

Book review

Loizou, Eleni & Recchia, Susan L. (Eds.) (2019). *Research on Young Children's Humour. Theoretical and Practical Implications for Early Childhood Education*. Cham: Springer International Publishing.

The book sets out to expand our knowledge on a novel and ambitious area of research regarding the development of humour. Humour, difficult to define and deconstruct, yet a familiar experience for almost all of us, has been explored from multiple perspectives, including (but not limited to) linguistics, sociology, philosophy, psychology and education (merely browsing through the contents of this journal, I think proves the point!). Therefore, an interdisciplinary approach seems to be the most appropriate way forward when studying humour, including its development. Loizou and Recchia have utilised this kind of approach in their book. Bringing together scientists from different parts of the world, they have presented research, theoretical, and review chapters deriving from the area of developmental psychology, educational sciences, and cultural studies on a subject matter that very little is known about: young children's humour.

The fact that this is an unexplored area and that limited research has been conducted is stressed in almost every chapter of the book. Indeed, little has been written about young children's production and appreciation of humour, or the potential use of humour in the early years' classrooms, these points being the objective of the book. It seems to me that research on humour follows (what seems to be) a 'general rule' in developmental sciences, where young children's capacities (at least at the initial stages of research on a particular area of development) seem to be understudied, and possibly underestimated -for instance, see the well-known criticism on the early stages of development in Piaget's theory (Lightfoot et al. 2018). One main reason behind this seems to be the methodological challenges that research with young children poses. Loizou and Recchia's book aims to bridge the gap in our knowledge regarding the development of humour in young ages and the pedagogical implications of its use in early education settings, and it certainly is a first step to this direction. Certain methodological weaknesses that can be found in some chapters of the book (for instance, the pilot/small-scale studies presented in some chapters, or the age of the research participants which in some cases are not young, but latency or preadolescent children) are expected since this area of research is very new. A definite strength of the book is the emphasis on the applied aspect of the research on young children's humour. Each chapter includes practical implications and suggestions regarding the fostering of humour in early childhood and/or the potential use of it in preschool education.

The book opens with an introductory chapter by the editors where the need for research on young children's humour and the potential use of it as pedagogical tool is discussed. The book is further organised in three parts. Part I, entitled "Development and learning" comprises of four chapters which focus on the connections between humour and other aspects of social experience. In chapter 2, Doris Bergen proposes the existence of a close theoretical partnership between young's children play and humour development, which she examines from an evolutionary, a constructivist, a psychoanalytic and a sociological communications perspective. Elly Singer in chapter 3 focuses on laughter in 2- and 3-year-old children (laughter being considered an

indication of humour), and the interdependent/interrelated sources of it. According to the results of the study she conducted with 96 2- and 3-year-old nursery students, laughter at this young age seems to have three sources: social laughing, incongruity based-humour and pleasure to function. In chapter 4, the styles of humour (affiliative, aggressive, self-enhancing and self-defeating) are explored within a group of children in middle childhood and preadolescence. The development of a humour styles questionnaire (HSQ-Y) for this age group (8-11 years of age) is described. The chapter's authors, Lucy James and Claire Fox, also report results from the administration of the HSQ-Y, including interesting findings concerning gender differences in humour styles and associations between the four humour styles and aspects of psychosocial adjustment at this age group. They conclude that there are clear links between children's humour styles, their social relationships and well-being and that humour should be covered as part of the school curriculum. Wen Liu in Chapter 5 reports an empirical study she conducted in order to explore the development of preschoolers' (3- to 5-year-olds) sense of humour and the relationship between children's temperament and parents' humour style in China. According to her findings, the age of four is a turning point for the development of the sense of humour. Furthermore, dimensions of a child's temperament and the parents' sense of humour can predict his/her sense of humour development.

