent laughter comes from an ownership of adult-like things that adults support, in this case having a book that was like mine. Having the exact thing that I had made them feel important, especially because I think the majority of them really liked and looked up to me. Owning something the same as mine also helped bridge the gap between child and adult, and child and adult possessions, and my notebook helped give them a perceived adult-status. My enjoyment in journaling was positively copied, and many of the children who initially showed little or no interest in writing, soon became thrilled about marking in their secret black books. Aaron clued me in to another possibility for the books' success when he said, "The children really like having small things." Kids are small and they like small kid-sized things despite their desire to be grown up. They are caught in the middle of enjoying childhood but desiring more

independence. Being able to act like children and adults simultaneously is absolutely appealing.

Also evident was that the meaning of the notebook, and the laughter it created, changed over time. At first, the laughter originated from the children desiring to interact with me and get my attention using my notebook. Then, when they had their own, more laughter resulted from the secrecy it allowed, which gave us something secret in common. As they wrote in their new books, they laughed and were delighted to be successfully creating what they wanted. Thus, the laughter that was demonstrated throughout the semester facilitated social interaction, imagination through secrecy, and a positive sense-of-self since they could be considered nothing but successful while using it.

Not More Knots!

On the day that I tied more than 40 individual shoes, I concluded that shoe tying was one of my primary responsibilities in kindergarten. It seemed as though laces were always undone and flopping about at the same time, and many children's shoes had laces of a poorly-engineered makeup that would not stay tied at all, no matter how many knots I put in them. Sometimes I wanted to tie their shoes so tight they would never be able to untie them again, and their feet would stop growing like the tiny bound feet of Chinese concubines.

Adam was the one who had the most constantly dangling laces, and at least once an hour he was placing his shoes in front of me to tie. After I had already tied his shoes 6 times in one day, they just as soon came undone again. He plopped his

foot on my lap to tie once more. I sighed, pretending to be bothered, and exasperatedly declared, “AGAIN?” He lets out guttural snort noise that sounds like he is choking, and then clutches his stomach and falls to his back on the floor guffawing with tears in his eyes. I laughed with him, and once again tied his shoes.

This game with Adam continued throughout my time in kindergarten, and he never tired of it. It was obvious that he enjoyed our game, and after I had not seen him for a week and a half the first thing he did was run into the classroom laughing and saying, “Sarrrrraahhhhh, look at my shooooooess.” It immediately became a game of anticipation, as I often changed my responses to him when he presented his foot, and he waited to see how I would handle each shoe-tying event. Sometimes I would jokingly refuse and walk away, other times I would tie his laces together or in impossible knots. After awhile he would no longer ask me to tie them for him, but point at them and laugh.

Soon I saw how actively he was pursuing our game, when I saw him untying his shoes on purpose so he could pester me again. He gasped when I caught him, and laughed wildly at my wide-eyed face and hand on my hip stance, knowing I had busted him, which he found implausibly funny. Thereafter, Adam would often tell me not to tie his shoes in double knots, because he liked to be able to untie them again easily, and continue our game.

Meanings

This game was wholly about Adam finding a way to connect with me, and me with him. This shoe tying game is a terrific example of Adam and me interacting with something silly, and it was a great connection between us that always ended

positively. For Adam, it was always something he could count on to make me laugh, and it was always something I knew I could use to get his attention and make him laugh. Of course when he would laugh, so would I; and when I would laugh, so would he; so we both laughed together every time. It was the constancy of this positive ending, as well our varying and novel responses to the game that allowed it to endure. Overall, it was a game that helped our relationship begin, develop, and sustain throughout our time together in kindergarten, or as Adam would designate it, “*kid*’ergarten.

Teeth and Their Collector



Centuries ago in Europe, it was thought that if a witch got her clutches on a child's tooth, a curse could be placed on that child, so it became common practice to bury children's baby teeth in the garden or throw them in a fire to thwart this unfortunate curse in its surety. As people migrated to the United States, many of the same beliefs and superstitions followed, though the child's pillow became the more convenient hiding place, and parents could easily switch the tooth in the middle of the night for a treat or coin. When the children asked who was taking their teeth, the story of the Tooth Fairy was born. Now when children question what the Tooth Fairy does with all the teeth, they are told to go outside on a clear night and look high up into the sky where countless glimmering and sparkling stars will be seen; all children's little teeth.



Figures 17-20. Kindergarten Teeth

I had to revisit my experiences as a child in order to appreciate just how important this tooth loss was for the children. I easily remember having my first loose tooth, or at least one that I considered loose; the one I knew would be the first to go that I could feel wiggle a little bit even if my parents could not see it moving back and forth because my chubby fingers were covering it as I shook it fervently.

It is evident by these photographs, that after many centuries the Tooth Fairy is still in bigtime business, though I wonder how she affords the price of teeth, as the going rate is now anywhere from 1 to 10 dollars a tooth. When I found this out I went in search of my own personal molar collection since I figured each molar should be worth at least 20 dollars a piece by now. I even tested my own, hopefully permanent teeth for wiggleness...just in case.

This subject of the Tooth Fairy became so common for many of the children that it remained a prominent theme throughout the semester in many ways, and even those children who were not quite yet at the falling out stage were excited with anticipation. The only problem with this tooth loss stage, is that I am convinced if children are to get any germy sickness transmittable by mouth, it is sure to happen. Their fingers are ALWAYS on their teeth.

When the first tooth fell out during the schoolday, it was quite a hullabaloo. We were standing in the hallway, where suddenly Karla was standing with 3 other children in the typical quarterback huddle with their arms around each other's shoulders. Suddenly Jeremy shrieks, KARLA LOST A TOOTH!!!!" but you would have thought she had lost her head, rather than a tooth, by his head-swiveling yelp.

She danced around singing and laughing, “I lost a tooothhhhh. I lost a tooothhhhh.” She could not wait for the Tooth Fairy to come and take it away to her castle.

After this first tooth loss, there were teeth dangling about everywhere. Jeremy was anxious to start the process and walked around for an entire day laughing and provoking me towards insanity with his fingers latched on to his tooth that was not yet loose. He wiggled it persistently saying, “Look, is it loose? Is it loose? Feel it. Wiggle it.” I shook it hoping it would bring him satisfaction, and though I could not really feel it moving, I assured him that it would not be long.

When Julia lost her first bottom tooth, she walked around relentlessly giggling, “Look at my lizard face.” She would clench her teeth together and poke her tongue as far as she could out of her tooth hole while making a slurping, hissing sound with her eyes bugged. This was the new baby lizard face as opposed to the one where she stuck her tongue out of her entire mouth. It made me snicker every time. Lindy was thrilled that she was the leader in the tooth loss, as she was older and her front four had already fallen out, so she had already experienced the appealing mystery of the Tooth Fairy. She would push her hair from her eyes and declare to Julia, “I know JUST what it feels like.” The most hilarious to me was Abigail, who lost her 2 front top and 2 bottom teeth all within two weeks, and the result was a gigantic cavernous smile that made everyone who looked at her and heard her talk giggle with adoration.

And finally, on the day that Isaac lost his first tooth, we had just returned from a fieldtrip and he was standing against the wall with a huge grin on his face. All it took was my approach for him to come to me and slowly reveal what he had cupped

in his hand. He whispered to me with his eyes wide, "I lost a tooth." "Which one is it?" I asked. He opened his mouth and pointed to the empty hole. Knowing that he does not like spectacles, I quietly inquired if he wanted something to keep it in, and he quickly nodded his head yes. We went to the office to get him one of the tooth-shaped, tooth holding containers on a string that children can wear around their necks. Though he did not tell anyone else about his tooth, the other children saw the container and became interested. Isaac happily showed his tooth to anyone who inquired, and he clutched onto his container while smiling for the rest of the day.

I had many conversations with individuals or groups of children about what it meant to lose teeth and what the Tooth Fairy was all about:

Sarah: "Why do your teeth fall out?"

Karla: "Because the big ones want to grow and there isn't enough room for all of them."

Don Jeffrey: "So you can chew more things."

Lindy: "So we can BITE more things." She giggles.

Charlie: "I will bite you!!!" He laughs and pretends to chew on Lindy's arm which starts a laughing and shrieking spell.

Addie: "So we can be grown up."

Abigail: "The Tooth Fairy needs them."

Sarah: "For what?"

Abigail: "She makes them into jewelry to sell where she lives in her palace."

Sarah: "What does the Tooth Fairy look like?"

Patrick: "She looks like my mom." I am unsure if Patrick is suggesting that

he knows the Tooth Fairy is his mom, so I am quiet because I do not want to spoil the other children's fantasies.

Sabrina: "She has blonde hair and looks like a butterfly."

Sarah: "Does the Tooth Fairy have teeth?"

Lindy: "Duhhhhh!!!! Of course. She's the Tooth Fairy."

Julia: "Yeah she has teeth, but if she collects teeth from kids that she likes more, she can take hers out and give herself prettier ones."

The entire group laughs with Patrick and Charlie hollering, "NOOOOO!" and the rest screaming, "YESSSSSSS!!!!!!!!!"

I loved the way I could harass the children about the teeth they could not leave alone, and when they would not keep their hands out of their mouths, I always suggested I would gladly assist them with the removal. They screeched their heads off with pleasure when I chased them around the playground with my fingers outstretched, pretending I would hold them down and pull it myself when I captured them. They would always eventually let me seize them and scream with delight until breathless, "NO!! NOOOOOO!!!! NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!!!!" while I inched towards their mouths. They guffawed until there were tears in their eyes, and when I would let them go they could not wait to be caught again. They also cherished the idea of the traditional way to remove teeth by tying one end of a string to a doorknob and slamming the door to pull it out, and all it took was me holding or swinging a string around for them to happily squeal like piglets in cool filth.

Meanings

I was so excited to watch these children lose a piece of their childhood, and I think it was exactly this that caused much of their laughter surrounding this monumental event; it was part of their transition from being a child to becoming more grown up and adult-like. There is also something quite titillating about a part of your body falling out, and the subsequent hole that a missing tooth creates feels funny to the tongue, and looks funny to the viewer.

Interesting about the Tooth Fairy scenario is that every child was always at a different stage of this tooth loss, and there was always anticipation involved for everyone. The children who had already lost teeth laughed because they felt successful at already achieving this childhood transition, especially because they could talk about the experience firsthand. Those who had not yet lost them knew what was to come, and the excitement only grew when a tooth actually started wiggling.

