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Humor and Laughter as Intentional Teaching Strategies: Professional Development for Early Childhood Educators

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**Humor and Laughter as Intentional Teaching Strategies: Professional Development for
Early Childhood Educators**

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ED 590: Conducting and Completing the Capstone

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Abstract

Research has shown that humor and laughter benefit young children's social-emotional development (Lovorn, 2008; Semrud-Clikeman & Glass, 2010). Humor and laughter also benefit teachers (Chaniotakis & Papazoglou, 2019). However, despite the benefits, research has also shown that teachers may be hesitant to use humor and laughter for fear of "losing control," not feeling inherently funny, and/or because teachers have not been taught how to use humor effectively (Chaniotakis & Papazoglou, 2019; Lovorn & Holaway, 2015). Cekaite and Andr n (2019) revealed that teachers in early childhood settings rarely responded to children's laughter with laughter. The difference between teachers' beliefs and practices around humor and laughter was evident in the literature, which raised the question of how professional development designed to teach educators how to use humor intentionally could positively impact children's social and emotional development while also benefiting the teachers themselves. A solid breadth of research is available about social-emotional benefits of laughter. However, a review of the literature revealed limited research on humor and laughter in early childhood settings and limited research about humor and laughter training for teachers. Therefore, this literature review examined professional development about other early childhood topics that could offer insight into how humor training for early childhood educators may impact teaching practices. Results suggested that effective professional development about humor and laughter may alter teachers' attitudes and practices which could ultimately benefit children's social-emotional development.

Keywords: humor, laughter, Early Childhood Education (ECE), professional development, social-emotional development

Chapter One: Introduction

Research has concluded that humor and laughter benefit learning across multiple domains, including cognitive, social-emotional, and physical development (Chaniotakis & Papazoglou, 2019; Lovorn & Holaway, 2015; Van Praag et al., 2017). According to Lovorn (2008) and Savage et al. (2017), teachers utilizing laughter improved and enhanced learning through the rapport and relationship building that came from shared laughter. However, despite the benefits, research also showed that many teachers are hesitant to use humor in class. A study by Cekaite and Andr n (2019) revealed that in a preschool classroom setting, teachers responded to children's laughter with laughter only two percent of the time. Intergenerational laughter was almost non-existent. Teachers attributed hesitancy toward using humor to not feeling funny or for fear of losing control. Educators also reported concerns about lacking appropriate training about how to use humor effectively (Lovorn & Holaway, 2015). Within the scope of the research analyzed for this paper, teachers' knowledge about the benefits of incorporating humor and laughter into the curriculum did not guide instructional practices.

Benefits of Laughter in Education

Humans are hard-wired for laughter (Mireault, 2018). As early as age four months, infants reacted to stimuli with laughter (Cunningham, 2005). Laughter is a social and developmental phenomenon for all ages (Addyman et al., 2018). Humor is an important area of study in early childhood education because humor offers a window into social and cognitive understanding (Recchia & Loizou, 2019). According to Semrud-Clikeman and Glass (2010), humor was not enjoyed if the humor was too easy or too hard. Therefore, humor was dependent on development. Recchia and Loizou (2019) emphasized that humor has the ability to integrate children's cognition, emotion, social awareness, and interpersonal understanding. Lovorn (2008)

further indicated that if cognitive development is delayed, so are humor and laughter. Laughter and development go hand-in-hand with a distinct developmental progression through early childhood. Therefore, the study of humor and laughter is relevant in understanding and supporting children's learning over time.

Classroom humor not only benefits children but teachers as well. McGhee (2019) wrote that humor impacted teachers' emotional state, and Frenzel et al. (2009) showed that teachers' enjoyment in class positively impacted students (as cited in McGhee, 2019). Elkind (2000) similarly suggested that when teachers incorporated more laughter into what they were doing with children, learning was fun for both the teacher and the children. In addition, Johnson et al. (2005) pointed out that early childhood teaching was an emotionally challenging occupation that leads some teachers to leave the profession (as cited in McGee, 2019). Given the importance of maintaining teachers' mental states and a positive classroom environment, humor can act as a tool to combat burnout (Linde, 2013). Humor is an effective technique for sustaining a teacher's positive mood throughout the day while also influencing the positive experience of the children in the classroom.

Research Challenges

Laughter research is challenging. Historically, research examining childhood humor and laughter was limited. Also, definitions within the laughter research field are not clear-cut. Additionally, even though the research indicated how teachers perceived humor's function in the classroom, very little research was available at the time of the review about how to train early childhood teachers to use humor and laughter as teaching strategies. As a result, the lack of available research was a limitation in studies connected to early childhood laughter. Further research is needed to make more evidence-based conclusions in the field.

Humor Research Trajectory

Historically, laughter research was not considered a worthwhile area of study (McGhee, 1988). The topic was not deemed “serious” enough. During this literature review, limited data was found on children’s humor before 1970. Before the 1970s, more research was conducted on negative emotions (Mireault, 2018). According to a review by McGhee (1988), the number of studies of children’s humor went from two studies in the decade 1910-1920 to 115 studies between 1970-1979. Research findings identified a shift in the 1970s when humor and laughter research gained ground and attention. A thorough accounting of humor and laughter research after the 1970s was not found at the time of this review, and many of the researchers and studies from the 1970s are still referenced today as foundational to the field and often still relevant. However, despite more attention on children’s laughter since the 1970s, research in preschools was very limited. Few early childhood laughter studies were conducted specifically in schools, with more research done in laboratories or homes. The lack of studies in schools made examining laughter’s role in early childhood settings challenging. Therefore, to some degree, conclusions about laughter in early childhood education had to be made with minimal data collected in preschools. In this literature review, some referenced studies were conducted in preschools, some in homes, and some in laboratories.

Professional Development about Humor and Laughter

Teachers indicated that one reason educators do not use more humor in instruction is due to a lack of training (Lovorn & Holaway, 2015). A search of the literature for early childhood preservice or in-service professional development about children’s humor and laughter yielded no results. One Wheelock College course about children’s humor was found in the literature, but the course was not specifically geared toward preservice early childhood educators (Klein,

2003). The course was open to students in different areas of study (education, medicine, law, etc.). The Wheelock College course was included in this literature review as the only course found at the time of the review that was dedicated fully to children's humor.

Where the Wheelock College course was the only preservice course on children's humor at the time of the review, a search of the literature about in-service training for early childhood educators revealed a similar gap in the research. No studies were found about humor and laughter professional development for early childhood educators. Therefore, professional development workshops about other topics were selected as a basis for the potential effects of professional development on the teachers' knowledge and practices with humor and laughter. Limitations from the lack of current evidence meant that discussions in the literature review needed to be considered without widespread primary research. Further research is needed to be able to make more in-depth conclusions about the effectiveness of humor and laughter professional development for children and teachers.

