I couldn’t put this piece down from the moment I saw the title. I was sucked in by the first funny story—so real, such a scene. As a preschool teacher, Sarah Smidl describes her reflection on the moment: her brief struggle for control, for propriety, and then relenting to join in wholeheartedly to joy. Sarah writes from her soul, and this is why this piece on children’s humor jumps off the page. Even as young children are learning how to behave, they are constantly poking fun.

Good, full, round laughter shared together does create community. As Sarah says, humor often arises from children’s impetus to connect. Laughter also marks children’s accomplishments and surprise when things are not as they expect. Sarah’s teacher research on humor offers a comprehensive view of the topic, while providing creative ways to examine everyday practical questions. Her richly represented voice and ample evidence from her teaching answers questions about children’s social, physical, and cognitive development through laughter. Early childhood teachers can make joy a part of daily practice.

—Barbara Henderson
My Daddy Wears Plucky, Ducky Underwear: Discovering the Meanings of Laughter in a Preschool Classroom

Sarah L. Smidl

The Chair Incident

It was morning snack time in the classroom that I shared with seven wily and sticky toddlers. As I waited for the next cup of milk to topple over, Tessa, who was 2 years and 4 months old, tentatively put down her spoon, pushed back her chair from the table, turned it around, sat back down and began to giggle. I put on my furrowed-eyebrow teacher face and said, “Tessa, please sit correctly at snack time.” To my surprise, she continued to sit unwaveringly on her backwards chair, the laughter building up like the fizz in a dropped bottle of pop ready to gush out the top once opened. This time I deepened my voice, made squinty eyes for greater impact, and declared, “Tessa, you neeeeed to sit correctly at snack time.” She sat committedly, still staring at me with tenacious brown eyes, now squealing with raucous glee. Dumbfounded, I waited to see what would happen. Gradually, one-by-one, the other six toddlers pushed back their chairs. They turned them around, two hesitant and smiling, the others erect and screeching with laughter.

As teachers of young children, we strive to teach them how to think, learn, and inquire—how to communicate and interact with others, how to keep their fingers out of their noses, and if we are fortunate, how to sit down and eat without stabbing themselves with a pointy utensil. Yet young children often defy society’s rules, and in my classroom, ignore my rules. I know I am expected to handle
any situation, since I am the teacher and I have “authority.” But children’s blatant and perplexing rebellions can be funny!

Children’s “goofing around” might not be about poor manners or breaking the rules of the classroom, but rather based on insights on what we find funny. Our classroom is united through laughter; this has transformed my teaching philosophy from a view of “my” classroom to “our” classroom. We are The Laughing Classroom. Here, I document my journey to seek what is behind the phenomenon of children’s laughter: Why do children laugh in the preschool classroom?

**Review of literature**

**Good for Relationships: Social Benefits of Laughter**

Laughter is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon often seen as a lightweight topic of scientific study. However, there is a growing body of research, literature, and anecdotal observations that support its benefits in numerous areas of human development.

It is the social significance of laughter that has been researched and documented most often. Scholars of laughter believe that in the course of social interaction, laughter serves as a means of communicating and bringing people closer (Coser 1959). Research studies have focused on how laughter enhances interpersonal relationships, develops group cohesiveness, eases communication, and decreases social distance; all studies have concluded that laughter is fundamentally a social phenomenon (Bainum, Lounsbury, & Pollio 1984; Graham 1995; Masten 1986; Walker 2013). It has also been discovered that children rarely laugh when they are alone, concluding that laughter is an indication of social awareness and responsiveness to others. Laughter, like smiling and talking, is engaged in almost exclusively during social encounters, and mirth responses are rated as funnier when shared with others (Chapman 1975; Provine 2000).
Good for the brain: Cognitive benefits of laughter

McGhee and Chapman (1980) and Morreall (1983) assert that we can gain knowledge about a child’s understanding of the world by paying attention to what she laughs at in different situations. This offers much insight into how and what they think, which can help adults begin to understand the complexity of child development and learning. In terms of Piagetian theory, we can even determine a child’s cognitive stage and understanding of concrete and abstract concepts by examining the types of things they laugh at and understand, and the humor they create (Chapman & Foot 1996).