The fantasy of believing in the Tooth Fairy also triggered much laughter and drove the children's creativity as they tried to describe who she was, where she lived, and what she looked like. There seems to be an inherent laughter built into believing in something imaginary and magical. Another important finding is though children will naturally continue to engage in things that they find humorous or pleasurable, a teacher can further promote this continuity by engaging in the play with the children, as well as provoking them to think about what they find so funny. Asking children questions about events and supporting their answers and creativity will only spawn more questions, creativity, and laughter.

The Mean Lunch Lady

Lunch is a wonderful and disgusting time. The children pull apart the food they have been given, eat some of it, drop part of it on the floor, mix some of it together milk included, and dare each other to eat the gross concoctions. Most of the children eat a little, though I am always exasperated at how much goes to waste. Isaac was the only one who ever ate bread crusts, and I always joked with Aaron about how many pounds of uneaten crusts must go into landfills each year. More than eating, lunchtime is a time for socializing, acting up, being funny, and laughing.

Each day of my research I willingly ate lunch with the children. I chuckle while reflecting on my conversation with Aaron on my first day when I walked with the class to the cafeteria, and asked him if I was allowed to eat with kids. He said, “Yes,” and then hesitated....., “but you know you don’t have to.” I know why I was the only adult at the school who chose to sit amongst them, as it is a very high volume, high energy, terribly overwhelming, and quite messy time, and one that I would likely reconsider if I was the one with them thirty-five hours a week.

I knew I had to eat lunch with them for the sake of my research, because I had experienced snack time with preschoolers and had seen that the process of eating together facilitated some the most frequent and funny interactions. It was a prime opportunity to see them at their best-worst and I loved it, though it is certainly not for the faint of heart.

The humor that surrounds and permeates lunchtime is infusive and contagious, and since eating is now a rote activity to them, they can focus all of their energy on being preposterous. I automatically thought that the children would not

want me present during lunch so they could goof off more, yet it was this goofing off that they wanted me to be a part of. If I, an adult, accepted their barbaric antics, then it was OK, and I think they sensed that I definitely accepted more than others. I think children need to be allowed to goof off, though I did try to thwart them from playing with and wasting their food. Soon I came to see how much these children counted on my being there during lunch, as first thing in the morning they were combating for my lunch time sitting commitment, and they always included me in their tomfoolery.

When the children got to a rambunctious point that even I could not support, I often did not have the chance to correct them, as there was always the presence of The Mean Lunch Lady, a theme that laughingly persevered throughout the year. I know the importance of the lunchtime disciplinarian to tame the pack, though because of the following story which seems to keep slinking into my memory, the Mean Lunch Lady's initial presence made me quite meek.

I was in second grade and we were having pigs in a blanket for lunch at school. I sat down to eat and began to dig into the blanket of dough with my spork, but when I got through the dough I came to a hot dog that was completely desiccated and blackened. Hungry, I began to tear through the skin to eat the moister inside, and ultimately leave something that looked like a hollowed out shell. One of the Mean Lunch Ladies swooped over, began her demonic cackle, and crowed to her other Mean Lunch Lady friends, "HEY!!! LOOK AT WHAT THIS GIRL HAS DONE TO HER HOT DOG!!!" The rest of the Mean Lunch Ladies waddled over and began pointing at it with their talons, and roared until every child in the cafeteria was staring at me and laughing along. Thereafter, I have been timid around lunch ladies because

one described in the morning. The children would sit on both sides of two long tables, and 3 or 4 smaller groups would form based on who was sitting next to whom. The effect that this would create would be several smaller groups loudly talking and playing while trying to talk over (and with) the other small groups at the table. Absolute pandemonium.

The escapades that took place at lunch usually went something like this: Don Jeffrey pretends to brush his teeth with worms, which is really spaghetti, and it gets on his face. Charlie slams down his apple on the table, and it makes Abigail's goldfish dance like a handful of fleas. The Mean Lunch Lady interjects, "QUIET DOWNNNN CHILLLLDREN!!!!" Addie and Abigail cannot stop laughing and Charlie cannot stop doing it, despite my attempts to tell him to behave. He laughs and says to everyone paying attention, "Do you want me to smack myself with this apple? Do you? Do you? I'll do it." Before anyone can answer apple segments fly everywhere. Isaac is smiling but he is the only one focused on actually consuming his food. The Mean Lunch Lady bellows, "I SAID, QUIET DOWNNNN!!!!" and she approaches the table with a venomous scowl and a few of the children speak a little more quietly, though it does not last long.

Brady is kicking the bar underneath the table and Patrick hollers at him, "I will chop off your smile," as he makes a karate motion with his hand hitting the table thunderously. "SILENNNNNCE!!!" the Mean Lunch Lady shrieks. Adam has brought his usual jello that I joke is brains, and he yells, I am going to steal your brain and pretends to grab the top of my head. My missing brain prevents me from talking, though today Adam's howl makes me unable to stifle my laughter. Julia pokes me in

the side while Karla whispers from across the table, “Sarah, be careful, here she comes.” We all giggle and look down to our food until she passes. Then the mayhem continues.

Addie drops her spork, and laughingly pleads with me to go and get her a new one so she does not have to walk past the Mean Lunch Lady. I shake my head and say, “NO WAY!! Why should we both be eaten?” though I eventually go with her and we tiptoe past while chuckling. While we are gone we hear, “ITTT’S TOOOO LOOOUUUDDDD!” and Addie chuckles and pulls me flush to the wall to hide. We get back to our seat and Addie sighs, “Whew, that was close.” Abigail, Addie, Julia, and Karla are giggling at our successful adventure. Jeremy laughs and affirms, “You almost got BUSTED. You should have worn my camouflage.”

Julia is counting 1200, 1300, 1400, 1500, 20,000 hundred, 18 million hundred. Charlie points at her and says, “You are making me laugh!” and he starts to count with her. Suddenly the Mean Lunch Lady is hovering and taps Charlie on the shoulder with a single talon, and slowly turns around and gasps. “DO YOU NEED TO SIT AT A TABLE BY YOURSELF?” she bellows. This question always makes the children quiet for a moment, because I found that there is no greater punishment for kindergarten children than having to eat their lunch alone, as this is one of the times they enjoy interaction the most.

Six children start singing, “Bringing home a baby bumblebee, won’t my mommy be so proud of me?” while using their hands to chop the table in tune to the music. They laugh so hard they are quivering, and their laughing mouths look like a nest full of ravenous baby birds. “QUUIIIETTTTT!” she shouts. Then the burping

begins. This is something I can never stop successfully, and the children do it as frequently and loud as possible in each other's faces, except mine, and they try to guess what each other has just eaten based on how the burp smells. Gross, but yes, it is side-splittingly funny to them. "FINISH UP YOUR LUNCHES AND THROW YOUR TRASH AWAY!" she bellows. Addie tells me a rhyme, and Charlie tells me a rhyme that doesn't rhyme, which makes it even funnier. We all laugh and laugh while being ever conscious of the surreptitious skulk and subsequent pounce of the Mean Lunch Lady. And so it happened day after day after day....after day.

Meanings

The children were thrilled with exercising the absurdity that they knew they could not get away with otherwise. They liked to interact in a way that they could not ordinarily behave, and they wanted each other to see how fun, funny, and gross they were. The more other children would laugh at them, the more they would laugh themselves, and it was a cyclical and cumulative effect that seemed to rarely have a definite ending point.

However, the laughter surrounding the continuity of the Mean Lunch Lady had a different meaning altogether. As I was second after Aaron in the authority queue in the classroom, the children would usually listen to me when necessary, though in the cafeteria, the Mean Lunch Lady was solely in charge. My relationship with the children was therefore equalized, and I was no longer a teacher but a friend. Because they knew I had a fear of the Mean Lunch Lady's impending wrath, they felt connected to me in a different way, and though we all knew our expression of this fear was exaggerated, it was exactly this embellishment that made it more amusing.

In the lunchroom I was just as vulnerable as them, and though I always went home covered in peanut butter and food bits, I did not care...and my dogs loved it. What they did not know is that by the end of the year the Mean Lunch Lady and I were quite friendly, though I would never expose my secret for the sake of our game.

CHAPTER NINE

Laughter and Learning

With all of the laughter that took place in Aaron's kindergarten classroom, it was inevitable that some of it would provoke learning. The connection between learning and laughter is one that is mostly unknown and assumed, as it is challenging to definitively measure, so I sought to watch what things in the curriculum the children laughed at and enjoyed the most, and how these concepts showed carryover in learning from day-to-day. This chapter looks at some of the things the children found highly laughable, and how they continued to demonstrate learning through laughter over time. I will also focus on how laughter can be used to facilitate social learning, especially with those things that are often difficult or taboo for an adult to discuss.

Conceptual Learning

The primary prerequisite for a child to learn is that he or she must be interested enough in a stimulus to pay attention, and once that child's attention is captured, the stimulus must remain appealing enough to make a child stay focused. I found that parts of the curriculum that had a large element of fun, humor, and laughter could do exactly these things, the most consistent being books and music.

Planets and the Solar System

One subject that the children seemed to particularly enjoy was the planets and solar system, and Aaron's love of astronomy continued to facilitate this learning and

interest over the semester. Because he taught these subjects to the children through multiple media, including music, books, and fun demonstration, it captured everyone's attention, and this fact was seen when the children continued to demonstrate their knowledge of the solar system through their self-chosen activities and play.

Every child in the class knew the planets because of a song they frequently sang and loved.

“Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars
These are planets, not our stars.
Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus
The solar system is for us.
Neptune, and Pluto.”

Though this song does not have humorous lyrics, it was the way in which the children sang the song that made it a funny and continued source of interest. Aaron would play it on his guitar and have them sing it fast or slow, loud or soft, and the children loved trying to outdo the other singers. He would play it and then stop abruptly after Neptune, hesitating while the children shrieked with anticipation, and then the children would scream Pluto as fast as their mouths could utter it. Even Isaac tapped on his leg in tune to the music.