Definitions

Researchers have written that defining and measuring humor and laughter is a challenging aspect of laughter research (Chaniotakis & Papazoglou, 2019; Chapman, 1976; Lovorn & Holaway, 2015; McGhee, 1988). Even simple terminology was not completely straightforward, and researchers acknowledged the difficulties. Some terms commonly used were laughter (Addyman et al., 2018; Cekaite & Andr n, 2018), humor (Chaniotakis & Papazoglou, 2019; Hoicka & Akhtar, 2012; Lovorn & Holaway, 2015), mirth (Linde, 2013), and glee (Sherman, 1975). In some research, humor was considered a catalyst for laughter (Curtis, 2013). However, Addyman, et al. (2018) wrote that sometimes, humor and laughter were used interchangeably in the research. Glee was described by Sherman (1975) as joyful screaming and

laughter with physical acts. However, some people may interpret mirth in a similar way (Linde, 2013).

Terminology ambiguities may be because humor and laughter can be difficult to measure. What makes something funny is not always clear. Lovorn (2008) suggested that laughter was easier to identify than humor because laughter was more measurable as a behavioral response. Chapman (1976), on the other hand, wrote that even laughter was hard to measure objectively. (When, for example, is the exact moment a smile turns into a laugh, or a laugh reverts back to a smile?) Chapman (1976) also noted the difficulties of measuring humor and laughter in a laboratory setting, especially with children. Additionally, studying a child's response to something funny was not just about the child's experience and behaviors but also about the humor itself. One person may find something funny where another person does not. Regardless, Lovorn (2008) stressed that even though terms can be difficult to differentiate, researchers seemed to agree that, taken together, humor and laughter supported learning. To some degree, laughter and humor come as a package. Therefore, for this literature review, humor and laughter were considered intricately woven together, but where humor was primarily the impetus to laughter and laughter referred to the physical act of laughing.

Conclusion

Research findings indicated a gap between laughter's benefits and teachers' use of humor in instruction. The difference between belief and practice around humor and laughter as intentional teaching strategies is worth attention in the field of Early Childhood Education. The research in this literature review revealed that humor and laughter fostered child development and learning. Humor also reduced stress and increased job satisfaction in teachers. Relationship-building was noted as a benefit of shared humor in the classroom among children and between

teachers and children, where relationships were foundational to creating an environment where both children and adults could learn and thrive. While teachers reported understanding the benefits of humor and laughter, teachers also indicated a reluctance to use humor as a teaching strategy.

The following literature review examined the question: How can professional development for early childhood educators on the implementation of humor and laughter as intentional teaching strategies support social and emotional development? The literature review was based on research in the past ten years that offered insight into laughter and social-emotional development and early childhood professional development. Because of the gaps in current humor and laughter research (including professional development about humor), older studies still relevant to the discourse were also included in the review. Weaving together older and newer resources provided a scope of research that reflected the current status of studying humor and laughter.

The research question of this review required starting with an examination of the fundamental effects of laughter on both children and teachers. Teachers' perspectives on using humor in the classroom were also examined to provide insight into why teachers may or may not be utilizing humor and laughter as intentional teaching strategies. With the lack of existing research at the time of this review on the effects of training teachers to use humor through professional development, early childhood professional development programs on other topics were studied as potential models for professional development about humor and laughter. Results of this review indicated that future practice in early childhood education would benefit from research-based professional development about humor and laughter as intentional teaching strategies. The following chapter is a literature review examining both current and foundational

research about the benefits of humor and laughter for social-emotional development and possible professional development models for training teachers how to utilize humor and laughter as intentional teaching strategies.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Within this literature review, scholars agreed that laughter played a positive role in learning (Chaniotakis & Papazoglou, 2019; Klein, 2003; Lovorn, 2008; Lovorn & Holaway, 2015; McGhee, 2019). Humor and laughter fostered cognitive, social, perception, and language skills (Lovorn, 2008; Semrud-Clikeman & Glass, 2010). Semrud-Clikeman and Glass (2010) suggested that laughter was inextricably linked to development and served a developmental purpose. The authors concluded that humor was positively related to academic and social competence, which Lovorn (2008) suggested led to academic achievements through college and beyond. Some researchers concluded that the physiology of laughter alone did not directly cause learning, but that laughter created an environment conducive to learning (Savage et al., 2017).

Regarding social-emotional development, humor and laughter supported relationship-building in the classroom, both among children and between teachers and children (Lovorn, 2008; Savage et al., 2017). However, teachers reported hesitancy toward using humor due to concerns about classroom management, lack of confidence in humor abilities, and lack of training (Chaniotakis & Papazoglou, 2019; Lovorn & Holaway, 2015). The differences between teachers' beliefs about the benefits of humor and laughter compared to teachers' actual practices formed the basis of this literature review. The research question examined was: How can professional development for early childhood educators on the implementation of humor and laughter as intentional teaching strategies support social and emotional development?

Social-Emotional Benefits of Laughter

Research on laughter in children has focused on the social-emotional benefits of laughing (Cekaite & Andr n, 2019; Chaniotakis & Papazoglou, 2019; Clikeman & Glass, 2010; Lovorn, 2008). Researchers agreed that laughter was social and rarely happened without another person

(Addyman et al., 2018; Curtis, 2013; McGhee & Lloyd, 1982; Smidl, 2014). Mireault (2018) described laughter's relational effects as "social glue" (p. 6), and Smidl (2014) wrote that "all studies have concluded that laughter is fundamentally a social phenomenon" (p. 3). When people shared laughter, connections were made that set the stage for optimal learning (Savage et al., 2017). Humor itself may not have made the difference in social-emotional development but rather the social setting that evolved from humor and laughter (Chapman, 1976). According to a study by Chapman (1976), the more social the situation, the more laughter was found. Chapman (1976) revealed that laughter around others was observed four times more than when children were alone. The Chapman (1976) data was supported by a later study by McGhee and Lloyd (1982) where high amounts of social play led to high amounts of laughter. Examining the research further, laughter played a role in some specific aspects of social-emotional development, including making connections, understanding social norms, and fostering emotional growth.

Making Connections

According to the research, laughter supported children learning how to make friends and build connections. Provine (2000) emphasized that laughter was even more about relationships than jokes (as cited in Lovorn, 2000). Chapman (1976) wrote that a thorough study of laughter could not happen without considering the social dimensions. Similarly, laughter was identified by Curtis (2013) as fostering social development through creating connections, shared moments with friends, camaraderie, breaking down barriers, and social intimacy. Considering teachers, Smidl (2014) concluded that laughter fostered social connections both among children and between teachers and children.

A literature review by Semrud-Clikeman and Glass (2010) investigated research about humor in childhood. The authors synthesized studies that examined theories of humor, how humor developed, the relationship between humor and brain development, and humor with various developmental disabilities. As a result of the review, the authors described laughter as a “social lubricant” that enhanced relationships and provided cohesion (Semrud-Clikeman & Glass, 2010, p. 1). Humor fostered social-emotional interactions and aided children in a kind of “social intelligence” (Semrud-Clikeman & Glass, 2010, p. 3). The researchers also linked popularity, prosocial skills, social standing, and higher numbers of friendships with a sense of humor.

Taken together, research findings by Semrud-Clikeman and Glass (2010) showed that humor benefitted children’s social-emotional development. Though Semrud-Clikeman and Glass (2010) were able to make conclusions about childhood humor through research, the authors acknowledged a limitation in the research. Considering the scientific study of humor, neuroimaging at the time of Semrud-Clikeman and Glass’s (2010) literature review had been primarily conducted in older adolescents and adults. Semrud-Clikeman and Glass (2010) suggested that more neuroimaging with children would provide a different picture of how humor develops in children over time, both behaviorally and neurologically.