Part II of the book addresses how humour may affect "Teaching and Classroom Experiences" in early childhood education. In chapter 6, Paul McGhee, the pioneer researcher on humour development, argues that humour is a neglected form of play, and that time has finally come to make use of it in the early education classroom. The chapter includes valuable practical advice on putting research into action, encouraging educators to start generating their own ideas about how to introduce humour into their teaching efforts. Chapter 7 is a research chapter written by Eleni and Evi Loizou. Using robust methodology, young children's (3.5 to 4.5 years of age) visual and verbal humorous productions are explored under the theoretical framework of the Theory of the Absurd and the Empowerment Theory, the two theories on humour development that had been proposed by Eleni Loizou (Loizou 2005). At the next chapter, Nikolaos Chaniotakis and Magdalini Papazoglou, explore the place of humour in primary schools' classrooms. They provide a detailed literature review on the use of humour in the classroom and present the results of their study on the quantity and quality of humour expressed by teachers and students in their everyday classroom interactions in primary schools in Greece. They conclude their chapter by providing informed suggestions to teachers on how/when to include humour in their teaching. In chapter 9, Eleni Loizou and Simoni Symeonidou present a pilot study conducted with five 6- to 8- year old children on the potential use of cartoons as an educational tool to fight stereotypes about disability. The findings point out the importance of following a specific process when using cartoons as a mediating tool to fight stereotypes, as humour needs to be cultivated appropriately in order to be successfully used in such way. Lisa Arter in Chapter 10, based on the McGhee (1979) model of humour development, makes suggestions on the appropriate types of jokes, picture and comic books that are suitable for each age, and offers advice as to how educators can use these texts.

The third Part of the book, "Other Perspectives and Context", is stimulating in that it introduces new ways of understanding and conceptualising children's humour development. For instance, Vasudevi Reddy, in Chapter 11, explores humour as a cultural process by focusing on three aspects of culture that come together in humour (namely, dialogicality, particularity, and precariousness) and trying to unpick them through examples of humorous exchanges in infancy. In Chapter 12, Laura Jennins-Tallant uses Bakhtin's theory of carnivalesque (1984a, 1984b) as a framework to examine young children's humour. Using data from a small-scale research study conducted in the UK, she proposes that children's humour can be understood as carnivalesque, employed as a means to question authority, and argues that it is important for the field of early

education to acquire a more comprehensive sense of framing children's humour. Jennifer Mata-McMahon in Chapter 12 employs a novel approach to children's humour by exploring its connection to children's spirituality. She makes the case that teachers might be able to facilitate the pursuit of happiness and life's meaning for children by nurturing both their spirituality and humour. The concluding chapter of the book (which to my surprise was included in Part III, although it seems to sum up all previous chapters) is written by the editors. It is argued that humour (and the study of it) integrates cognition, emotion, social awareness and interpersonal understanding and offers a powerful lens through which to learn about young children's thinking, as exemplified in the chapters of the present volume. Finally, a framework for future research, suggesting ways young children's humour can be explored further, is propositioned.

On the whole, the book makes a welcome and timely contribution to the field of humour development. It includes chapters written by some of the most prominent scholars of the field and manages to put on view the diversity of topics and complexity of issues that studying humour, especially at a young age, entails. A little more refined editing in some chapters would be advantageous, but overall, the book is well structured and persuasively argued. It is recommended both for developmental scientists interested in early development, scholars of humour, teachers and early childhood educators who in each chapter can find valuable suggestions on how to make use of the powerful pedagogical tool that humour can be. Loizou and Recchia paved the way with their book, so that now we can "anticipate the new knowledge that the next generation of humour research will bring" (p. 250).

Lida Anagnostaki

National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece

lanagnostaki@ecd.uoa.gr

References

- Bakhtin, M. M. (1984a). *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. (C. Emerson, ed. and trans.). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1984b). *Rabelais and his World*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Lightfoot, C., Cole, M. & S. R. Cole. (2018). *The Development of Children (8th edition)*. New York: Worth Publishers.
- Loizou, E. (2005). 'Infant humour: the theory of the absurd and the empowerment theory'. *International Journal of Early Years Education* 13 (1), pp. 43-53.
- McGhee, P. E. (1979). *Humor: Its Origin and Development*. San Francisco: Freeman.