Aaron also extended the musical learning of the planets by doing fun demonstrations, like when the children were learning that the earth revolves around the sun one time each year. He took out a large blue beanbag to show how the earth rotates on its own axis while simultaneously revolving around the sun. They

immensely enjoyed the exhibition, but what they found funniest was relating all of our ages to how many trips we had made around the sun. Julia screams 5, Don Jeffrey figures out almost 6, and the rest of the children declare the number of times they had orbited. However, in their short lives and understanding of what constitutes being old, what ended up causing the biggest riot, was learning that I had made almost 31 trips, and Aaron had made 54. Most of the children simultaneously yelled and laughed, “WOW! NO WAY,” or “That’s a LOT of times.” Lindy shouts, “You must be TIRED!!!!” and I told her, “You have NO idea!!!” One evening Aaron even brought his telescope to school so the children could see the moon and stars up close.

I was somewhat taken aback at how much the children incorporated their learning of the solar system into their play, and it became common to go to outer space when I got suckered into pushing them on the tire swing each day. These tire swing interactions always occurred in groups with 3 children, because 3 can fit on the tire swing and there was never an extra space open. The following tire swing giddiness all started on the day when Aaron was telling the class about a shuttle landing on Jupiter’s moon of Titan, so off we went.

Sarah: “Where do you want to go today?”

Karla: “Titan!!!”

Sarah: “What will we eat on Titan?”

Don Jeffrey: “Space food.”

Julia: “EEEEWWWWW!! THAT’S NASTY!!!!” She says it

emphatically with a disgusted, scrunched up face, and we all laugh.

Sarah: “How do you go to the bathroom in space?” Their eyes broaden and

they start to giggle.

Don Jeffrey: “I guess you would have to go in your space suit.” They all laugh and shout, “EEEWWWWW!!”

Karla: She points her finger as when one has a eureka moment and laughs, “You would bring a toilet with you!!”

Julia: “Let’s go to Mercury now. Bring some sunscreen because it is really hot and you will get a sunburn!!!”

Sarah: I push the swing high for takeoff and they squeal with pleasure. I yell, “Oh, no!!!! We were going too fast to land and missed Mercury and we are going to run out of gas. What is the next planet where we can land?”

Don Jeffrey: He starts to sing, “Mercury...” and screams, “VENUS!!!”

Sarah: We land to refuel and I ask, “Where to now?”

Karla: She confidently states, “Earth is next but let’s not go there because we have to live on Earth all of the time and we are on an outer space vacation!”

Julia, Don Jeffrey, and Karla all start to sing the planet song again and are quite thrilled to be going to the red planet of Mars next, because that is where the friendliest space aliens live. We only made it to Saturn that day, but all three of them knew which planet we would start on next time.

Other Laughable Learnable Things

There were many other things that the children learned that caused much laughter and carried over into other activities. The followings song, which taught

them about letter sounds, was one of the most popular, and they often laughed at the content of the lyrics as well as the fact that they could remember them all. They regularly came back to singing this song when they were figuring out what sounds letters in new words made.

A a Andy hit a B ba bump with his

C ca cart at the D da dump.

E eh Emma thought it F fa funny that the

G ga garbage hit her H ha honey.

I i it spilled like J ja juice or a

K ka kite on the L la loose.

M ma metal rained like N na nails into

O o orange P pa pails.

Q qu quick they cleaned the R ra rest

S s so here's a simple T ta test.

U u unload carts V va very carefully

W wa while remembering to eXamine Your Zipper.

Another popular song was “Six Plant Parts,” that talks of “roots and stems and leaves and flowers and fruits and seeds.” The children howled with laughter during the parts of the song that call for examples of each of the plant parts, and they would see who could come up with the correct answer first. When we were outside looking at plants and flowers they often recalled this song and the function of different plant parts.

Most of the children loved books and would pay attention for most of story time, though there were several books that all of the children incessantly requested, laughed at, remembered, and paid attention to all at once:

Miss Nelson is Missing: This book is about a teacher with a class of students who misbehave, so she dresses up as the wicked Viola Swamp to make her class appreciate her. After Aaron's class discovers that Viola Swamp is really Miss Nelson in disguise, they laugh endlessly, anticipating the last pages where her scheme is uncovered to the reader, though remains unbeknownst to her class. They love having knowledge that the child characters in the book do not, and when Viola Swamp comes into the book for the first time, someone usually shouts, "IT'S MISS NELSON!!!"

No, David: This book about a boy who is always in trouble has few words, but explicit and eye-catching illustrations. The children could easily relate to getting in trouble and found it totally funny, however, the highlight of the book is a picture of David running naked down the street, which might be why they love this David book more than the others in the series. They scream, "Let us see the naked picture!!!"

King Bidgood's in the Bathtub: The children tell me this book is funny because a king is too busy and too important to take such a long bath, and they LOVE that no one can get King Bidgood out of the tub. Once again, the funniest page has an illustration of King Bidgood finally exiting the bathtub after the plug is pulled, only wearing a towel.

Other favorite books are *A Bad Case of Stripes*, also by David Shannon of the *No, David* books, *Dr. Seuss's ABC's*, and *Soccer Mom From Outer Space* where Aaron's children sit on their hands until they see the page where the mother dresses up like a pickle, and their effervescent laughter can detonate.

Though these books were inherently funny to them, there were keys to making reading more interesting, the primary being what I call the reading gusto of the reader. I found how integral this was when a volunteer reader came into the classroom and read a much-loved book without passion and without showing the pictures. The kids were lying down, fiddling with zippers and toys, and whispering to each other even though I knew the book was one of their favorites. When the volunteer asked if they wanted him to read another book they all screamed, "NNOOOOO!"

When Aaron reads, the book comes complete with different character voices, reading gusto, and playfulness. The children love it when Aaron will look at the next page by himself, and say, "Oh, you don't want to see that page." He pretends to skip it and the children laugh and scream, "NNOOOOO! We want to see it!!!" Also monumental for many books to be successful, is reading those that make humorous connections to the children's lives, allowing them to relate to the characters and events in the book.

Social Learning

The Unheard of or Unwillingly Heard of

During my first week in kindergarten, Addie was sitting on my lap for music with Aaron, and I bent close to whisper a question in her ear. Before I could finish my thought, she pivoted around, began to wave her hand emphatically in front of her mouth while bellowing for everyone to hear, “YOUR BREATH STINKS!”

I did not realize just how important this topic could be, but after watching the things that most kindergarteners pay attention to and question, I grasped its worth. I find these things so significant because it is my opinion that communication is the largest factor in anything that is to be successful, and it is not something that children in the public schools are usually taught how to do, as it is not a part of the measurable curriculum. Just like math and spelling, communicating with other people and learning how to say sensitive things is not inherently natural for most people, and it needs to be modeled and taught.

What was integral, was the opportunity that these unwillingly heard of things provided for discussion, building relationships, and developing social skills. Whereas most of these quite common incidents are usually sternly reprimanded by many adults and teachers or not talked about at all, these situations allowed me to have discussions with children about things that are not usually talked about openly or thoroughly. One of Aaron’s most unique qualities as a teacher was to address many of these forbidden things that the children were fascinated by. The opportunity to discuss them presented frequently, and I found that it is an imperative lesson for teachers and parents to understand that young children are not born trying to offend or embarrass

others, and if a child is punished during these times, a crucial learning opportunity could be missed.

Most people I know would be horrified if they were anywhere in public and afterwards discovered a piece of food hanging off their chin or a visible booger fluttering with every breath. These are the things that could ruin one's life forever, as it is these times when a person unwillingly shows another he or she is human. I had to think what it was about these stinky breath and booger scenarios that made them so prohibited by adults, yet easily discussed by children.

My first thought is that egocentrism does not end in early childhood, and adults often think something is about them. Those who heard Addie's comment to me were suddenly statuesque, either trying not to breathe in my putrid vapors, or waiting to see how I would handle something so blatantly rude from a child. It is true. I was initially embarrassed, after all, who could ever think MY breath is bad? Everyone's wide-eyed reactions suddenly scared Addie, as she showed me with her saucer-eyed stare and welling tears, but I whispered to her, "It's OK. You aren't in trouble. We will talk about it later." Thirty minutes later we took something to the office and sat in the hallway while having the following conversation:

Sarah: "Let's talk about what you said to me."

Addie: "Are you mad at me?"

Sarah: "No, I'm not mad. Sometimes when you tell people things like their breath is bad it can be embarrassing or hurt their feelings."

Addie: "I didn't want to hurt your feelings on purpose!"

Sarah: "Sometimes it is hard to know what things could hurt a person's

feelings. Have you ever had your feelings hurt?"

Addie: "Ummm. I think so. I threw up at lunch once and everyone said, 'EWWWWW, throw up!!!' It made me cry and my mom came to pick me up."

Sarah: "It is similar to when you told me I had bad breath and everyone heard. Maybe next time you could whisper it to me quietly."

Addie: She covered her mouth and giggled, "OK. You wouldn't be embarrassed if I whispered?" She whispered in a voice louder than a whisper, "Your breath stinks. Like that?"

Sarah: I chuckled at her understanding and replied, "Almost."

Addie: She hugged my neck and rested her head on my shoulder and giggled, "It's not THAT bad."

We devised a secret code that next time my breath was less than desirable she would squish the tip of her nose with her index finger of one hand, and tug on her earlobe with the other, and thankfully I learned that she was not always telling the truth when she did it. Often she would attempt this action, but could not coordinate it correctly, which always ended in peals of laughter. We talked over the day about how everyone is different and some people might still get upset even if she whispered.

It was evident to me that Addie was learning about communicating sensitively with others, because on subsequent occasions she asked me if something had hurt my feelings or if I was embarrassed. By making light of and laughing about something

that I could have gotten angry about, Addie became more aware of different ways to talk to people about potentially embarrassing or hurtful issues.

After Addie and I talked about the bad breath incident she made sure to point out to other children the times when they were hurting others' feelings. She kept telling them they needed to whisper things. One week after Addie and I had our talk, Adam was standing next to me in line and he started giggling.

Adam: "Sarah, come here. I have to tell you something." He dragged me around the corner and stood on his toes to tell me something.

Sarah: I started chuckling because he was being so secretive and I said, "What do you have to tell me?"

Adam: "You have something on your bottom."

I immediately started to feel around on my butt fearing what I would find that no one else had the audacity to tell me. I soon pulled a smiley face sticker from my right cheek and a sticker that said, "MY NAME IS," from my left. I had to laugh about how many people had seen my butt stickers and had chosen not to inform me. However, because of Addie's focus on telling people things appropriately, Adam told me with subtlety, practicing Addie's suggestion of telling people things in a sensitive manner. Hence, through Addie's relationship with me, and her relationship with Adam, she taught him what she learned about discussing taboo issues.