Looking specifically at age progression and social connections, Hoicka and Akhtar (2012) uncovered that, already as infants, children used laughter and smiling to look for a reaction in someone else. Hoicka and Akhtar (2012) conducted a two-part study collecting both quantitative and qualitative data. For the first part of the study, the researchers examined two- and three-year-olds humor production with parents, where 47 parents were interviewed and videotaped joking with children. The second part of the study involved 113 parents completing a

survey. The overall project investigated humor as a complex socio-cognitive phenomenon, looking at whether or not children produced novel humor and the types of humor produced.

According to the results of the Hoicka and Akhtar (2012) study, children are born searching for a connection. Parents reported that children laughed, smiled, and looked for reactions when joking. Infants as young as eight months used humor socially with jokes that were intended for an audience and wanting to be shared. However, the researchers made the distinction that even though infants produced humor, the children may not have understood why something was funny. Hoicka and Akhtar (2012) concluded that infants mimicked without necessarily recognizing what was funny but instead learned which acts previously elicited laughter and then replicated the same actions. Like Semrud-Clikeman and Glass (2010), Hoicka and Akhtar's (2012) findings demonstrated that young children's laughter was a social-emotional phenomenon. However, while the results from Hoicka and Akhtar (2012) offered evidence about children's humor and laughter development, the research was conducted with children and parents together and not in a school setting. A study of humor and laughter in early childhood settings with children and teachers may yield different results.

As infants and toddlers grow, preschool is a time when children spend a considerable amount of time making friends and developing a social identity (Cunningham, 2005). According to Cunningham, preschool laughter helped break down boundaries and taught children how to enhance relationships with people around them. Joking was one way this happened. Whether a knock-knock joke from a five-year-old or a two-year-old flopping down on the floor in a silly way, Cunningham wrote that the response children got from peers taught a form of reciprocal communication and relationship building. Taken as a whole, the research in this literature review revealed that humor and laughter supported children in making connections with others.

Social Norms

Findings in this literature review showed that early childhood was a time when learning and practicing social norms came into play (Hoicka & Akhtar, 2012). Children in the research discovered that people laughed at jokes in social settings, and the children began to understand when to laugh and when not to laugh (Morreall, 2013). Some researchers maintained that young children laughed not because of understanding the reason for laughing but rather because the children learned when to laugh in a given social situation (Bergen, 2018; Purser et al., 2020). Research by Chapman (1976) suggested that social conformity may have been induced simply by a companion laughing. Imagine sitting around the dinner table with guests. Children learn that people laugh when someone tells a joke and learn which jokes should and should not be used at the table (Morreall, 2013).

Leading humor researcher, Paul McGhee, conducted extensive humor research over decades that led to the researcher's theory of four stages of humor development. McGhee theorized that all children move through the same four stages, though at varying rates (as cited in Bergen, 2018). McGhee suggested that laughter may simply have been a result of a child knowing what "should be" (as cited in Bergen, 2018). At around age 7, even though children in McGhee's research had developed a more complex understanding of humor, the children may still not always have been able to explain *why* something was funny (as cited in Bergen, 2018).

A recent study by Purser et al. (2020) suggested an age relationship between liking a joke and understanding it, and conclusions from the study reflected a possible difference between children understanding humor itself versus understanding social situations. Working under past conclusions about how cognitive, linguistic, and social development related to humor development, the quantitative study by Purser et al. (2020) examined riddle appreciation and

comprehension in children ages four to 11. Seventy-four children were asked to rate how much the children liked certain jokes and if the children could explain *why* the jokes were funny. One part of the experiment involved children watching videos of adults telling jokes and then rating the jokes on a scale from very funny to not funny. The other part of the study utilized sentence completion tasks designed to measure local processing bias. Additionally, since humor comprehension involves language, children's language development was measured through the British Picture Vocabulary Scale and converted into standardized scores.

Purser et al. (2020) concluded that riddle comprehension increased with age. Older children liked the riddles less but understood them more. Instead of comprehension, the authors suggested that laughing in younger children may have just been a result of children understanding social norms. In other words, four- and five-year-olds in the study may have laughed because of an understanding that laughter happens when joking without actually understanding the joke or comprehending why the joke was funny. Purser et al. (2020) emphasized that a child's laughter should not be taken as a sign of understanding but perhaps just a sign of knowledge about what to do in social settings. Purser et al. (2020) aligned with earlier research by Chapman (1976) that the amount of laughter was not a product of humor but of the social situation. A limitation of the Purser et al. (2020) research, however, was that the study was a cross-sectional design. To be able to gain further understanding of how children's humor develops over time, longitudinal studies that follow individual children's development may yield different insights.

Preschoolers use humor and laughter with transgressions in social situations. Semrud-Clikeman and Glass (2010) and McGee and Lloyd (1982) described how children experimented with using laughter to show aggression in acceptable ways. Children tested boundaries (Curtis,

2013), such as laughing while running away when the expectation was to line up in the gym. Sherman (1975) recorded children exhibiting bursts of glee during transgressions. Consider, for example, a scenario with handwashing for snack. One child starts splashing water, and others follow and do the same while all laughing uncontrollably. In the sink example, group glee is an exhibit of how children test the teacher, knowing that splashing water at the sink is not acceptable. Laughing in context was a way for children to practice laughter's appropriate or inappropriate role in social situations (Recchia & Loizou, 2019).

Taboo topics are relevant to a discussion about preschoolers learning social norms. Fake sneezing, burping, and using words like "fart" and "poo" can send preschoolers into bursts of laughter. Sherman (1975) addressed taboo talk in a study that found children expressed quantifiable glee when using taboo words, and the author suggested that educators could decide what to do when children started to talk about taboo topics. Curtis (2013) maintained that teachers viewed potty talk as a sign of cognitive and social growth and suggested that teachers could choose to reprimand, ignore, or embrace the laughter. Taken together, research findings in this literature review reinforced the notion that laughter both reflected and supported learning social norms.

Emotional Growth

Laughter plays a part in learning to recognize and manage emotions. According to Lovorn (2008), laughter built trust and confidence. Cekaite and Andr n (2019) suggested that laughter with peers and adults supported emotional attunement. The authors described laughter as an active process of emotional expression and emotional sharing that invited others to participate in common experiences. Semrud-Clikeman and Glass (2010) related laughter to adaptive well-being, explaining that to take part in humor, a child needed to recognize the intent

of playfulness, which led to emotional connections and empathy. Savage (2017) added that laughing also acted as a coping mechanism.

According to Lovorn (2008) and Smidl (2014), children sharing laughter built a sense of safety and resiliency. Smidl (2014) discussed the emotional connections made through laughter in a report about a 14-week study the author conducted in a preschool classroom of four- and five-year-old children. Smidl and seven research assistants used a multi-method, naturalistic, and interpretive qualitative approach to studying preschool laughter. The author explained that using a narrative method of inquiry provided the ability to collect and describe experiences over time and in the social context of the study. The Smidl (2014) study was one of few found at the time of this review that was conducted in preschools versus homes or laboratories. Data was collected by taking detailed field notes, audio and video tapes, child interviews, a personal diary, and conversations with a mentor professor. The author concluded that laughter in early childhood settings taught a sense of safety, resiliency, and trust, where children learned to have a “non-devastating perspective” and positive self-image (Smidl, 2014, p. 4). Smidl (2014) also suggested that children were more likely to remember something and learn new concepts when an emotional connection was made. Smidl’s (2014) findings suggested that when children’s emotional needs were met, learning occurred. The author acknowledged that the Smidl (2014) article included in this review did not offer teachers specific strategies for utilizing humor and laughter intentionally to support early emotional growth. However, Smidl’s (2014) findings were an exhibit of how laughter was a vehicle for emotional growth in preschool settings.