Children’s laughter can also help teachers discover children’s theories of how things work, by watching the incongruous events that disrupt their perceptions and cause laughter. The incongruity theory of laughter focuses on the cognitive meanings of laughter, for this theory is “an intellectual reaction to something that is unexpected, illogical, or inappropriate” (Morreall 1983, 15). According to the incongruity theory, if there is a mismatch between our perception and conceptual understanding, this surprises us and produces laughter. We laugh when there is a breach to our orderly world as we have come to understand and live it. Watching children laugh at things such as 20 clowns climbing out of a small car, seeing a rabbit pulled from a hat, or hearing how children begin to create and laugh at their own jokes can help us comprehend a child’s understanding of space, time, and causality, and her understanding of how concepts relate to one another (Elkind 2000).

Good for the soul: Psychological benefits of laughter

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). Laughter has also been identified as a factor in creating resilient youth who have a greater capacity to deal with conflict (Carlson & Peterson 1995). Though there are few research studies that specifically study the psychological benefits of laughter, it is evident that children have many daily struggles that affect self-esteem and self-image as they try to figure out how and where they fit in the world. By teaching children to use laughter to look at the positive and humorous in everything, they learn to maintain an attitude that provides a more accurate and non-devastating perspective about themselves and their problems. This can allow them to develop a better foundation for learning how to constructively deal with life issues (Gordon 2011; Michelli 1998).
Research design

Setting: The laughing place

During this 14-week research study, I was a graduate student working toward a degree in human development while teaching in the Child Development Lab School (CDLS) at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, VA. I had seven research assistants, who were undergraduate student teachers in the classroom. Our classroom had 14 magnificent preschoolers; nine girls and five boys who ranged in age from 3 years 0 months to 4 years 4 months at the beginning of the study. All of them were from middle to upper-middle class families as measured by parent report, and each had a mother and father who were married. Twelve children were Caucasian, and two were of international race and ethnicity—one Indian and one Korean. All parents provided parental consent, and each child provided his or her assent to participate in the research.

Funny stories: The narrative inquiry approach

I sought to engage in a multi-method, naturalistic, and interpretive qualitative approach to the subject of laughter. Therefore, I chose the method of narrative inquiry, which aims to understand people’s experiences and uses rich narratives in order to describe those experiences over time and in the social context in which they occur (Clandinin & Connelly 2000). For me, this method also highlighted the centrality of my experiences in my multiple roles of person-teacher-researcher, and acknowledged that the meanings I ascribed to laughter were inextricably ingrained together with the children’s. As a human jungle gym and member of many of the laughter scenarios, I had to acknowledge and embrace this inherent embeddedness.

Data collection and analysis. Data collection took place for the 14 hours per week the children were at school, for a total of 14 weeks. I used the following tools and techniques while documenting laughter:

- handwritten field notes written by my research assistants and I (my primary data collection method),
- audio- and videotape,
- child interviews,
- a personal diary, and
- conversations with my major professor.

Handwritten field notes were my primary source of collecting data, as I felt it would be easiest for me to carry my journal throughout the day and write down the laughter-producing situations that I saw, or at least quick notes that I could then expand on at the end of the day. I then transcribed these journal notes into my computer at the end of each week, ending with hundreds of pages of notes.
I used audiotape sparingly to capture the discussions of the children and researchers verbatim during long dialogues. However, regardless of my attempts to familiarize the children with the cassette recorder prior to collecting data, this is one device they never seem to tire of—many times I tried to audiotape, but soon surrendered my recorder to their fascination. I used videotaping during the last 6 weeks of my study, as I felt it would allow me to capture some of the body gestures and mannerisms that could increase my understanding of laughter. Also, since children also excitedly watched the videos, it permitted the continuous adding of new layers of interpretation as well as many new laughter situations to document.

Goodwin and Goodwin discuss 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. . . . [On]e can never become a child. One remains a very definite and readily identifiable ‘other.’ (1996, 134)

I was aware that due to the young age of the children in my study, it might be difficult to gather interview data. It would also be hard to validate whether I was capturing the meanings as the children intended. Despite this potential impediment, and even though the children in my study were very young, I believed it crucial to try to understand what these laughing incidents meant to them. Interviewing children individually and in groups included asking them simple, general questions about humor and laughter, such as “What makes you laugh the most?” as well as clarifying questions about specific times when they were laughing such as, “What was funny about that?” Sometimes the discussions involved sitting down and watching a video or listening to an audiotape, so the children could more easily recall and replay the actual event as we discussed its content.