The Art of Nosepicking

"Inside everybody's nose

There lives a sharp-toothed snail,

So, if you stick your finger in,

He may bite off your nail.
Stick it farther up inside,
And he may bite your ring off.
Stick it all the way, and he
May bite the whole thing off” (Silverstein, 1974, pg. 75).

I often recited this poem to the children, as it was one of my most laughing of childhood, and it fit perfectly for them in situations where I was trying to address their zest for nose-picking. I would be neglecting a major observation of my research if I did not write of the nose-picking phenomenon that is highly prominent in kindergarten, and I assume much later in elementary school, though through social learning it becomes less common over time. This is another matter that seems to be rarely discussed with children, as it is just something that you are not supposed to do, so once again I tried to figure out how to address something that is quite natural for people to do, but is considered pretty gross when others are watching.

I have developed a nose-picking theory about what makes the nose so appealing. First, being in the stage called childhood assumes that one is in a state of discovery, and the inside of the nose is one of the things that needs meticulous investigation. If the nose were not meant to be explored, then one’s finger would not fit so perfectly inside of it. Second, because children need to sit and listen more in kindergarten than their previous experiences, they need to keep their hands busy to listen sufficiently. As it is quite hard for children to sit with their hands in their laps for extended periods of time, their fingers find the warmest and most fitting place to go; the nostril.

There is also an unstated nose-picking quota that must be filled, or rather removed, which is met on both an individual and group level. Each child must pick an average of X minutes per day, but also within a group of more than 7, at least one child must be picking at all times. And despite what most children believe, you do not dig to China through the sandbox but through the nose. For most, it is gross no matter how you look at it especially if it is eaten after it is removed, though I am in the mindset that if boogers get eaten, it only decreases the probability that they will end up on me.

The principal point, is that kindergarten children are still acquiring the social skills necessary to know that many of their behaviors are extremely unbecoming. They lack social finesse, and though I am convinced that one day they will not pick their noses vigorously in public, they may always find boogers very funny. In kindergarten, they are not embarrassed when they are caught picking their noses, so this early age may be the perfect time to address this issue before their reputations depend on it. For now, they compare their deepest findings, and joke about wiping it on each other and scream with laughter rather than actual disgust about it being gross. I unfortunately find it funny too, and perhaps it is because I see the humor in bodily functions, can I talk openly about it.

In fact, Aaron sings a song about this nose-picking, perhaps to make the children just a little more aware of their manners without causing too much attention to something that is really a natural progression of development. This is his natural and wonderful way, and the song makes the children laugh feverishly and then point out others' nose-picking behavior. Here is my shorter version of the song.

You shouldn't put your finger in your nose

You shouldn't put you finger in your nose

When there's something in your nose, all you have to do is blow!!!!

Your nose is just not where your finger goes

Lousy Lice

And then the lice came, and I reflected back to my own elementary school experience when lice were treated like a plague you could get just by looking at someone who had it. In first grade when someone in my class had lice, most of the children were wary about talking to or being near that child for what I am sure was an intolerable period of time to the one afflicted. Because of this shunning, I was uncertain as how to approach the children to tell them that I was looking for bugs on their head, and the last thing I wanted was for them to be grossed out or develop the stereotypes that are often associated with people who have lice as dirty, poor, and highly contagious, which was exactly what I had grown up believing.

I went to kindergarten and all I got was this lousy lice, and I now completely understand what it means to say you are feeling lousy. My head had been slightly itchy for two days without me thinking much about it, until I suddenly looked around at both kindergarten classes and saw lots of little hands scratching scalps like monkeys. Because I have been around lice more frequently than the average person, I offered to do the head checks, and got out a big box of Popsicle sticks that would help me get the job done.

It was rest time, so I captured children to check as they were coming in and out of their reading and computer groups. I notified them, "I am going to check your

heads for lice, but do not worry because I am the fastest lice catcher around.” I hear Aaron tell Addie that it is time for me to check her brain and this immediately becomes something desirable to have done. They are suddenly fascinated and line up for their turn begging, “Is it time for you to check my lice?” Everyone’s heads start tickling and they inquire, “DO WE HAVE BUGS? What is a lice? What do they eat? What eats them? Gross!!!” Then they laugh, “Check my head again. PLEASE!!!! I think I have lice this time!!!!” It ended up that only two children had lice...and me, and the children were overly pleased that teachers could get it too. For the rest of the year when their attention was waning, I could always get them to focus and listen by telling them I would send my lice after them. When I would pretend I was going to rub my head on them, they would beg for mercy and another chance to listen, though after awhile all I had to do was point to my head and not say anything at all to make them laugh or listen

By making the lice a light subject, treating it playfully, and talking about it openly, Aaron and I were able to let the children know that lice is just another part of life. The unfortunate fact that my own head was inundated with nits and scampering lice showed them that anyone can get it, even teachers, and lice is little more than an itchy annoyance that can be very, very difficult to get rid of. They enjoyed hearing how it took me three hair washing treatments to get rid of it all. We also deduced that lice eat blood but lots of things can eat lice for protein, including humans, though they would probably taste disgusting. As Aaron’s class will laughingly advise you, “If you are going to eat lice, do it with plenty of rice and lots of spice, because those are the only things that might make it nice!”

CHAPTER TEN

Meaning and Applications for Teachers

Based on my interactions and observations of Aaron and the children and what worked in his classroom, I will briefly write about some of the key pieces to having a laughing classroom that facilitates positive relationships and learning. A teacher who does not use laughter will not necessarily have a class that is unsuccessful, though a laughing classroom can help children hang on to the laughing spirit of childhood that helps them develop their sense-of-self, relationships, and willingness or ability to learn.

Image of the Teacher and Child

Most important to a teacher making a choice to use laughter and humor in the classroom is personal reflection, with particular focus on what kind of teacher he or she is and wants to be. As teaching is as much about the teacher as it is the child, a teacher must first concentrate on his or her teaching style and personality. Aaron has an inherent personality trait of silliness along with a strong sense-of-self, and therefore, he uses humor and laughter effortlessly and naturally throughout the children's schoolday. As a teacher is continuously negotiating the roles of the teacher and child, while striving to achieve a successful classroom, this is especially important, as a teacher needs to be willing to give up some of the control that divides children and teachers that will allow this laughter and playfulness to happen. Using laughter and humor requires that a teacher be willing to entertain her creative mind,

ideas, and silly side, and ultimately, a teacher must be prepared to disclose more herself to the children.

Part of teachers reflecting on their ability and desire to use and support laughter and humor, is getting back in touch with the meaning of childhood while reflecting on personal perceptions of the child. Though we can never really mentally return to our youth with our adult perspective, we can reflect on those magical, humorous, profound, or seemingly meaningless events that took place in our childhood lives to relive some of the excitement, enjoyment, and life perspective that dissipates as we age. The image of the child as competent, exuberant, and creative is integral to a teacher who wishes to support laughter and humor, or they will not be possible or successful.

General Techniques for the Classroom

The ways that laughter and humor can be supported or fostered in the classroom are limitless, though I have seen that there are a few general techniques that are almost guaranteed and work across age groups comprised of varying backgrounds and personalities.

Know Children and Their Interests

Once a teacher makes a conscious decision to use or support laughter and humor, it is fundamental to know children more personally, especially their personal interests and developmental level. Though the teaching life is a time-consuming one, I cannot stress enough the importance of making attempts to get to know children well, and though it takes more initial effort and time, the results can be priceless. I

suggest that teachers do home visits with each of their new families each year, especially in kindergarten when a child's successful transition into the public school system will impact his or her perception of school throughout the educational experience. Because so many of the children's families were integral to their discussions and experiences at school and subsequent laughter, entering a child's home life, or lack thereof, is monumental to better understanding each child's personal context and background.

However, laughter and humor are still easy even without a teacher learning more about children in this way. By watching what children pay attention to and what makes them laugh, teachers can easily discover what they find interesting or meaningful, and it is these things that children identify closest with that spawn the most laughter. In Aaron's class, the primary internal developmental conflict or interest of most children was what it meant to be a boy or a girl, and he used this as a source of constant playful and humorous conversation that ultimately helped the children develop their sense-of-self and others through laughter. As I saw with the children's interest in my notebook and the Tooth Fairy, following something exciting made the subject remain interesting and laughable, thus promoting more in depth conversations and relationships over time.

Another source of great interest for elementary school children are topics or behaviors such as body noises, bad breath, or lice. Though most teachers find these subjects taboo, inappropriate, or disgusting, they are nonetheless subjects of fascination for children. I strongly believe that if a teacher can get over this initial dislike or fear in acknowledging these issues and behaviors, and learn to address them

with humor, laughter, understanding, and playfulness, it will help children learn to negotiate their childness while learning to address issues sensitively and use laughter at appropriate times.

As I discussed in my case study portraits, laughter is a trait that needs to be nurtured based on the individual personalities, requirements, and interests of each child. By assessing children's different thresholds for laughter and different emotional issues that need to be addressed before laughter can take place, a teacher can learn to develop laughter and humor strategies particular to varying children, and increase the success in using them in the classroom.

Novelty

Make it new!!! Regardless of a teacher's personal teaching techniques and the material that needs to be taught, I have found novelty to be the most integral factor to having a laughing classroom, as well as the easiest to implement. This idea of novelty is in agreement with my personal theory of what makes children (and people in general) laugh the most, the Incongruity Theory of laughter. Within this theory it is believed that anything that is new or exciting that challenges a person's perception of the world as she currently understands it will cause laughter. Because so much has the potential to be new to young children, this idea of novelty for laughing and learning can be used to the fullest with this age group. This novelty can be something as simple as a teacher dressing up as a character in a favorite book, changing the order of activities in a day when children's attention is waning, or introducing an old topic in a new way. Teachers of older children need not fear, because although less is new over time as children age, and finding things that are new to older children can

take more creativity, this approach is sure to be successful and cause much interest, laughing, and learning.

Use Multiple Ways of Learning

The use of multiple ways of learning for teaching concepts will provoke more laughter and learning than using one method alone, especially because using varying methods ensures that each child's personal learning style will be addressed. For example, the way that Aaron taught the children about the solar system through music, books, physical demonstrations, and real experience always made the topic new in a fun or silly way and stimulated frequent laughter, which provoked greater attention to what was happening, and hence, more laughter. Because some children learn best through music, some books, and some complete body engagement, each child has more opportunity to find that method that will help him or her laugh and learn.