Benefits of Laughter for Teachers

This literature review found that laughter not only benefitted children but teachers as well. Paul McGhee, a leading researcher on children’s humor, wrote an extensive literature

review that included his research about children's humor and learning in the classroom (McGhee, 2019). McGhee (2019) showed that educators' enjoyment of teaching positively related to students' enjoyment, leading to positive gains for both the teachers and children. According to McGhee (2019), even though most early childhood teachers found the profession rewarding, research reflected that teaching early childhood was emotionally challenging, causing teachers to leave the profession. McGhee (2019) suggested that teachers who maintained a positive outlook in the classroom (supported by using humor and laughter) were better at sustaining positive interactions with children. Shared laughter between children and teachers, which McGhee (2019) described as "stress deodorant," provided teachers with a way to balance teachers' moods throughout the day (p. 101). Using humor as a tool to manage emotional states boosted educators' comfort levels and skills in using humor as an intentional teaching strategy (McGhee, 2019).

Other studies have reflected McGhee's (2019) conclusions about the benefits of humor and laughter for teachers. Chaniotakis and Papazoglou (2019) reported that teachers used humor to decrease tensions and improve relationships with students. Teachers also reported humor as a vehicle for maintaining teachers' interest in teaching and ability to relax. Additionally, teachers in Chaniotakis and Papazoglou (2019) wrote that teachers described humor as a way of shortening the distance between teachers and students. Van Praag et al. (2017) indicated that teachers used humor to express themselves and to communicate less formally, and Elkind (2000) described humor as a release for the mind, which made work fun. Finally, Linde (2013) suggested that positive work environments that utilized effective laughter in the workplace boosted employee efficacy, increased productivity, and decreased turnover. Research in this

review showed that teachers benefitted along with children from utilizing humor and laughter as intentional teaching strategies.

Teachers Laughing with Children

Laughter builds community which opens the door for learning. According to Lovorn (2008) and Savage et al. (2017), teachers utilizing laughter improved and enhanced learning through the resulting rapport and relationship building. Savage et al. (2017) conducted a literature review that examined the relationship between humor, laughing, learning, and health. In the Savage et al. (2017) review, the researchers emphasized that humor had been documented as a vehicle for building relationships and enhancing performance. The Savage et al. (2017) literature review referenced a study by Lujan & DiCarlo (2016), which found that laughter attracted and sustained attention, reduced anxiety, enhanced participation, and increased motivation (as cited in Savage et al., 2017). According to Banas et al. (2011), using humor as a coping mechanism in class may have allowed children to deal with stress and be better equipped to stay focused and motivated for an overall greater educational experience (as cited in Savage et al., 2017). By sharing laughter with children, teachers set the stage for learning and built connections between teachers and students (Savage et al., 2017).

Despite the benefits of laughter on learning and relationships, some studies suggested that teachers were not laughing together with students at high rates. One study by Sherman (1975) looked at early childhood teachers' responses to children's glee. The results indicated that the most frequent teacher response to glee was ignoring the behavior. The author suggested that the lack of responsive laughter may have been related to classroom management, where teachers were concerned about glee getting out of control. A more recent study echoed Sherman's (1975) findings by revealing limited laughter between teachers and students. The Cekaite and Andrén

(2019) study utilized both qualitative and quantitative measures to examine how laughter played a role in everyday Swedish preschool classrooms. Data was collected from two public Swedish preschools for children one- to five years old, with approximately 25 students and six educators in each school. Video recordings were used to analyze laughter patterns between partners (child-child, child-teacher, teacher-teacher) in different situations throughout the day (mealtimes, shared reading, etc.). Results of the multi-method study showed that even though teachers laughed with teachers and children laughed with children, intergenerational laughter (teachers responding to children's laughter with laughter) was limited. Only two percent of laughter in preschools was teachers responding to children's laughter with laughter. Though high occurrences of other positive responses like smiling and head nodding were observed, the actual act of teachers laughing in response to children's laughter was limited.

Findings from both Cekaite and Andrén (2019) and Sherman (1975) revealed limited laughter between children and teachers. Findings in this literature review brought up questions about why teachers did not laugh more with students when studies showed that laughter encouraged learning. According to Curtis (2013), part of the issue may simply have been that adults did not laugh in general as much as children. Curtis (2013) wrote an article directed at teachers about children's laughter and how humor was about creating social connections. Curtis (2013) referenced data by Kids Health (2013) which indicated that children laughed on average 200 times per day and adults only 15-18 times (as cited in Curtis, 2013). Curtis (2013) suggested that more shared laughter between children and teachers was not present simply because adults did not laugh as much as children. Curtis (2013) went on to suggest that since humor and laughing often came from an element of surprise, children laughed more than adults because children encountered the unexpected more times per day. According to Curtis (2013), adults had

already been exposed to most things around them, so adults did not experience as much novelty and, therefore, less humor. With laughter's benefits on social-emotional development, examining why teachers did not laugh more with children was relevant for this review and also if deliberate professional development could train teachers to intentionally use effective humor and laughter in the classroom.

Support and Reluctance from Teachers

According to the research, teachers appreciated humor and laughter as beneficial to learning and social-emotional development (Lovorn & Holaway, 2015). However, teachers were also hesitant to use humor in the classroom (Chaniotakis & Papazoglou, 2019; Lovorn & Holaway, 2015; Van Praag et al., 2017). Teachers reported understanding the role of humor and laughter in learning but also reported reluctance about utilizing humor and laughter as intentional teaching strategies (Chaniotakis & Papazoglou, 2019; Lovorn & Holaway, 2015; Van Praag et al., 2017).

Support for Using Humor

According to this literature review, teachers recognized the academic, social, and classroom management benefits of using humor (Chaniotakis & Papazoglou, 2019; Lovorn & Holaway, 2015). An article by Chaniotakis and Papazoglou (2019) presented both a literature review and a report of a quantitative observational research study. The Chaniotakis and Papazoglou (2019) literature review synthesized research about the benefits of humor in the classroom, why teachers did or did not use humor in teaching, and types of classroom humor. The primary study by Chaniotakis and Papazoglou (2019) examined the quantity and quality of humor expressed by teachers and students. The research took place in 105 Greek elementary school classrooms and utilized classroom observations to collect data about the frequency of

teachers' and children's humor, whether humor was correlated to content, whether positive or negative humor was used, and different types of humor (jokes, non-verbal humor, irony/sarcasm, etc.).

