

# NHAEYC Newsletter

Serving Those Who Work with Young Children

Fall 2005



## The Importance of Nurturing Children's Sense of Humor

Paul E. McGhee, PhD

Why did Miss Tomato turn red?



Because she saw Mr. Green Pea (pee) Ha! Ha! Ha!

We've all heard five- and six-year-olds repeat riddles like this (above) and break up laughing at their own jokes—even when they don't yet understand them. While we have long understood the many benefits resulting from play, we have been slower to recognize the equally striking developmental benefits resulting from children's humor. This article reviews those benefits.

### What is Humor?

Humor, in my view, is a form of play—intellectual play, or play with ideas. Infants show this form of play as early as six or eight months of age, when they start laughing at their parents' funny faces or other odd behaviors. By the beginning of the second year, they create their own first humor in the context of pretend play. Thus, a 16-month-old may find it very funny to put a diaper on her head and pretend it's a hat. Two-year-olds move a step further and find it endlessly funny to call familiar objects by the wrong name. Calling daddy "mommy" or calling a cat a dog is always good for laughs. Even putting the wrong word into songs is funny at this point (e.g., singing "Head, shoulders, knees and cheese," instead of toes).

By three and four years of age, the child's new conceptual capacities find their way into new forms of humor. So a dog that moos or a cat that has human feet and has its ears in the wrong place will be very funny. By the time chil-

dren reach first grade, they get the riddle disease and derive endless pleasure in the newly acquired (because of new concrete operational thinking skills) ability to play with meanings of words. What 1<sup>st</sup> grader wouldn't love this riddle?

**What did the chicken say to the duck that always made him laugh?**

**You really quack me up!**

A discussion of basic developmental changes in children's humor from infancy through the elementary school years may be found in my new book, *Understanding and Promoting the Development of Children's Humor* (Kendall/Hunt, 2002).

### Intellectual Benefits

While engaged in such mental play, children learn a tremendous amount about their world. This knowledge will support their performance in school, and in life generally, the rest of their life.

### Vocabulary Enrichment

Children love to play with words. By two, they find it great fun to call things by the wrong name. By three, they're already playing with the sounds of words. Playing with word meanings (puns) occurs by about first grade. The discovery that the same word can have two meanings is an exciting one and spurs them on to find even more words to play with. In the process, the child's budding vocabulary is rapidly enlarged.

### Improved Reading Skills

reading skills is to spend a great deal of time with books.

Funny preschool children's books are especially effective at capturing and holding children's attention. In the process, basic pre-reading skills are learned. Any regular watcher of *Sesame Street* can attest to the power of humor in supporting pre-reading skills. A couple of years later, kids will listen to or read books over and over again, providing the practice needed to improve general reading skills; and skills that are improved while reading riddles will generalize to everything else the child reads, thereby improving performance in school.

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### *General Cognitive Gains*

Preschool curricula are often built entirely around play. The learning that occurs through verbal humor is just as powerful and occurs in two basic ways.

The first involves a consolidation of what is already known. Humor always reflects some form of distortion of the known world. Preschoolers use language in the context of humor to refine their understanding of just what is and is not possible. In creating playful incongruities, their laughter says "That's absurd, I know that's impossible."

The second source of general intellectual gains lies in the background information present in all funny children's books. While the humor is especially effective in sustaining attention and a sense of fun, there is a tremendous amount of learning that occurs in connection with the general background material supporting the humorous content. By age five or six, a great deal of information is also provided in riddles and jokes. Any riddle involves a complex set of ideas that lead to the ultimate punch line. Reading the riddle allows the child to learn this new information. And since kids love to read riddles over and over, each rereading allows for a gradual assimilation of information not fully understood the first time.

### *Increased Creativity*

There has been research since the 1950s documenting a close relationship between creativity and humor. Children who get turned on to humor accumulate a tremendous amount of experience with the general notion of thinking about the world from unusual vantage points. This strengthens a general ability to think in innovative ways.

### *Social Benefits*

A good sense of humor has long been recognized as a powerful interpersonal

skill among adults. It is often referred to as a "social lubricant," serving to make social interaction easier and more enjoyable.

### *Facilitation of Social Interaction*

Children who initiate humor more often than their peers show more social participation in activities, and are judged by their peers as being more sociable—from the preschool level through junior high school (as well as among adults). This increased level of engagement in social activities supports the development of other social skills and increases the odds that these children will become social leaders.

Children who know how to use humor in social interaction are also better at putting others at ease. This creates an environment in which all communication is easier. The joy, laughter and cheerful demeanor of the child with good humor skills are a ready invitation to others to join in.

### *Increased Popularity and Friendship*

It's difficult not to like someone who makes you laugh. Among children, adolescents and adults, research shows that those who become more skilled at initiating humor in social interaction tend to be more popular and find it easier to develop new friendships. The child who is rated by peers as being more humorous is more likely to be picked by other children as someone they would like to do things with, while children rated as less humorous tend to be singled out as children who were liked the least.

### *Socially Acceptable Means of Expressing Anger*

Freud noted long ago that humor provides an effective means of expressing aggressive feelings in a way that is not only socially acceptable, but even valued—if done cleverly. We can use humor to say exactly what we mean, or just the opposite. If a school-age child's hostile joke or remark backfires, she can always say I was "only joking."