Teachers must also focus on the primary developmental areas of growth of the children they are teaching. For example, kindergarten is a time when most children's imaginations are absolutely primed and open, and children are laughingly thrilled with their ideas and creations. By kindergarten teachers focusing on activities that excite this fantasy and creative growth spurt, a child's sense of humor is sure to be stimulated. Activities such as role-playing, puppet shows, charades, or telling stories will support a child's imagination, and the novelty that is inherent in imagination will produce much interest, fun, laughter, and learning.

Set Children up for Success

Way too early in the educational experience, children learn the words fail or wrong, with little focus on learning from mistakes, or learning that making mistakes is beneficial. The teacher should teach that to make mistakes is human, and in many cases humorous, and knowing how to appreciate the humorous side of mistakes is vital. In addition to making light of mistakes, a teacher will inspire much laughter if she sets children up for success. I have seen that children laugh excitedly with pleasure when they are successful at something new, and what children laugh at in a classroom depends upon them being able to demonstrate knowledge of the known, while mastering the new and interesting. The teacher who sets a child up for laughing success needs to believe that kindergartners are often less interested in the right answer or end product of something, and more focused on the process and imagination involved in getting there.

Have Group Time

No matter what the grade level of the children, a morning group time may be one of the most useful tools to stimulate laughter and humor. Groups provide a time for teachers and children to learn more about each other, while creating a time of day that organizes and solidifies the group. In Aaron's class the morning group was the time of the day with the most laughter, and it set the mood for the entire day, something that could be useful for children of any age. Because children coming together in a group increases the potential number of interactions and the chance that laughter will occur, group is an ideal time for the teacher to set up this environment that will provide positive laughing feedback and success for those involved.

Support Absurdity

Allowing a child to act like a child might be the most difficult thing for a teacher, but I have seen that allowing time for absurdity, as well as playful, joking banter will help children develop a greater sense-of-self and relationship skills. Children love to act and talk silly while throwing their bodies about in funny, silly ways. If a teacher takes away or does not support these behaviors at certain times, it will only surface when the teacher wants it the least. Over the past 10 years I have been in more than 100 different classrooms as a therapist and graduate student, and have found that what most teachers would consider behavior problems is simply children appropriately expressing their inherent and enormously silly personalities.

Enhance What You Already Know

For the teacher who does not feel he or she has the time or resources to create brand new activities for learning, there are still unlimited possibilities for using and inspiring laughter. If a teacher focuses on enhancing that which she is already doing by using laughter, humor, or silliness it will be easy. I found one of the easiest ways to make children laugh was with reading books, and this is where a teacher who is willing to let her guard down can easily create an attentive, excited, and laughing audience. All the teacher needs to do is be willing to read with gusto, which includes doing different character voices in an animated manner. This seems a simple suggestion, though it is the one that is implemented the least by teachers, and I cannot tell you how often I have heard a student teacher tell me she was embarrassed to read a book to children in this way.

In conclusion, the use or support of laughter and humor in the classroom can be a highly valuable experience for the teachers and children involved. Once a teacher makes the decision that a laughing approach is right for his or her classroom, there are infinite ways to ensure laughter's success for helping everyone develop their relationships, promote a more positive sense-of-self, and facilitate inspiration and learning.

EPILOGUE

My Return to First Grade

I knew my research would not be complete until I had followed up with the children in my study, but it was mostly precipitated by my own need to see them again. I could not imagine leaving things as they were, with the kindergartners growing into first graders without me. I go inside the front doors of Cartwright Elementary and check into the office, not knowing exactly what I will do when I get there. I was there to eat lunch with the first graders at 11:45, and I was 15 minutes early.

Aaron

I feel out of place, pace a little, say hello to a few people, and decide I will walk down to sanctuary of Aaron Silver's classroom. Everything is the same and nothing is the same, though I think that maybe it is me who is no longer the same. I hesitantly peer in the door and Aaron emphatically waves me in from his roost on his chair. We hug and I am delighted to see him. He is in the middle of a story, and though I did not mean to interrupt I do. I sit down and introduce myself to his new class and two children immediately plop in my lap. There were the preschoolers, now kindergartners, sitting quietly yet excitedly. A child from last year's preschool class says, "Do you remember me from last year?" Out of habit I expected that the kids I knew would be there but of course they are not, and Aaron has a new class of willing and energetic children that seem way too tiny to be in kindergarten. Aaron reports he

is doing well and says, "Please come back anytime. You are always welcome. Come and read a story to them." I assure him that I will.

Abigail

Abigail shyly puts her arms around me, and when I ask how she is she exclaims, "Good, I have a baby brother and I like him but he cries all the time." She sits down with her aunt who has come to eat lunch with her.

Adam

Adam, who still has his lunch packed and does not need to go through the lunch line, comes and sits next to me. He starts to laugh, puts his foot up on the bench next to me and says, "Saaarahhhhhh, Will you tie my shoe?" Our game continues.

Addie

Addie has moved and changed schools.

Brady

Brady notices me sitting when he comes out of the line with his food. He starts to laugh, and puts his tray down, throwing his head back and rolling his eyes at me. He smiles and says, "What are yyooooouuu doing here?" I reply, "I came to bother you," and he exclaims, "I thought so." He sits down by Don Jeffrey.

Charlie

Charlie was absent to school upon my return.

Don Jeffrey

Don Jeffrey sees me and smiles shyly, asking if I remember his dad, who has come to eat lunch with him. I exchange greetings with his dad and I give Don Jeffrey a hug and move on.

Isaac

Isaac eyes me from his place in the lunch line, still smaller than the rest. I wave at him and say, “Hi Isaac!” He waves back while looking right at me, something he never would have done before. After he gets his lunch he sits at a different table from me, though I go and sit by him for a few minutes and ask him how he has been. He nonchalantly replies, “OK,” and says, “I saw you sitting here when I came in and I waved.” I give him a squeeze that I think is more meant for me than him.

Jeremy

Jeremy walks past and looks right at me, turns around, jumps in the air, and screeches for everyone to hear, “SARAH, WHERE THE HECK HAVE YOU BEEN?”

Julia

Julia squeals, “Sarah’s here, Sarah’s here,” and chants SARAH! SARAH! MY SARAH IS HERE!!!!!!” She walks backwards the rest of the way to the lunch room door, smiling and waving. I get up and walk up to her in line, she throws her arms around me and says, “My Sarah! Will you sit by me at lunch?” “Of course I will,” I

reply. The first thing she tells me is that she still has the treasure chest I gave her at the end of the year, but her sister stole two things out of it and it made her mad. I sit by her the majority of lunch, and she tells me about all of the fun she has been having. She has two new rhymes to tell me and questions why I am not writing them in my book.

Lindy

Lindy and her mom were in line for lunch, and for the first time I saw her as shy. She sits with her mom for most of lunch, until her mom comes up to me with Lindy in hand, though Lindy is hiding behind her. Her mom states, “You wanted to say hi to Sarah, why are you hiding?” Lindy says, “Hi, Sarah,” with her now fully grown in teeth showing. I give her a hug lifting her off the ground, she laughs and her shyness dissipates, and she asks if I will come to her first grade class.

Patrick

Patrick walks past me and gives me his large Cheshire Cat grin.

Karla

Karla is also with her parents today and stops to tell me she can't sit by me because her parents came *just* to see her. I laugh, and tell her next time I come she can sit by me.

Sabrina

Sabrina stomps by me in her clunky boots giggles and screams, “Hi, Sarah,” as she sits down to eat lunch.

The Mean Lunch Lady

The mean lunch lady is still there and wholly committed to making the children be on their best behavior. We smile at one another and embrace, exchanging hello’s and nice to see you’s, and then we begin exactly where we left off, talking about the children and the things that are different or still the same. Soon I hear, “QUIIETTT DOWNNNNNNNN!” and Julia and I begin roaring.

Sarah

The air was a comfortable 68 degrees in mid October yet my back was damp with sweat against my car seat. I had made this trip at least 50 times and had never been this nervous or anxious making it. Today was the test; at least it was a test that I had created, and today I would see if I had passed. I drove knowing that soon I would be at the school that safely held the kindergartners that I had adored so much, though now they would be first graders who would look taller and more mature even if they weren’t. There was a chance that they might not remember me, or react differently to me than they had before, and this was the reason I was so nervous. Today was exactly 4 months to the day since I last saw them, and last cried because I would miss them, a fairly short time in the life of an adult but quite lengthy for a 6 or 7 year-old.

I asked where the first graders sat, and hesitantly sat down, only to change my sitting position another 3 times before the kids filed in, in what they considered a line but really looked like one of the constellations that I always pretend I can make out when someone clearly points to it and asks if I can see it. I feel like I am waiting for a loved one to get off the plane, waiting to see the faces of the children I adore, wondering how their summer experiences had changed them, and if they would remember me. Each one remembered me and appeared cheerful that I was back. Most important, they were all still smiling, laughing, and causing complete hysterical mayhem in the cafeteria. I had passed my test.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Children's Ages at Beginning of Study

NAME	BIRTHDATE	AGE AT BEGINNING
Abigail	05/20/99	5years-7months
Adam	07/27/99	5years-5months
Addie	06/07/99	5years-7 months
Brady	05/24/99	5years-7months
Charlie	07/22/99	5years-5months
Don Jeffrey	03/05/99	5years-10months
Isaac	05/16/99	5years-8months
Jeremy	07/09/98	6years-6months
Julia	08/27/99	5years-4months
Karla	10/21/98	6years-2months
Lindy	09/15/98	6years-4months
Patrick	02/22/99	5years-10months
Sabrina	03/27/99	5years-9months

APPENDIX B

School and Classroom Philosophies

Following is the school philosophy of Cartwright Elementary, a mission that guides many of the dedicated teachers within the school.

- ❖ As a school community, Cartwright Elementary School is committed to the vision of making our school “A Growing Community of Learners.”
- ❖ We accept the responsibility to be active advocates for the educational rights of our children, our school, and our community and strive to foster the emotional well being of each child.
- ❖ We hold as fundamental the promise, the dignity, the intrinsic worth, and the unlimited potential of each child who enters our door.
- ❖ We recognize that learning begins at home and extends beyond the classroom.
- ❖ Our school must actively involve our parents, our staff, and our community.
- ❖ We strive to create a learning climate which both respects the unique qualities of each individual, while at the same time promote an understanding of our roles as citizens and stewards of many diverse social groups.
- ❖ We strive to implement our curriculum to encourage all children to reach their potential.