According to Chaniotakis and Papazoglou (2019), teachers in the research acknowledged that humor made children feel more comfortable and improved relationships and when used properly, strengthened communication that led to feelings of acceptance. In addition, teachers indicated a belief that humor helped create a positive atmosphere that motivated students and boosted interactions among teachers and classmates. Chaniotakis and Papazoglou (2019) also referenced a study by Neulip (1991) which reflected that teachers used humor to maintain a personal interest in the classroom, relax, and convey self-expression (as cited in Chaniotakis and Papazoglou, 2019). Examining Chaniotakis and Papazoglou (2019) within this literature review provided evidence of teachers' beliefs about humor usage. However, the Chaniotakis and Papazoglou (2019) study was conducted in elementary schools. Using the Chaniotakis and Papazoglou (2019) research results to analyze humor with preschoolers means needing to keep the age differences in mind. Also, the Chaniotakis and Papazoglou (2019) study was conducted in Greece. Cultural differences could affect the results of similar studies conducted in the United States.

Similar to Chaniotakis and Papazoglou (2019), a qualitative study by Lovorn and Holaway (2015) examined teachers' beliefs about the benefits of humor in the classroom. The Lovorn and Holaway (2015) study utilized content analysis methodology to examine perspectives among k-12 teachers about the effectiveness of using humor in the classroom, particularly as it relates to classroom teaching, classroom management, and teacher-student and student-student interactions. The researchers conducted an online dialogue with 31 master's level

in-service teachers (grades one to six) from a major university (not named) in the southern United States. Over the course of 15 weeks, researchers asked teachers open-ended questions related to humor, and the responses were used to collect data about teachers' perceptions and experiences with using humor in the classroom.

Like Chaniotakis and Papazoglou (2019), results from Lovorn and Holaway (2015) revealed that teachers believed that humor led to improved attention and learning and that humor was an effective classroom management tool when used properly. Teachers in the Lovorn and Holaway (2015) study indicated that humor created a positive classroom environment that reduced student stress and encouraged students to be more open to discussion. Teachers in the study also expressed that humor helped educators get to know students and supported students in feeling more comfortable with both peers and teachers. Finally, the teachers in Lovorn and Holaway (2015) believed that humor, when used appropriately, helped students from different backgrounds connect, practice patience, and show respect. Overall, teachers in Lovorn and Holaway (2015) perceived humor as positive for social-emotional development and learning in the classroom. Therefore, results from Lovorn and Holaway (2015) are relevant to understanding how teachers view humor as an instructional strategy. However, since the study was conducted with teachers across k-12, results of the study may look different if conducted exclusively with teachers of Early Childhood Education.

Hesitation About Using Humor

Despite recognizing the benefits of using humor, teachers in the literature review indicated a reluctance to use humor in class due to concerns about class management, fear of wasting time, and/or not feeling inherently funny (Chaniotakis & Papazoglou, 2019; Lovorn & Holaway, 2015). The most common reason for hesitation to use humor came from a fear of

losing control (Chaniotakis & Papazoglou, 2019). Klein (2003) wrote that teachers expressed concern that laughter meant that children and teachers were not taking learning seriously but just being silly. Also, Klein (2003) pointed to an existing belief by educators that humor was a form of entertainment with little academic or social value.

Lovorn and Holaway (2015) were previously cited in this review as evidence of teachers' beliefs about the positive benefits of laughter in the classroom. However, the study also revealed that teachers were reluctant to use humor as a teaching strategy. Teachers in the Lovorn and Holaway (2015) study identified more reasons not to use humor than reasons to use humor. Some teachers shared that they were hesitant to use humor out of fear that the humor could be misunderstood, which could damage relationships in the classroom. Lovorn and Holaway (2015) also wrote that teachers seemed to have a narrow concept of humor, where humor was mostly about something being funny or silly, without considering other forms of humor that could be positive and effective in the classroom, such as caricature, irony, or satire.

Van Praag et al. (2017) conducted a study that emphasized the relevance of humor for building relationships between teachers and students, but like Lovorn and Holaway (2015), the research article also revealed teachers' hesitation to use humor as a teaching strategy. The observational study utilized high school classroom observations in Belgium to examine how humor related to teacher-student relationships. The qualitative semi-structured study involved naturalistic observations for two- or three weeks during school activities, as well as face-to-face, taped interviews. Van Praag et al. (2017) found that teachers' first concern with using humor was classroom management. Teachers indicated that to "survive" each class meant that the first condition to be met was keeping control. Humor was identified by teachers as a strategy for getting children back on track and to support a positive classroom environment but not

necessarily as part of the curriculum itself. A limitation of the applicability of Van Praag et al. (2017) to this literature review was that the study was conducted in high schools. The age of the students in Van Praag et al. (2017) needs to be considered when making conclusions about early childhood teachers' perspectives on humor and laughter. Also, like Chaniotakis and Papazoglou (2019), the Van Praag et al. (2017) study was conducted in Belgium, so cultural differences between Belgium and the United States could result in different findings.

Teaching Educators to Use Humorous Practices

According to Lovorn and Holaway (2015), teachers indicated a lack of training on how to use humor in instruction, which contributed to the reluctance to use humor in the classroom. A review by Klein (2003) concluded that most undergraduate students and most teachers had not encountered classes about humor and teaching. In the absence of training, Chaniotakis and Papazoglou (2019) wrote that, overall, teachers did not need to be funny to use humor in the classroom because humor can take on many different forms, types, and qualities. Chaniotakis and Papazoglou (2019) suggested that teachers not think of humor as an inherent personality trait that a person either has or does not have but rather as a tool that can be learned and used for building relationships and teaching content.

Research by Recchia and Loizou (2019) addressed teachers who expressed concerns about a lack of humor training. In a book chapter about the relevance of early childhood humor research, Recchia and Loizou (2019) addressed adults' roles in nurturing humor in young children. The authors emphasized that adults and teachers were in a position to promote environments that supported the development and engagement of humor in young children's lives. In early childhood settings, humor was a strategy and teaching tool, and Recchia and Loizou (2019) provided recommendations for how teachers and caregivers could support humor

as an element of quality, responsive, playful early childhood education. The recommendations included incorporating classroom elements involving the people, the classroom space, the activities, and the materials. Concrete suggestions for teachers included context-related suggestions (such as creating a playful environment), activity-related suggestions (such as reading humorous stories or doing math problems in the form of jokes), and materials-related suggestions (such as humorous picture books or artwork). By creating classrooms that embraced humor, Recchia and Loizou (2019) suggested that children expressed themselves emotionally, socially, and cognitively. The authors concluded that humor was a means through which learning was fun for both teachers and children.

Considering the differences between teachers' beliefs and practices around humor, a quantitative study by Wen et al. (2011) addressed teachers' perspectives. Wen et al. (2011) compared early childhood teachers' curriculum beliefs versus classroom practices. The authors wrote that the basis for the study was research from the past that had revealed the significance of quality teaching on young children's development. However, a systematic study of the correlations between teachers' beliefs and practices was rare. Wen et al. (2011) noted that past research about teachers' beliefs related to practices had been conducted in elementary and secondary school and not with early childhood teachers. Therefore, Wen et al. (2011) focused the study on teachers in Early Childhood Education, which the authors believed had important implications for improving the quality of early childhood education. For Wen et al.'s (2011) primary study, surveys were conducted with 58 preschool teachers about teachers' professional backgrounds and curriculum beliefs, and each teacher was also observed for two hours. Data to analyze teacher beliefs versus practices was collected using multiple quantitative measurement tools.