As this research was also about who I was becoming as a person and teacher, and because I was a true participant in my research, I knew I needed constant reflection on how I might be impacting the process. I decided to keep a personal diary that I wrote in several times a week, and it was here that I recorded my thoughts, feelings, and perceptions about my personal involvement. I commented on general day-to-day moods and feelings about my study, especially the times when I was particularly excited, discouraged, or perplexed. I tried to make a point of focusing on myself as an individual as well as an integral part of a group.

Finally, I had reflective conversations with my major professor throughout the study, in order to gain deeper analysis and multiple perspectives from a person who had extensive experience with research. I feel it is only when we discuss our ideas and thoughts with others that we open up to multiple perspectives of viewing any concept or situation.
The data collection and analysis occurred together throughout the entire data collection process, as well as after it was over (Goodwin & Goodwin 1996; Hammersley & Atkinson 1995). I reflected numerous times on all of the situations that were documented, and wrote my thoughts, ideas, and questions, taking into consideration each child’s individuality and relationships with others.

Each scenario was coded and categorized with keywords, and within a few weeks several themes began to emerge. Throughout this continuous analysis, I interwove my own experiences as a person, teacher, and researcher to create a narrative based on both these individual experiences as well as dynamic relationships in the classroom. After approximately eleven weeks of data collection and analysis, data saturation occurred and no new themes emerged. In the next section, the seven themes that emerged from my data are briefly described, which helps illuminate the answer to my primary research question, “Why do children laugh in the preschool classroom?”

## Findings

My seven major findings, or themes, are that:

- laughter builds and sustains relationships,
- laughter is used as a strategy,
- laughter demonstrates and builds cognitive understanding,
- laughter demonstrates competence and success,
- laughter is about novelty and fun,
- laughter is all about the body, and
- laughter is not always funny.

Each theme is explored below, helping to illuminate the answer to my primary research question, “Why do children laugh in the preschool classroom?”
1. Laughter builds and sustains relationships

I found that laughter is almost solely a social phenomenon, used primarily in these three areas: it helps to develop friendships, enhance group cohesiveness, and alleviate social conflicts. My findings indicated that this overall theme of using laughter to build relationships is at the very heart and soul of what laughter is about; people uniting, bonding, and developing intersubjective relationships with each other.

Joy scuttles around the slide, pressing her body against it while covering her face with her petite, pale hands, as though hiding her features will prevent her from being discovered. William stomps rhinoceros-style through the mulch and grabs her with both hands before flinging himself to the ground and crawling underneath the slide. He curls up like a roly poly bug, peeping from beneath his armpit, his body vibrating with laughter. Joy, who rarely makes a whisper, squeals and jumps up and down before hurling herself over William’s body. They roll onto their backs, stomachs heaving, turning to peek at one another to signify it is time to stand and continue, over and over and over again, until it is time to go back inside.

Though this scenario was one of dozens I documented as an example of how children use laughter to build relationships, this one was crucial to my awareness of how laughter can be used by children who cannot communicate through speech, but are adept at using the language of laughter. Here, Joy, a girl with speech apraxia, and William, a boy of Korean descent with little understanding or expression of the English language, built rapport with each other during a game of hide and seek on the playground, which allowed them to further connect to each other in a classroom where others usually developed bonds through expressive speech and language.

Though the above scenario primarily demonstrates how two children use laughter to develop a friendship, children also used it as a group to bond with one another. This usually occurred at snack time, as this was one of the only times when all of the children came together as a group. It is notable that snack time was where children who didn’t normally interact with one another during play suddenly became aware of others and bonded through laughter, such as the time the children called each other “stinky” for twenty minutes over a plate of waffles. I also discovered how often I did things that I hoped would create laughter in order to thwart the numerous social conflicts that take place in the preschool classroom. For example, I turned our often contentious clean-up time into a funny game where the Toy Thief left a note and stole everything from the classroom for two days. The children thought it was hilarious and were able to use their creativity to develop a group plan of how to work together each day to clean up so their toys would not be taken again.
It was a fact that we rarely saw a child laughing alone. This suggests we use laughter as we are discovering one another, and continue to use it regularly within the context of our evolving and trusting relationships. In early childhood education this can mean helping to create a laughing social environment that facilitates optimal connections and learning.