- ❖ We promote a learning climate, which encourages exploration, research, and higher level thinking which promotes life-long learners from preschool and beyond.
- ❖ We strive to foster the emotional well being of each individual learner.
- ❖ We celebrate the successes of our children as they continue in their learning.

Though Aaron did not have a specific written philosophy of teaching and learning, his personal values were transferred into the classroom and were evident in the way that he talked to and supported the children. His philosophy honored those traits that he felt made children most able to learn.

1. Treat everyone fairly (don't make fun of people's bodies, skin color, or how they look or talk).
2. Be kind and generous to other people.
3. Talk about it (solve your problems with communication).
4. Respect other people's bodies and things.

APPENDIX C

Research Proposal for the Montgomery County School System

Investigator: Sarah L. Smidl, M.S.

Institution: Virginia Tech

Start Date of Research: August 25, 2004

End Date of Research: June 2005

Proposed Dissertation Title: A Portraiture of Humor and Laughter in Kindergarten Children: The Giggles and Guffaws That Support Teaching, Learning, and Relationships in the Classroom

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to better understand how the context in which kindergarten children laugh and create humor in the classroom illuminates their relationships with their peers and teachers. I am interested in documenting the laughter and humor that bring children and teachers together, as this relationship phenomenon of using laughter and humor to initiate, build, and sustain relationships was something that I found to be the most integral part during my thesis research on laughter in preschoolers. Also, as I feel relationships are the skeleton of a good and effective classroom, I want to extend these laughter-producing or humorous situations to describe how they have the potential to influence teaching and learning directly.

As kindergarten is filled with transitions and making new friends while trying to understand themselves through them, I hope to see how humorous or nonhumorous laughter is or can be used to help children with their ability to cope with stress or difficult situations as they progress through this understanding. I also wish to investigate how a teacher uses laughter in his or her classroom in order to enhance teaching practices or affect any possible behaviors in the classroom, including discipline, chaos, or the promotion of activities that are necessary for a productive classroom. Finally, because laughter is so personal to me, I hope to continue to enhance my understanding of self through my reflection of the interactions with the children and teacher/s in my study, as once I finish my degree, it could only help me to develop my own future teaching practices as a preschool teacher.

Much of my interest in studying the subject of laughter and humor stems directly from my personal experiences with them throughout my life. I often reflect on my learning style and how certain teachers in my life have been able to stimulate my interest and learning, laughter and humor of which was and continues to be a huge part. In essence, I want to study this complex subject for some very simple personal reasons. I love to laugh and love to watch children laugh. Laughter is fun and can make tedious things fun. Shared laughter is intimate and meaningful in relationships. However, I also want to study laughter and humor for more complex societal reasons, as I feel laughter and humor could have a large impact in our public school system where the play and fun of learning is slowly being drained by the enforcement of higher standards and more accountability.

Procedures and Research Methods:

If my proposal is accepted, the subject pool for my dissertation research would contain a class of kindergarten children, preferably from Prices Fork Elementary School in Blacksburg, VA. I have chosen kindergarten on the basis that I want to extend my knowledge of laughter and humor to slightly older children, as well as be involved in the process of the public school system. I would like to be present in the classroom approximately 15-20-hours per week throughout the 2004-2005 school year.

After gaining approval from the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects, which I am currently waiting for, I would begin my study by writing a letter and consent form to the parents of a particular kindergarten class to present them with the opportunity to let their child participate in my research. I also feel it important to gain assent from each of the children in the study to respect their rights to participate or not participate. If possible, I would like to go on home visits to meet the children prior to school beginning, as I felt this was one of the most important things for many of the children to feel comfortable while I was teaching preschool. I intend to discuss with the children the different methods that I will be using throughout the duration of the study, for example, writing in my journal and using audiotape. The children will be read a simple consent form that they can verbally agree to or sign if they are able to write their name. In the case of non-English speakers, I would utilize their parents for translation.

I want to conduct my study based on the principles and methods of ethnography and portraiture to carry out a qualitative study. As ethnographic research dictates, I want to watch the teacher and children's lives in the classroom, with a role ranging from observer to complete participant. I would like to be involved as much as possible in the workings and process of the classroom and come to know and understand the children well (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Portraiture is a newer and less known methodology that seeks to blend empirical description with artistic expression to create a narrative portrait of those being studied (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). With a combination of these methods I wish to write a dissertation that tells the stories and lives of the children and teachers in the classroom through rich description and through the meanings and perspectives that each participant attaches to his or her experience.

Writing fieldnotes will be the major method that I will use to gather data. By using fieldnotes, I will objectively document the laughter and humor-producing situations that occur while I am in the classroom while watching and interacting with the children.

I am interested in documenting the children's meaning of the laughter-producing situations both as they are occurring and retrospectively, which I will do through child discussion. When it is convenient and not interfering with curriculum, I would like to talk to the children to acquire a better picture of their insider perspectives and thoughts about their own humor and laughter. This could potentially be one of my most useful methods to glean information, as I feel that not enough credit is given to the young child's ability to provide accurate and reliable information. Part of my research goal is to learn how to develop better techniques for discussing ideas with young children, as there is only a scant amount of information

about how even to go about talking to young children. By learning how to ask questions in the right way or through the right medium, I hope to better show what their many capabilities for reflection and deep thought are. I also feel that knowing their perspectives on situations that directly include them is integral to writing an authentic dissertation.

Audiotaping is a method that I feel will be extremely useful in capturing verbatim the dialogues of the children, the investigator, and the teacher. I wish to use it most frequently during individual and group discussions with the children, when these are possible, so that I can focus closely on the children, their interactions, and their gestures, rather than looking away to write fieldnotes (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995).

I also believe the use of videotaping interactions could be beneficial for many reasons. This use of video will allow me to capture even the smallest of body gestures that could increase my understanding of laughter including things as small as a raised eyebrow or a slight upturn of the lips (Goldman-Segall, 1998 & Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995).

Finally, I will use a digital camera in order to take photographs of children during humorous situations. As I know that technology is interesting to children and has the potential to be distracting, I will work out ways with the kindergarten teacher to expose the children to these methods prior to their use, or to use them so they do not disrupt the classroom. All of my documentation and pictures, etc. will be placed in a locked box that only I will have access to.

Overall I am hoping that my presence in the classroom at the beginning of the year, as well as my continued presence throughout it will allow the novelty of my being there to wear off and let the children come to see me as a member of the classroom.

Potential Outcomes:

Despite wanting to study laughter because I love it, there is a growing database of empirical research that suggests laughter is of monumental importance to children. For example, most researched and documented are the social importance of laughter, a few of which include the enhancement of interpersonal relationships, development of group cohesiveness, easing communication, and decreasing social distance (Hertzler, 1970; Masten, 1986). Several studies into the above listed subjects have concluded that laughter is fundamentally a social phenomenon (Hertzler, 1970; Morreall, 1983; Panksepp, 2000; Stearns, 1972). The almost exclusive evidence of the social nature of laughter can be seen in a study by Chapman (1975) which concluded that children laugh more when with a companion than when alone. It has been a general observation that one rarely sees a child laughing alone during his or her play (McComas, 1923). Bainum, Lounsbury, and Pollio (1984) found that laughter only occurs when the child is alone in 5 per cent of all recorded situations, thus reinforcing laughter as a relationship-forming phenomenon. Gregg, Miller, & Linton, (1929) also found that children rarely laugh when they are alone, concluding that laughter is an indication of social awareness and responsiveness to others. This knowledge could be monumental to kindergarten children as they are

learning to negotiate the many relationships and conflicts that dominate this age group.

McGhee & Chapman, (1980) assert that we can gain knowledge about a child's understanding of the world by paying attention to what they laugh at and what they listen to. Looking at what a child laughs at has a lot to say about how he thinks and what he thinks, and can help adults begin to understand the complexity of child development. We can begin to learn about their theories of how things work, and watch the incongruous events that disrupt their perceptions and cause laughter. This could also have great implications when it comes time to assess what a child knows, and it could begin to provide an additional form of assessment to the standardized tests that dominate our public schools.

Laughter can also be monumental in helping a child develop sense-of-self, self-esteem, and a positive outlook as he or she grows to become an adult. By teaching children to develop and use laughter to look at the positive and humorous in everything, they can learn to maintain an attitude that helps give them a more accurate and non-devastating perspective about themselves and their problems, (Michelli, 1998) which can then help them develop a better framework for beginning to learn how to constructively deal with life issues. Psychologists often define an emotionally healthy person as one who has the capacity to laugh, to put things into perspective, and to separate genuine tragedy from mere annoyance (Rogers, 1984). Laughter has also been identified as a factor in creating resilient youth that has a greater capacity to deal with conflict (Carlson & Peterson, 1995). Perhaps this could be the beginning of leads a child to healthier living as an adult. Laughter and humor can create a healthier psychological functioning that directly relates to overall physical health. This includes getting fewer illnesses as well as recovering from illness faster. One statistic says that 50% of all illnesses are due to lifestyle (Michelli, 1998). This demonstrates that adding more laughter and humor to one's life could significantly decrease this chance of illness due to how one lives

I anticipate that this research will provide valuable information regarding how laughter and humor can help develop teacher-child and child-child relationships, and help facilitate learning in the classroom. It may give insight into certain learning styles of children and help teachers to understand the importance of laughter and humor in cognitive, social, and psychological development. Also, it could provide pertinent information for teachers and parents about how to use it in building stronger and less stressful relationships, especially in terms of how to discipline their children and make daily hardships at home and in the classroom easier to handle.

Possible Discussion Questions:

I will ask the children will be informal and directly related to humorous or laughter-producing situations as they naturally occur in the classroom. I feel that they will most often be impromptu, as the children could say or do something that is humorous that I might be able to immediately prod them for their ideas about the content and reasons for the humor. The questions I would ask would try to figure out exactly why they think something is funny or not funny, what led to the situation, or what was the process of the humorous interactions that occurred. For example, if a child told a joke and she and/or others laughed I would ask her, "What made the joke

funny?” I might ask, “What were you doing before you all started laughing.” In no way will any of the questions that I ask be psychologically hurtful to the children, as it my goal to make them happy, and of course, laugh. These discussions would need to be negotiated with the teacher, as I would not typically want to remove them from the classroom, as I feel this creates a false situation that could have an impact on the authenticity of their answers. I also feel it is important to ask children about something immediately after it happens unless there is a visual cue such as a video tape, as the longer one waits to ask, the more inaccurate the information has the potential to become.