Results from the Wen et al. (2011) study indicated a weak correlation between early childhood educators' beliefs and behaviors. The researchers reported discrepancies between what early childhood teachers believed and what teachers did in class. For teachers with more professional training, stronger correlations were uncovered between beliefs, knowledge, and practice, leading Wen et al. (2011) to conclude that higher levels of professional development may help teachers bridge the gap between beliefs and practice. Results of the study led Wen et al. (2011) to recommend the importance of early childhood professional development with a focus on transforming teacher knowledge into practice. The authors did, however, acknowledge the limitation of the study that the study parameters were about a general consistency between beliefs and practices and that studying changes in teachers' practices in specific contexts or with specific topics may change the research results. Considering Wen et al.'s (2011) recommendations about professional development as a vehicle for shifting instruction, early childhood professional development that focuses on transforming teachers' beliefs about humor and laughter into practice could influence the use of humor and laughter as teaching strategies. More research is warranted to connect Wen et al.'s (2011) findings about the effects of professional development as a whole to humor and laughter professional development specifically.

Intentional Teaching

To consider humor and laughter as intentional teaching strategies for social-emotional development, this literature review examined the concept of intentional teaching proposed by Copple and Bredekamp (2009). In a book about developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs published by National Association for the Education of Young Children, Copple and Bredekamp (2009) wrote that educational effectiveness includes research-based,

developmentally appropriate practice for child development and learning. Copple and Bredekamp (2009) suggested that teachers had multiple decisions to make about how to make classrooms effective, including how the environment is organized, planning a curriculum that engages and supports children, and adapting teaching strategies for both the group and for individual children. Copple and Bredekamp (2009) suggested that while teachers needed to plan with clear objectives in mind, teachers had to also be responsive to “teachable moments” guided by the outcomes identified for the children. Copple and Bredekamp (2009) concluded that intentional teachers were intentional in all aspects of their role, including creating a community of caring. The authors wrote that children learned and developed best when part of a community of learners, where every person in the room contributed to one another’s well-being and where teachers made it a priority to develop a warm, positive relationship with each of the children. With Copple and Bredekamp’s (2009) recommendations for intentional teaching in mind, a review of the literature showed that the positive classroom relationships emphasized by Copple and Bredekamp (2009) could be established through humor and laughter as intentional teaching strategies (Cekaite & Andrén, 2019; Chaniotakis & Papazoglou, 2019; Lovorn & Holaway, 2015; McGhee, 2019).

Professional Development in Early Childhood Education

According to Copple and Bredekamp (2009), effective teachers made use of a wide range of teaching strategies, such as remaining flexible and observant and modeling attitudes and ways of approaching problems. Like Copple and Bredekamp (2009), McGhee (1988) wrote that part of teachers’ roles was to model positive attitudes through intentional practices. Since teachers reported a lack of training on how to utilize humor and laughter as intentional teaching strategies (Lovorn & Holaway, 2015), professional development that trains teachers how to use humor

effectively may be beneficial. However, according to Lovorn and Holaway (2015), few studies have focused on how teachers incorporated humor into the classroom. At the time of this review, no Early Childhood Education preservice or in-service training dedicated to early childhood humor and laughter was found. Therefore, this review examined other professional development models that could offer insight into how humor professional development could affect teachers' knowledge, attitudes, and practices around using humor and laughter as intentional teaching strategies.

Humor Training

A review of the literature uncovered only one college course (and, subsequently, only one article) specifically dedicated to teaching undergraduate students about children's humor (Klein, 2003). Where humor and laughter research was historically not considered worthwhile (McGhee, 1988), Klein (2003) explained that most students had probably not had a class about humor or seen humor in textbooks because humor was widely considered a form of entertainment with little academic or social value. The Klein (2003) article described a Wheelock College course, *Humor and Child Development*, where students in the class were both pre-service teachers and students studying other relevant fields, such as health and psychology. The college course was based on two underlying principles: (1) humor is an important factor for nurturing development, and (2) humor has the potential to enhance children's well-being. With the principles in mind, the course content covered several major areas, including surveying a historic overview of humor research, examining developmental changes in children's creation and comprehension of humor, learning about how humor supports children across domains, and investigating practical applications of humor. Class discussions, large and small group activities, and collaborative projects were prioritized as a way for students to learn from others' backgrounds and interests,

and guest speakers from different fields (musicians, teachers, health care professionals, counselors) presented how humor was utilized in the speakers' work.

As a vehicle for translating theory to practice, the Wheelock College children's humor course included both coordinated group class projects and individual special projects (Klein, 2003). One objective of the group projects was to inform other communities or populations about the significance of humor in children's lives. Examples of class projects included the creation of humorous games and activities for hospitalized children, a radio broadcast geared toward parents on the topic of humor and children, and an exhibit for Week of the Young Child with information about ways teachers use humor. Klein (2003) summarized that the class projects pulled together what the students had been learning in coursework and allowed the students to develop innovative approaches to nurturing children's need for humor.

Along with group projects, students were asked to complete an independent project (Klein, 2003). The students needed to follow certain criteria but were able to pursue personal interests on humor in different settings. One example of an independent project was built around humor in a prison setting. Since visiting family members in prison can be stressful for children, three students developed a combined project that culminated in three components: using art to playfully decorate the visitation rooms, leading fun activities during visitations (funny song sessions, humorous books, games, etc.), and a workshop for inmates that focused on children's play and humor development. Klein (2003) wrote that the compilation of course discussions, field experience, and projects provided undergraduate students with an important window into children's development and modeled ways that adults can use humor with children. Klein (2003) suggested that other formats of professional development could offer similar insights into

children's humor, such as professional development workshops, retreats, online discussion groups, or newsletters.

The Wheelock College course and recommendations by Klein (2003) could offer a model for professional development about utilizing humor and laughter as intentional teaching strategies. The course's inclusion of theory, group and individual projects, and reflection could suggest potential components of humor and laughter professional development for early childhood educators. However, some limitations of the Klein (2003) study should be mentioned. The Wheelock College course was not specifically designed for teachers in Early Childhood Education, so the content of the course lacked a high amount of content for early childhood educators. Also, because the course was geared toward students in different fields, preservice teachers did not learn early childhood humor teaching strategies or have the opportunity for practice teaching or coaching. The Klein (2003) article's limitations need to be kept in mind when considering the Wheelock College course as a model for humor and laughter professional development.

Professional Development Example: Indigenous Play-Based Curriculum

Where the Wheelock College children's humor course was relevant for preservice teachers, a participatory action study by Elinam Dzamesi and Van Heerden (2020) was conducted with eight in-service kindergarten teachers. The qualitative study in eastern Ghana was constructed by modifying different aspects of several existing professional development models, where the objective of the research was to examine the effects of professional training on early childhood teachers' knowledge, skills, attitudes, and practices in using indigenous, play-based teaching strategies. The study was conducted in four phases. First, one-on-one interviews were held with teachers to identify prior knowledge and beliefs about play-based pedagogy.