2. Laughter is used as a strategy

In addition to loving princess dresses, Lucy also loves makeup. Occasionally she comes to school already painted like a clown fish. Other times when she is running late, she brings her makeup to school. It wasn’t long before she began to use her need to beautify to get out of cleaning up. Lucy was playing under the loft when the red light came on to let the children know it was time for the dreaded deed. I said, ‘Lucy, please put away the books under there.’ She screamed, ‘No, I am NOT cleaning up today or EVER!’ This continued two more times until she popped out from under the loft and sprinted to her cubby while giggling, “NO! I can’t clean up until I am beautiful again!’ She began laughing hysterically, and I was trying hard not to. She snatched her makeup, sprinted over to the mirror, and started pressing her powder puff all over her face. ‘One more minute,’ she hollered, glancing out of the corner of her eye to assess the status of the room, which by now had been cleaned up by the other children. ‘Okayyyyy, I’m ready to clean up now!’ she hollered.

As teachers or parents we have all used laughter as a strategy to ease pain, hurt, fear, anger, or conflict. We also use laughter to motivate children to do the things they are trying to avoid, often right after they have used laughter to get out of doing what they are supposed to do. We use it to encourage them to eat their vegetables, get a shot at the doctor’s office, or to wash their grimy faces. It was a huge success for me to learn to embrace and accept the laughter children used as a strategy when trying to escape something they didn’t want to do, while simultaneously honing my own ability to use it in difficult situations. I found this approach did not always work when I wanted it to, though if anything was going to work, it was laughter.
3. Laughter demonstrates and builds cognitive understanding

At snack time one day, Tessa gifted us with the following eloquently expressed “poem”:

I’m a stinky, winky head.
My inky, winky head is coca.
My binky, winky is a dona.
My daddy has yucky, ducky underwear.
Plucky, ducky underwear. Plucky, ducky underwear.
Plucky, ducky underwear. Plucky, ducky, stinky underwear.
(Shortly after, she shrieked,)
I love my stinky head and I hate my stinky brain.
I bit my tunca. I bit my tunca. I bit my tunca stinky head!

She was laughing so hard when she finished that she fell out of her chair while clutching her ribs.

Brilliant, right? How often do we hear things like this without really taking notice? By this point, the children had begun choosing many rhyming books for story time. This scenario clearly demonstrates Tessa’s ability to combine her new knowledge of rhyming sounds, understanding of opposites, memory of words and themes from books we had been reading, and knowledge of different parts of the body, all while inserting her creativity and exploration of nonsense words. This was the first time I was aware enough to explore the laughter associated with a child’s word play. I recognized how this incongruity can be something that teachers use to support learning, as well as to potentially gauge the level of a child’s cognitive development and understanding. There is also the idea that we are more likely to remember that which causes an emotional reaction; perhaps providing materials and instruction that tugs on the funny bone could impact our ability to learn new concepts.

Children are incredibly enigmatic, imaginative, and hilarious. At the end of my data collection there was a surge in laughter that occurred during children’s engagement in language-based cognitive activities such as word play, or understanding the differences or incongruity in objects or concepts. Interestingly, this kind of laughter was only engaged in by six children in the classroom, who were among the oldest. This suggests that from a developmental perspective, a child needs to have the cognitive understanding and creativity present to both grasp and produce it.
4. Laughter demonstrates competence and success

It was finally the day for Firefighter Dan to come to class, talk about fire safety, and bring his truck for the children to explore. He loves to embarrass one of the adults and have them put on his fire suit piece by heavy piece as he talks about how each piece of the fire suit protects him. One of my student teachers, Annie, had been chosen to model the suit. She put on the bibs. The children laughed. She put on the jacket. The children laughed. She put on the boots. The children laughed. She put on the mask. The children roared. Next, Firefighter Dan wanted to show the children what you should do if there is smoke in your house, so Annie crawled on all fours towards the children. The children laughed hysterically in the moment, and continued to discuss this event for the remainder of the year, laughing every time they talked about it.

On that day, I witnessed Edie master something she had worked so hard on, and her laughter demonstrated the pure jubilation of succeeding in something she had just learned. She retold the story of her success over and over for the remainder of the day and week, laughing each time. I also personally remember this type of maniacal, effervescent laughter in that moment when I pressed the “submit” button that would send my dissertation into the permanent electronic file, never, ever to be edited or revised again.