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APPENDIX D

Parent Introductory Letter

Dear Parents and Caregivers,

January 10, 2005

I want to introduce myself since I will be spending 3 days a week in Mr. Rosenfeld's classroom for the remainder of the school year. My name is Sarah Smidl (the children call me Sarah) and I am a graduate student in Child Development at Virginia Tech. I spent my first 9 years in Denver and then lived in Ft. Lauderdale and Tucson, Arizona before moving to Blacksburg 6 years ago. My background is in Occupational Therapy and I worked 3 years helping infants and children with special needs become as independent as possible. I also spent 4 years with infants, toddlers, and preschoolers at the Virginia Tech Lab School. It is my goal to teach preschool and write books for caregivers and teachers when I finish my degree.

When I am not at school I enjoy many activities including reading, cooking, hiking, camping, playing darts, writing children's books, and spending time with my 2 dogs and 3 cats.

In Mr. Silver's classroom, I will be starting my dissertation research on the laughter and humor of kindergarten children and teachers. With the information I collect I will discuss the many reasons it is important to developing relationships and learning. I hope that each of you will allow your child to participate in my research by signing the permission form that is attached to this letter and returning it to school. Please email me or call me at my home phone if you have any questions, comments, or concerns before allowing your child to participate. I am looking forward to getting to know you and your children!

Very sincerely,
Sarah L. Smidl
ssmidl@vt.edu
540-961-1585

APPENDIX E

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

Parental Permission Form

Title of Dissertation: A Portraiture of Laughter in Kindergarten Children: The Giggles and Guffaws That Support Teaching, Learning, and Relationships in the Classroom

Investigator: Sarah L. Smidl

I. Purpose of this Research/Project

The purpose of this study is to better understand how the context in which kindergarten children laugh in the classroom enhances their relationships with their peers and teachers. I am interested in documenting the laughter that bring children and teachers together, as this relationship phenomenon of using laughter to initiate, build on, and sustain relationships was something that I found to be the biggest part during my thesis research on laughter in preschoolers. Also, as I feel relationships are the skeleton of a good and effective classroom, I want to show how these laughter-producing situations have the potential to influence teaching and learning directly.

II. Procedures

I will use a combination of written fieldnotes, child discussion, audiotaping, videotaping, and still photos to document laughter situations as they occur naturally in the classroom. All of the children will have an equal opportunity for participation in the study. Only I will have access to the information that I collect and it will be kept in a locked file cabinet.

III. Risks to Participation

Risks to the participants in the study are minimal to none.

IV. Benefits to Participation

There is no guarantee that there will be benefits, and these benefits have not been included in order to encourage you to allow your child to participate. Children may experience the many social, cognitive, psychological, and physiological benefits associated with laughing.

V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

The people with whom I will share the data collected in my study are the investigator (myself), my 4 dissertation committee members, the children in my study, the parents of the children in my study, and the kindergarten teacher/s with whom I am working. I will enforce confidentiality by choosing an alias for each child.

VI. Compensation

There will be no monetary compensation for this study.

VII. Freedom to Withdraw

You are free to withdraw your child from this study at any time.

VIII. Approval of Research

This research project has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, by the Department of Human Development.

IX. Parent’s Responsibilities

I voluntarily agree to allow my child to be photographed, audiotaped, videotaped, and interviewed about the laughter that takes place in the classroom.

X. Parent’s Permission

I have read and understand the Informed Consent and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

_____	_____
Parent’s signature	Date

Should I have any questions about this research or its conduct, I may contact:

Sarah L. Smidl, M.S. Investigator	ssmidl@vt.edu or 961-1585 Email/telephone
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Jim Garrison, Ph.D Faculty Advisor	wesley@vt.edu or 231-4671 Email/telephone
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Joyce Arditti, Ph.D. Departmental Reviewer	arditti@vt.edu or 231-5758 Email/telephone
---	---

David M. Moore, IRB Chair Office of Research Compliance Research and Graduate Studies	moored@vt.edu or 231-4991 Email/telephone
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APPENDIX F

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

Teacher Permission Form

Title of Dissertation: A Portraiture of Laughter in Kindergarten Children: The Giggles and Guffaws That Support Teaching, Learning, and Relationships in the Daily Experiences and Activities of the Children

Investigator: Sarah L. Smidl

I. Purpose of this Research/Project

The purpose of this study is to better understand how the context in which kindergarten children laugh throughout their day enhances their relationships with their peers, teachers, and staff with whom they are involved. I am interested in documenting the laughter that brings children, teachers and staff together, as this relationship phenomenon of using laughter to initiate, build on, and sustain relationships was something that I found to be the biggest part during my thesis research on laughter in preschoolers. Also, as I feel relationships are the skeleton of a good and effective educational experience, I want to show how these laughter-producing situations have the potential to influence teaching and learning directly. After spending time with the children in other areas of their day, this may include the time they spend in physical education, in music, in art, and on the playground, in addition to their classroom experience.

II. Procedures

I will use a combination of written fieldnotes, discussion with the children, informal teacher discussion, and photographs to document laughter situations as they occur naturally in the classroom and other areas of their day including physical education, music, art, playground time, and lunch time.

III. Risks to Participation

Risks to the participants in the study are minimal to none.

IV. Benefits to Participation

There is no guarantee that there will be benefits, and these benefits have not been included in order to encourage you to participate. Children may experience the many social, cognitive, psychological, and physiological benefits associated with laughing. Teachers and staff may benefit from the knowledge that we discuss together about the children's laughter and how it influences their life at school.

V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

The people with whom I will share the data collected in my study are the investigator (myself), my 5 dissertation committee members, the children in my study, the parents of the children in my study if they desire, and the kindergarten

teacher and other teachers and staff (physical education teacher, music teacher, art teacher, principal, lunch aide) with whom I am interacting. I will enforce confidentiality by choosing an alias for each child and adult.

VI. Compensation

There will be no monetary compensation for this study.

VII. Freedom to Withdraw

You are free to withdraw any comments or information that I may include in this study. If you desire, each adult may request to read any information I write about him or her before my final dissertation is completed in November of 2005.

VIII. Approval of Research

This research project has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, by the Department of Human Development.

X. Teacher Responsibilities

I voluntarily agree to allow myself to be photographed and informally interviewed about the laughter that takes place in the classroom or other settings within Prices Fork Elementary School. Though photographs will be taken, only drawings that I make of the school, and drawings that the participants do themselves from their actual photographs will be included to promote confidentiality.

X. Teacher or Staff Permission

I have read and understand the Informed Consent and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

Teacher or Staff Member's Signature

Date

Should I have any questions about this research or its conduct, I may contact:

Sarah L. Smidl, M.S.
Investigator

ssmidl@vt.edu or 961-1585
Email/telephone

Jim Garrison, Ph.D.
Faculty Advisor

wesley@vt.edu or 231-4671
Email/telephone

Joyce Arditti, Ph.D.
Departmental Reviewer

arditti@vt.edu or 231-5758
Email/telephone

David M. Moore, IRB Chair
Office of Research Compliance
Research and Graduate Studies

moored@vt.edu or 231-4991
Email/telephone

APPENDIX G

IRB Approval March 16, 2004



Institutional Review Board

Dr. David M. Moore
IRB (Human Subjects) Chair
Assistant Vice Provost for Research Compliance
CVM Phase II - Duckpond Dr., Blacksburg, VA 24061-0442
Office: 540/231-4991; FAX: 540/231-6033
email: moored@vt.edu

DATE: March 16, 2004

MEMORANDUM

TO: Jan K. Nesor Teaching and Learning 0313
Sarah Smidl HD 0416

FROM: David Moore 

SUBJECT: **IRB Expedited Approval:** "Using videotape and interviews to study preschool children's laughter" IRB # 04-136

This memo is regarding the above-mentioned protocol. The proposed research is eligible for expedited review according to the specifications authorized by 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. As Chair of the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board, I have granted approval to the study for a period of 12 months, effective March 12, 2004.

0416
2/24/04

cc: File
Department Reviewer Jan Nesor T&L 0313

APPENDIX H

Update on Changes to Current IRB From March 16th, 2004

To Whom it May Concern,

I wanted to report some changes to my currently approved IRB from March 2004 to make sure that I still have approval:

1. My research setting and subject pool will change from preschoolers at the Virginia Tech Child Development Lab School to a kindergarten classroom in the Montgomery County Public School System, which I am currently in the process of receiving approval. I will supply this as soon as I get it, though the assistant superintendent is waiting to see my IRB approval before I am approved through the school system.
2. I will no longer have research assistants.
3. I have slightly changed some of the wording in the “Justification of Project” to reflect a greater emphasis on studying laughter and humor in the context of relationships and during the teaching and learning process rather than in all general situations.
4. I will no longer be conducting teacher-research, but be an observer-participant in another teacher’s classroom.
5. There is a change in my title and type of qualitative methods to add portraiture as a method to describe the participants’ meanings and experiences more authentically.

Thank you!

Sincerely,

Sarah L. Smidl

Human Development

APPENDIX I

IRB Re-Approval August 5, 2004



Institutional Review Board

Dr. David M. Moore
IRB (Human Subjects) Chair
Assistant Vice President for Research Compliance
CVM Phase II- Duckpond Dr., Blacksburg, VA 24061-0442
Office: 540/231-4991; FAX: 540/231-6033
email: moored@vt.edu

DATE: August 5, 2004

MEMORANDUM

TO: Jan K. Nespor Teaching and Learning 0313
Sarah Smidl HD 0416

FROM: David Moore 

SUBJECT: **IRB Amendment Approval:** "Using videotape and interviews to study preschool children's laughter" IRB # 04-136

This memo is regarding the above referenced protocol which was previously granted approval by the IRB on March 12, 2004. You subsequently requested permission to amend your approved protocol to include the addition of the listed changes. Since the requested amendment is nonsubstantive in nature, I, as Chair of the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board, have granted approval for requested protocol amendment, effective as of August 5, 2004. The anniversary date will remain the same as the original approval date.

cc: File
Department Reviewer Jan Nespor T&L 0313

APPENDIX J

Research Update for IRB Approval Continuation From August 5, 2004

A brief progress report to include: how many subjects were involved to date, and a description of any unforeseen complications or events, which increased the level of risk to the subjects.