Where teachers in Lovorn and Holaway (2015) felt that training on how to utilize humor in the classroom was lacking, interviews in Elinam Dzamesi and Van Heerden (2020) similarly indicated that teachers needed training to develop play-based attitudes and practices. Phase two of the study built on the interview findings and included implementing workshops about indigenous play. The experiential, hands-on sessions utilized indigenous games, materials typically found in a Ghanaian kindergarten, and traditional Anansi stories. The third phase of the study moved teachers' training experiences to implementation in the classroom. The third phase also involved teachers taking turns observing other teachers' instruction as well as receiving coaching from the researchers. Finally, the last phase of the study involved one-on-one post-implementation interviews where teachers had the opportunity to explain the reasons for any changes in curriculum practices. Each step of the professional development process was designed to build teachers' play-based learning competencies.

Activities in the Elinam Dzamesi and Van Heerden (2020) professional development sessions were aimed at teaching and developing teachers' skills about using indigenous play for learning. In the beginning of the training, clay was introduced and teachers were invited to find materials in the classroom to manipulate and play with the clay to simulate how children would play. In the indigenous play training, clay became a vehicle for playful learning. Using clay and materials found in the classroom as part of training aligned with recommendations by Recchia and Loizou (2019) who suggested that existing classroom materials can be part of an arsenal of tools to create a humorous classroom environment. According to Recchia and Loizou (2019), the choice of classroom materials can have a meaningful impact on children's understanding and expressions of humor which relates to learning and development.

Results of the Elinam Dzamesi and Van Heerden (2020) study showed that the indigenous play professional development led to teachers making conscious efforts to change instructional methods. Data collected through interviews, observations, photographs, reflective journals, and questionnaires revealed that teachers felt that training uncovered previously unknown pedagogical possibilities. After the workshops, teachers reported using Anansi stories to teach grammar concepts and elicit reciprocal language. Teachers engaged more deliberately through intentional outdoor play. Classroom spaces and materials were altered to support more play-based learning. Teachers also reported that the shift in teaching strategies changed teacher-child interactions. Where teachers and children had typically had a top-down relationship in the past, teachers post-training reported being more open to the learners' contributions and viewed teachers and children as co-learners. The observable changes in teachers' behaviors exemplified a shift in educators' knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and approaches (Elinam Dzamesi & Van Heerden, 2020).

Prior to the Elinam Dzamesi and Van Heerden (2020) study, teachers indicated knowing that play-based strategies were intended as part of the official Ghanaian kindergarten curriculum. However, the teachers indicated that employing the play-based strategies was not possible because necessary knowledge and skills were not taught to the educators. Elinam Dzamesi and Van Heerden (2020) wrote that for the teachers to be able to implement the desired play-based strategies, teachers needed the content knowledge, pedagogical skills, and confidence in the ability to facilitate meaningful learning through play. The lack of confidence by the Ghanaian teachers was similar to teacher concerns in the research by Lovorn and Holaway (2015), which showed that teachers were afraid to use humor. The confidence shift in teachers in Elinam Dzamesi and Van Heerden (2020) could suggest that a similar boost in confidence may occur in

teachers undergoing training about incorporating humor in instruction. Where teacher practices in Ghana changed as a result of hands-on play training, experiential professional development aimed at increasing humorous teaching strategies could reveal similar observable results. The most obvious limitation of the Elinam Dzamesi and Van Heerden (2020) study was that the study was conducted in Ghana. Applying findings from the Ghana study to professional development in the United States needs to keep cultural differences in mind. Also, the size of the study was small with eight participants, so making conclusions on a broader scale may be different based on larger numbers of participants.

Professional Development Example: Movement Curriculum

A qualitative study by Sevimili-Celik and Johnson (2016) was designed around a professional development module that taught teachers how to incorporate movement into instruction. Unlike other studies in this review that involved teachers of older students (Chaniotakis & Papazoglou, 2019; Lovorn & Holaway, 2015; Purser et al., 2019), Sevimili-Celik and Johnson (2016) was conducted with early childhood educators, making the study relevant as a model for early childhood professional development about humor. Similar to the lack of research about humor training found in this literature review, the movement module was born out of a gap in research. The study authors wrote that little information on movement education existed in the literature, where most research on effective early childhood teaching concentrated on traditional academic subjects. Like the Wheelock College children's humor course (Klein, 2003), Sevimili-Celik and Johnson (2016) wrote that the movement course was likely the first such training.

Sevimili-Celik and Johnson (2016) designed the pre-service movement training around a previous 12-week professional development module about play, where teachers were actively

involved in the learning process through experiential activities. The underlying belief of the movement module was that integrating movement into learning fostered children's physical well-being and intellectual development. Like the impetus for Elinam Dzamesi and Van Heerden's (2020) indigenous play-based training, Sevimili-Celik and Johnson (2016) felt that teachers' theoretical and pedagogical knowledge, perceptions, and competence in using the movement approach needed to be addressed. Components of the module included weekly movement activities, micro-teaching sessions for peers, and self-reflection. Data was collected through open-ended questionnaires, interviews, microteaching analysis, and focus group interviews.

Examining teachers' perceptions and perceived benefits of movement education, the overall results of Sevimili-Celik and Johnson (2016) revealed that the movement training modules boosted teachers' competence, knowledge, and confidence in using movement-based pedagogy. Teachers expressed personal comfort about physically moving in different ways and conveyed an increased understanding of how movement can be used with different academic subjects. The teachers in Sevimili-Celik and Johnson (2016) expressed a deepened understanding of pedagogical ideas, and the educators reported the intention to convert newly gained knowledge into practice. On a social-emotional level, the professional development participants in Sevimili-Celik and Johnson (2016) expressed that the course fostered a sense of community through doing the exercises together with other educators. Teachers felt more connected to colleagues in the class. Teachers also reported feeling more connected to a shared professional culture. Additionally, the opportunity to play in the modules resonated positively with the participants and contributed to reducing concerns that teachers may have had about movement as

an instructional tool. Movement training positively impacted teachers on a pedagogical level as well as personally and socially (Sevimili-Celik & Johnson, 2016).

Findings by Sevimili-Celik and Johnson (2016) about the personal and social impact of professional development on teachers related to Smidl's (2014) contention that allowing laughter in the classroom helped teachers develop both personally and professionally. In a research report by Smidl (2014), the author suggested that the relationships that teachers developed through laughter shifted educators' mindsets from "my classroom" to "our classroom" (p. 3). Smidl also suggested an overarching belief that teachers can learn humorous teaching strategies. However, the type of training described by Smidl (2014) was not found at the time of this review. Considering the conclusions by Sevimili-Celik and Johnson (2016) and Smidl (2014), teaching educators how to utilize humor and laughter as teaching strategies could lead to social-emotional benefits.

Without an example of early childhood humor professional development, the Sevimili-Celik and Johnson (2016) movement study could offer insights into the potential benefits of laughter training for early childhood educators. Teachers in Sevimili-Celik and Johnson (2016) reported a paradigm shift that could suggest similar potential results of humor and laughter training. Where the Sevimili-Celik and Johnson (2016) study participants had not previously understood how to utilize movement in instruction, other teachers referenced in this literature review similarly reported a lack of understanding of how humor can be an intentional teaching strategy (Lovorn & Holaway, 2015). The Sevimili-Celik and Johnson (2016) movement modules helped reduce teachers' concerns about using movement across subject areas, which may suggest that humor training could similarly reduce hesitations teachers had about using humor throughout curriculum and instruction. Also, the collegial rapport and confidence gains that were

fostered in the movement training could be a positive result of humor training. Results from Sevimili-Celik and Johnson's (2016) movement modules may suggest that teaching educators humorous teaching strategies could benefit both teachers and children. However, while the movement modules in Sevimili-Celik and Johnson (2016) could be viewed as a model for humor and laughter professional development, Sevimili-Celik and Johnson (2016) was the only research study on early childhood movement training found at the time of this review. More research is needed to compare how the movement modules may or may not inform laughter training for early childhood educators.