I saw that these moments were rare in my research, which I believe is because these successful occasions are often hard to capture. They happen so suddenly, when the observer does not expect, as we often cannot guess what will make a child feel successful. I firmly believe in teaching children to value the process of learning, rather than just the end product. Laughter used for this reason makes me contemplate how teachers might be able to nurture this throughout the entire educational process of mastering new skills or concepts, even when learning is difficult.

5. Laughter is about novelty and fun

A child being able to pump her legs and swing by herself is a fantasy of many preschool teachers. Every day on the playground, the cacophonous voices began:
‘Sarah, push me.’
‘Push ME!’
‘NOOOO, push MEEEEEEE!’
They were always too quick for me to dash to the other side of the playground and pretend I couldn’t hear them. Then one day the magical moment occurred; it felt like fairy sparkles were fluttering through the heavens. Edie was shrieking with glee, beaming and laughing with all of her perfect little teeth gleaming, ‘Saraaaaahhh. Look at me! I’m swinging and you don’t have to push me anymore! I only needed a boost to start!’
The rumor is that children laugh three to four hundred times a day, as compared to the mere (and pathetic) fifteen times an adult laughs. Whereas it is unclear where this information originated, one thing is indisputable; children laugh oodles and gobs more than adults. And, more often than not, I found that children laugh simply because something is novel or fun.

The incongruity theory explains much of the laughter in this category, as there is so much novelty in a young child’s life that challenges his or her current perceptions. This freshness occurs each day, as children continue to build a repertoire of experiences. In our preschool class it was incessant—the arrival of a fire truck; a tunnel that the parents and children had to crawl through to get into the classroom (the parents didn’t appreciate this); the Toy Thief stealing the toys the children wouldn’t clean up; or the daring escape of Hamster Mousy, our class rodent.

I compare this to the life of the adult, as there comes a point in time when we simply no longer have this range of novel experiences to shatter previously established perceptions. I often ponder: At what juncture do many of the things children experience each day cease to be considered fun or laughable by the adult? This kind of laughter suggests that creating fun and novelty throughout education could go far in helping children experience more constant joy associated with learning throughout their lifetimes, while helping them retain some of this meaning in their adult lives. As early childhood teachers, we need to keep curricula novel and fun, as this is where the most laughter is likely to occur and where a lot of meaningful learning transpires.

6. Laughter is all about the body

At snack time, Woody begins to laugh wildly. He looks over to Shirley and shouts, ‘I FARTED!!’ Shirley giggles with her hands over her mouth. Two more times he claims, ‘I FARTED!!’ each time getting a more vociferous response from Shirley, even though he is laughing much harder than she is.

I am not sure if he did indeed fart, or if it was just an amusing thing to say, but what it comes down to is farting is a funny thing to do and talk about. The next questions to consider are exactly how much of this body humor do we “allow” as teachers, and are we brave enough to turn it into a classroom inquiry? Why do we often stifle the things that are developmentally appropriate to children because we, as adults, find them uncomfortable or improper?

Running, chasing, being caught, getting tickled, touching slimy things, burping, farting, screaming, and contorting the body and face into weird shapes—this is the pure essence of childhood. Most of us love this because
The year was 1982 and I was a 2nd grader at Dalton Elementary School in Aurora, Colorado. I was in the cafeteria when one of the mean lunch ladies (there were several) swooped over. She began laughing with barbed fangs, clucking to her other meanie friends about how I was dissecting the highly desiccated and inedible hot dog I had been served. As a dreadfully timid and introverted child, I was aghast and embarrassed as everyone in the colossal universe stared at me and my lunch. For the next year, I made sure never to do anything that would call attention to myself until I was finally able to move to Florida and escape their wicked cackles.

It’s worth discussing the laughter associated with these integral sensory experiences, as early childhood educators already ponder the negative implications of classrooms where hands-on learning is hard to find or nonexistent. The laughter that results from “having the body involved” in experiential learning further supports the importance of continuing to include these opportunities not only in early childhood education, but throughout life.

7. Laughter is not always funny

The year was 1982 and I was a 2nd grader at Dalton Elementary School in Aurora, Colorado. I was in the cafeteria when one of the mean lunch ladies (there were several) swooped over. She began laughing with barbed fangs, clucking to her other meanie friends about how I was dissecting the highly desiccated and inedible hot dog I had been served. As a dreadfully timid and introverted child, I was aghast and embarrassed as everyone in the colossal universe stared at me and my lunch. For the next year, I made sure never to do anything that would call attention to myself until I was finally able to move to Florida and escape their wicked cackles.