My study began with 15 participants (one entire kindergarten classroom) though over the course of the semester 2 subjects have moved away, making my current number 13. However, I did receive permission from these 2 participant's parents who have dropped out, and will most likely continue to include them in my study, as their departure caused a change in dynamics in the classroom. As of yet, there have been no complications in my study.

Any planned changes in the protocol which would impact the human subjects and the level of risk.

There are no changes in the previous protocol of my study and the risks continue to be minimal to none.

A re-analysis of the risks and benefits in light of the experience gained in the project to date.

There are minimal to no risks to the participants in this study. The only possible limitation is that I am doing research in the classroom of a male kindergarten teacher, thus making the setting easily identifiable. However, because of the subject matter of my study (laughter in the classroom) nothing hurtful or sensitive will be written about the participants, making this essentially a non-issue.

The benefits to this study could be essential in helping children to use laughter and humor as they learn to negotiate the world, solve conflicts, and deal with the difficulties of life, especially as it pertains to their social relationships with each other and teachers. It could help teachers see how important laughter is to children and may allow them more flexibility in their thinking when planning to include laughter-producing activities in their curriculum

An estimate of the time required (in months) to complete the study.

My study of humor and laughter in kindergarten children in a public school setting began on Jan 3, 2005 and will be completed on June 10, 2005. During these 5 months my total number of hours spent in the classroom will total approximately 400.

Other changes

I will no longer be using video as a data collection method for my research, as I have determined it to be too intrusive to the children and classroom.

On this new IRB, please change my faculty advisor to Jim Garrison; [email: wesley@vt.edu](mailto:wesley@vt.edu)

APPENDIX K

IRB Approval May 11, 2005



Institutional Review Board

Dr. David M. Moore
IRB (Human Subjects) Chair
Assistant Vice President for Research Compliance
CVM Phase II- Duckpond Dr., Blacksburg, VA 24061-0442
Office: 540/231-4991; FAX: 540/231-6033
email: moored@vt.edu

DATE: May 11, 2005

MEMORANDUM

TO: James W. Garrison Teaching and Learning 0313
Sarah Smidl HD 0416

FROM: David Moore 

SUBJECT: **IRB Expedited Continuation:** "Using videotape and interviews to study preschool children's laughter" IRB # 05-339 ref 04-136

This memo is regarding the above referenced protocol which was previously granted expedited approval by the IRB on March 12, 2004. The proposed research is eligible for expedited review according to the specifications authorized by 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. Pursuant to your request of last week, as Chair of the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board, I have granted approval for extension of the study for a period of 12 months, effective as of March 12, 2005.

Approval of your research by the IRB provides the appropriate review as required by federal and state laws regarding human subject research. It is your responsibility to report to the IRB any adverse reactions that can be attributed to this study.

To continue the project past the 12-month approval period, a continuing review application must be submitted (30) days prior to the anniversary of the original approval date and a summary of the project to date must be provided. Our office will send you a reminder of this (60) days prior to the anniversary date.

Virginia Tech has an approved Federal Wide Assurance (FWA00000572, exp. 7/20/07) on file with OHRP, and its IRB Registration Number is IRB00000667.

cc: File

VITA

Sarah L. Smidl
5659 Highland Road
Dublin, VA 24084
ssmidl@vt.edu
H: (540) 674-4521

Education

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Blacksburg, VA

August 2003- present

PhD candidate in Human Development: Focus in Child and Adolescent Development

Dissertation: A Portrait of Laughter in “Kid”ergarten Children: The Giggles and

Guffaws That Support Teaching, Learning, and Relationships in the Classroom

Will graduate May 2006

GPA 4.0

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Blacksburg, VA

August 2000- May 2003

MS in Human Development: Focus in Child Development

Thesis: Carve That Opossum and Plucky, Ducky Underwear: A Narrative Inquiry of

Laughter in a Preschool Classroom

GPA 3.8

Florida International University

Miami, FL

August 1995-December 1997

BS in Occupational Therapy

GPA 4.0

Broward Community College

Fort Lauderdale, FL

August 1992-August 1995

AA in Pre-Occupational Therapy

GPA 3.6

Experience

Virginia Tech Child Care Committee

Job Title: Graduate Assistant

June 2005- present

Job Duties:

- researching the child care offered at Virginia Tech’s peer institutions
- writing the proposal for the child care committee’s recommendations to be presented to the EVP and Provost of Virginia Tech

- researching the availability and costs of full-time child care center in the New River Valley and making statistical comparisons of figures
- researching business models of child care for which a university child care system could be built upon

Virginia Tech Family and Work/Life Resources

Job Title: Child and Elder Care Resource Specialist

June 2004-June 2005

Job Duties and Projects:

- assisting staff, faculty, and students in locating child and elder care
- maintaining elder and child care lists for distribution
- maintaining database of those who receive child and elder care information
- assisting in maintenance and verification of resources on Work/Life website
- helping to maintain resource library
- researching resources available in the community including adoption, early childhood curriculum, babysitting cooperatives, support groups, violence in the workplace, disabilities, organizations on aging, etc.
- attending continuing education programs put on by Work/Life
- working on Shared Lives Anti-Bias curriculum program and presenting workshops for the child care community
- researched and put together package of articles and resources related to integrating engineering concepts into early childhood education
- developed home study program for those on the Elder Care Provider list

Virginia Tech Department of Human Development

Job Title: Research Assistant

August 2004-December 2004

Job duties:

- researching tests and measurements for a research project on child and mother emotions
- preparing a research proposal for the Institutional Review Board for research on human subjects to complete project on child and mother emotions
- reading and evaluating the literature on infant and mother behaviors including attachment and temperament

Virginia Tech Child Development Lab School

Job Title: Teaching Assistant

Head Teacher Preschool Classroom: August 2002-May 2004

Head Teacher Toddler Classroom: August 2001-May 2002

Head Teacher Infant/Toddler Classroom: January 2000-May 2001

Job duties:

- planning and implementing curriculum based on the philosophy of social constructivism and the Reggio Emilia approach to education
- assessing children with a portfolio-style assessment

- supervising 12-14 undergraduate student teachers per semester in the Early Childhood Education program
- working closely with families to establish individual goals for children
- working as a member of a team of educators and researchers

Center for Rehabilitation and Development

Blacksburg, VA

Pediatric Occupational Therapist

January 1998- January 2001

Job duties:

- assessing and treating children (birth-12 years) with disabilities in clinical, home, and school environments
- writing therapy goals and home programs for families for functional carryover of treatment into the home
- working with a variety of diagnoses including feeding disorders, Sensory Integration Disorder, Autism, Pervasive Developmental Delay, Down syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, ADD/ADHD, etc.
- working extensively with children and families to help children become as independent as possible
- attending staff and IEP meetings
- implementing and participating in a pool therapy program for children
- working with Early Intervention to help assess the need for therapy services and treatment
- supervising an Occupational Therapy Assistant in goal writing and treatment
- supervising 3 Occupational Therapy Assistant students in their college internships
- attending conferences for personal and professional development

Flowing Wells School District

Tucson, AZ

Job Title: Occupational Therapy Intern

September 1997-November 1997

- assessing and treating a caseload of 90 children
- helping children to develop fine-motor and perceptual skills to become more successful in the classroom
- attending child study and IEP meetings
- working extensively and collaboratively with teachers, children, families, special educators, physical therapists, and speech therapists to determine individual goals for children

Tucson Medical Center

Tucson, AZ

Job Title: Occupational Therapy Intern

May 1997-August 1997

- assessing and treating infants in neonatal and special care with feeding difficulties, drug addiction, prematurity, etc.
- organizing and participating in Sensational Kids!, a program for facilitating the transitional skills of autistic children with sensory integrative (SI) disorders
- engaging in extensive parent education
- collaborating with Physical and Speech Therapists in goal planning and treatment

Certifications

Certification in Sensory Integration (SI)
August 2000-present

Certified Infant Massage Instructor (CIMI)
February 1998-present

Certified Occupational Therapist (OTR)
May 1998-present

Conferences Attended

Reggio Emilia Approach to Education
Reggio Emilia, Italy
May 27-31, 2002

International Humor Conference
College Park, MD
July 6-9, 2001

Sensory Integration and Praxis Test Interpretation and Intervention
Philadelphia, PA
June 1-5, 2000

Sensory Integration and Praxis Test Theory
Hickory, NC
October 6-10, 1999

Sensory Integration and Praxis Test Administration
Hickory, NC
January 5-9, 1999

Neurodevelopmental Treatment (NDT) and Ball Techniques
Myrtle Beach, SC
June 19-20, 1998

Evaluation and Treatment of Oral Feeding Disorders in the NICU and After Discharge

San Diego, CA
June 4-5, 1998

Infant Massage Certification Conference
Roanoke, VA
January 12-16, 1998

Working With School-Aged Children and Youth With Neurobehavioral Disorders
Tucson, AZ
October 17, 1997

Memberships

International Association of Infant Massage (IAIM)
January 1997-present

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
July 2004-present

International Society for Humor Studies (ISHS)
December 2004-present

National Campus Child Care Coalition (NCCCC)
May 2005-present

Awards

William Preston Master's Thesis Award
November 2003

Publications

International Encyclopedia for Early Childhood Education
Entry on Humor in Early Childhood Education, in press

References

Jim Garrison, Professor in Teaching and Learning, Virginia Tech
Relationship: Thesis committee member and dissertation chairperson
Contact: 540-231-8331 or wesley@vt.edu

Lynn Hill, Educational Consultant
Relationship: Thesis and dissertation committee member
Contact: hillfam@vt.edu

Cathy Jacobs, Director of Virginia Tech Family and Work/Life Resources
Relationship: Previous boss and friend
Contact: 540-231-3213 or [cajacobs@vt.edu](mailto:cjacobs@vt.edu)

Will Rosenfeld, Kindergarten Teacher at Prices Fork Elementary, Blacksburg, VA
Relationship: Focus teacher for my dissertation
Contact: wrosenfeld@mail.mcps.com

Andy Stremmel, Department Head and Professor of Human Resources Family and

Consumer Sciences, South Dakota State University, Brookings, SD

Relationship: Thesis committee chairperson and dissertation committee member

Contact: 605-688-6815 or Andrew.Stremmel@sdstate.edu

Mindy Webb, Early School Teacher at Suffolk Academy

Relationship: Friend and former infant/toddler room co-teacher

Contact: 757-539-6015 or mmottley@highstream.net