Conclusion

According to this literature review, classroom humor and laughter benefitted both children and teachers. Humor and laughter positively influenced the social-emotional development of early learners and promoted teacher satisfaction. However, teachers reported a hesitancy to use humor and laughter as intentional teaching strategies due to a fear of losing control of the classroom or lacking training in effective humorous teaching practices. A gap in the literature was evident in how and when to train educators to use humor and laughter effectively. According to Sevimili-Celik and Johnson (2016), quality professional development had the potential to raise teachers' skill levels and improve the development of young children, but no humor and laughter training specifically for early childhood educators was found at the time of this review. An examination of other types of professional development for early childhood educators could provide insight into the possible results that effective training would have on teachers' knowledge, competence, and practices around using humor and laughter as intentional teaching strategies. More research is warranted. The following chapter synthesizes the overall results of this literature review and the applicability to the field of Early Childhood

Education. Limitations from the research are noted, and suggestions for future research are outlined.

Chapter Three: Discussion, Application, and Future Studies

This literature review examined the benefits of humor and laughter for both children and teachers and investigated potential professional development models to train teachers to use more humor and laughter in the classroom. Benefits of humor and laughter on social-emotional development were highlighted, including emotional development, learning social norms, and building relationships (Addyman et al., 2018; Cekaite & Andr n, 2019; Lovorn, 2008; Semrud-Clikeman & Glass, 2010). Teachers in the research believed in the benefits of using humor and laughter in the classroom but also indicated a reluctance to use humor due to fears about classroom management, concerns about being inherently funny, and/or because of lack of training on how to use humor and laughter as intentional teaching strategies (Chaniotakis & Papazoglou, 2019; Lovorn & Holaway, 2015). The present chapter pulled together the research from this review to consider what can be learned from the literature about implications for the field of Early Childhood Education and what the research suggested may be relevant next steps.

Limitations

One of the most prominent limitations in this literature review was the lack of research on humor and laughter in Early Childhood Education. One reason for the absence of studies may be because of the difficulty in defining humor and laughter. Researchers agreed that humor definitions and data are difficult to quantify (Chaniotakis & Papazoglou, 2019; Chapman, 1976; Lovorn & Holaway, 2015; McGhee, 1988). Research on humor and laughter may not ever be completely objective because the topic involves thoughts and behaviors that are not always easy to identify or interpret (Addyman et al., 2018). Smidl (2014) suggested that researching humor with young children can be especially hard because young children are hard to interview. Chaniotakis and Papazoglou (2019) also pointed out the observer effect when researching

children's humor. When participants are aware of being studied, humorous behaviors and laughter may change, leading to questions of validity. Additionally, this literature review revealed that laughter research was particularly limited in early childhood settings. Since laughter looks different in schools versus homes or laboratories, researchers need to consider how the research setting may influence conclusions about humor in Early Childhood Education (Recchia & Loizou, 2019). Research about how to train teachers to implement humor and laughter as intentional teaching strategies was also lacking in the research. Therefore, more research needs to be conducted to examine the effects that professional development may have on teachers learning how to use more humor and laughter in the classroom.

Future Research

Perceptions about the validity of humor and laughter research shifted in the 1970s when laughter research, in general, started to become recognized as a worthwhile field of study (McGhee, 1988). The lack of humor research in Early Childhood Education, however, has left a gap in fully understanding the roles of humor and laughter in the early childhood classroom (Recchia & Papazoglou, 2019). Looking forward, more research could provide a window into humor and laughter as intentional teaching strategies in Early Childhood Education. To make progress with research, a perception shift about the need for humor and laughter research in early childhood settings may be necessary. Drawing attention to research that has already shown the benefits of humor and laughter for both children and teachers could lay the foundation for gaining increased support in practice and policy for humor and laughter professional development.

Worthwhile future research would include further examination of early childhood teachers' hesitations toward using humor and laughter as intentional teaching strategies. This

literature review uncovered reasons why teachers were reluctant to use humor and laughter. Research was not, however, found for this review about what teachers think would be needed to shift beliefs into practice. Collecting data on what types of information and experiences (theory, practice teaching, coaching, project work, etc.) teachers think would be needed to feel more confident about using humorous teaching strategies could inform the design of preservice and in-service professional development. Research-based professional development based on the articulated needs of educators could lay the foundation for effective training.

Once humor training is more prevalent, the next research focus would be to study the effects of training on teaching practices. Research would involve investigating different types of training on humor and laughter as strategies and analyzing whether or not and how the training altered teachers' practices. Comparisons between teachers who have undergone training versus teachers who have not could reveal whether or not training positively alters early childhood teachers' practices (Wen et al., 2011) and which types of professional development are most effective. Knowing which types of training are effective would drive future models of humor professional development.

After research indicates what type of supports teachers need to incorporate humor and laughter as intentional teaching strategies, and after the effectiveness of different types of training is studied, the third focus of research would be to examine the effects that training has on children's social-emotional development (including relationships between teachers and students). Studies about teachers' job satisfaction post-training would also be pertinent and insightful. The ultimate goal of implementing professional development is to improve instructional strategies that benefit children. To make sure humor professional development is

having the desired effect, research would need to examine if and how teacher training results in changes for both children and teachers.

Conclusion

McGhee (2019) wrote that in a survey of humor researchers, investigating the role of humor in learning was voted the most neglected topic needing to be studied. This literature review revealed that research about humor and laughter in preschools was limited. According to research conducted in preschools by Cekaite and Andr en (2019), children laughed more in situations where adults were not present, “which implies that the presence of adults...has a constraining effect on children’s tendency to laugh” (p. 16). Given what has been shown in this literature review about the benefits of humor and laughter for both children and teachers, the “constraining effect” of teachers’ presence on children’s laughter deserves attention. More research is warranted in preschools to determine if the constraining effect could be a result of teachers lacking training in how to utilize humor and laughter as intentional teaching strategies.

Hamre et al. (2017) wrote that preparing early childhood teachers is even more complex than training K-12 teachers because of the variety of expectations and licensing across the “patchwork” of early childhood systems. The authors suggested that professional development can lead to substantial changes in early childhood teachers’ practices and that the right training will lead to higher-quality classroom environments and teacher-student relationships. Additionally, Hamre et al. suggested that the field of Early Childhood Education should find ways to make sure early childhood teachers have access to training experiences to be effective in the classroom. Considering the benefits of humor and laughter on learning, development, and teacher job satisfaction, well-planned professional development that trains teachers on how to use humor may result in the higher-quality classroom environment suggested by Hamre et al.

More research is warranted to understand what types of research-based professional development could effectively move teachers' beliefs about humor and laughter as intentional teaching strategies into instructional practices.

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