Despite all of the joy of laughter and its potential for bringing people together, there can be a downside, and adults need to use laughter judiciously and carefully. As the above vignette illustrates, laughter can be used by an adult or another child in hurtful ways, which is an important consideration as we try to help children build more competent social-emotional skills. Individual children do not always find the same situations as funny. An attempt to jest can be highly embarrassing, anxiety-provoking, or hurtful when the laughter is directed at them, not with them. Children also have different cognitive and social-emotional understandings of what laughing means, which should be taken into account. To laugh, we ought to be in a positive frame of mind and must not feel we are being made fun of. We also cannot automatically assume that a child’s laughter means there is something funny, as there is a whole other category of laughter that is used when we feel nervous, anxious, embarrassed, or afraid.

In our classroom, laughter didn’t always work. Occasionally the kids became upset when other children or I were laughing, especially if they just were not in the mood. Other times I tried to use it to solve conflicts, and it made the children feel like I wasn’t taking them seriously. Occasionally they would walk away upset or say, “You aren’t listening to me.” Teachers must
be sensitive to children who perceive an action or statement as making fun of them, although this can be difficult in a larger classroom.

**Discussion and implications for the classroom**

The nature of this kind of research is such that its purpose is not to generalize to the greater population, but to describe the meaning for those involved. At the same time, it raises possibilities for broader theoretical assumptions. For me, teaching is exhilarating, passionate, and self-affirming. However, I also find it terrifying. It is as contradictory as sucking on a mint while it dissolves, flipping it around against your teeth, rubbing your tongue on all sides, wanting to bite it and hurry the process but also wanting to be patient and savor the experience. I am constantly reevaluating who I am in any given changeable moment. I have arduously learned that in order to be an effective teacher I need to be comfortable with who I am—not who I want others to think I am, but who I really am when I let go of my fears (of which I have many).

I was a child who rarely laughed. I took things very seriously, felt mistakes were embarrassingly unacceptable, and suffered from killer whale-sized portions of anxiety. Laughter has helped set me free in my teaching and in my life, and now this permeates my teaching of graduate students. Even when they don’t laugh, integrating laughter into my daily practices helps me negotiate my varying teaching experiences. For me, laughing and not laughing in the classroom and in life is the difference between a Ferrari and a farm tractor (though I live in rural Virginia and really adore farm tractors). It was the joy of laughter in our classroom that prompted me on my own path of learning to love and laugh at my life, my mistakes, and my goal to be the best teacher I can.

**Should we laugh in early childhood education?**

As educational standards of learning become stricter, some may view fostering laughter in the classroom as conflicting with the predominating view of education, where it is still thought that maintaining a conservative social structure is necessary (Gordon 2012; York 2012). However, those who have experienced the social dynamic that laughter in the classroom can create feel strongly otherwise. It is my hypothesis that nurturing laughter in early childhood education could aid in a child’s progression from the joy of youth to the responsibility of adolescence and young adulthood. Learning to laugh at themselves and their mistakes in the context of learning is a valuable lesson for children, one that builds self-esteem and confidence as they learn to embrace the process of their experiences. Laughing can also help form trusting relationships and ease the challenges of many of the...
social and emotional trials of both negotiating relationships and learning (Morreall 2012). Laughter provides lightness, and in our increasingly challenging classrooms and lives, it may be the tonic that gives us just the right amount of protection. So the answer is a vehement “YES”—we should encourage laughter in early childhood education.

Allowing laughter in the classroom may also help the teacher develop personally and professionally. For me, discovering the numerous meanings of laughter in our classroom inspired me to promote these traits in others. It deepened my understanding of the children from multiple perspectives, and created my portrait of children as joyful, carefree, creative, and competent; as co-creators of their life and knowledge; as passionate lovers of learning; and as socially intelligent, perceptive, and adept.

This article is not designed to prescribe how to have a laughing classroom. However, I hope it prompts inquiry for each of you who have read it (and hopefully laughed a little) to gain greater self-awareness as you begin to investigate laughter in your own life and how you might cultivate it in your classroom. As you continue your own adventure, let your heart and mind open to the possibilities of laughter, and explore its many meanings as it flourishes.

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