### *Emotional Benefits*

Humor supports children's emotional well being in several ways.

### *Increased Joy and Happiness*

The most obvious thing about children who laugh and play is their joy and happiness. And this relationship between joy and humor is a two-way street. That is, children are more likely to experience humor when in a happy, joyful state of mind, but can also create joy and happiness (that wasn't previously there) by engaging in humor and play.

### *Heightened Self Esteem*

Since children with good humor skills tend to be more popular and form friendships more readily, they generally feel better about themselves. Also, the intellectual gains stimulated by humor increase the odds of doing well in school, and further strengthen the child's growing sense of self-esteem.

### *Tool for Coping with Life Stress*

It is now well established that humor is a powerful tool in coping with life stress. The most effective time to learn to use humor as a coping tool is during childhood. Kids who learn to use humor to manage upsets and difficult feelings will have a coping advantage the rest of their lives, because this crucial skill will be well-honed by the time they become adults.

Among preschool children, play therapy has been known for many years to be an effective way to help young children cope with difficult experiences and emotions. Humor—as a form of play—has the same power beyond the preschool years. Older children can use humor to achieve mastery over anxiety, and to release angry feelings, just as adults do.

*[Adapted from Understanding and Promoting the Development of Children's Humor: A Guide for Parents and Teachers. Kendall/Hunt, 2002. To order, call 800-228-0810. This book comes packaged with a separate book designed to build children's verbal humor skills.]*

## Week of the Young Child (WOYC)

WOYC celebrates young children and thanks early childhood teachers and everyone involved in the care and education of young children. This year financial scholarships were awarded to Cinnamon Street Early Learning Center, the Lakes Region Community Services Council, and the Concord Easter Seals Child Care Resource and Referral for events these organizations hosted around the state. If you are planning an event and would like to join these organizations and many others, including the City of Nashua and the Milton Cooperative School, learn more about how to raise awareness of the issues affecting young children and their families, you can go to [www.naeyc.org/woyc](http://www.naeyc.org/woyc).

If you would like to apply for grant money, please contact Lisa Strout in the office for an application. The criteria for applying are simple: applicants must be NHAEYC members, the WOYC event must be publicly advertised; the event must focus public attention on the needs of young children and their families and recognize the early childhood programs and services that meet those needs; and the application must be completed and returned on or before March 1, 2006 to be considered for the nationally recognized week of April 2-8, 2006. As funds are limited, all qualifying applications will be considered by the committee. Grants will range in the amount of \$50-\$300.

## NHAEYC Office News

The Board is pleased to announce our new Affiliate Coordinator is Lisa J. Strout. Lisa brings a strong background in Early Childhood Education and has worked in the field for over 18 years. In addition to her role at NHAEYC, Lisa is currently an Adjunct Associate Professor at NHCTC in Claremont & the Keene Academic Center, as well as providing training and workshops throughout the state.

NHAEYC is seeking volunteers to serve with our organization. If you are interested in becoming a board member, working on a committee, helping write the newsletter, or taking an active role with our conferences, please contact the office for more details.

Do you enjoy writing? NHAEYC is looking for articles to be submitted to our newsletter. Please contact Tracy Pond at the NHAEYC office for more information regarding article submissions.

NHAEYC is increasing our email database as we create a list serve to be added to our website. Please share your email with us so that we may keep you current on NH Happenings. As always, these emails will be kept private. All members submitting their email will be entered in a drawing to win publications from our NAEYC collection. You can do this quickly by going to our website and clicking onto the words "Contact Us."

1-888-225-4884 or WWW.NHAEYC.ORG

## N H A E Y C Board Members NHAEYC—Affiliate Officers

### *President—*

**Johanna Booth Miner**, Director, Live and Learn, Lee

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### *Secretary-Recording—*

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**Spring Conference 2006—Kate Stanley**, Cornerstone Kids, No. Conway

### *Spring Conference 2006—*

**Lisa Ranfos**, Assistant Program Director, Child Care Resource and Referral, Concord

### *Administrators' Conference 2006—*

**Lori Harris**, DHMC Child Care Center, Lebanon

### *Administrators' Conference 2006—*

**Lisa Strout**, Lempster

### *Public Policy—Susan Koerber*,

Dunbarton

### *Public Policy—Margaret Foehl*,

Lee

**Scholarships—Claudette Mallory**, Londonderry

**Scholarships—Diane Mulvaney**, Auburn

**Publications—Pam Binette**, Belmont

**Affiliate Council—vacant**

**Accreditation Chair—Dawn Rouse**, Child Development Bureau, Concord

## *The New Hampshire Association for the Education of Young Children*

### 2006 NHAEYC Spring Conference

#### Request for Proposals

\* April 29, 2006

\* To be held at the  
spacious Grand  
Summit Hotel &  
Resort in  
Bartlett, NH

\* 8:00 am - 4:30 pm

\* Sue Baldwin  
Keynote Speaker!

[www.suebaldwin.com](http://www.suebaldwin.com)

Please join us in building another successful conference for NHAEYC. We are looking for presenters to share their knowledge and ideas with other early childhood professionals. This year's theme is "Building Blocks for the Future". Sue Baldwin (author of *Life Savers: Tips for Success and Sanity for Early Childhood Managers* and *Lighten Up and Live Longer*) will be giving the keynote address. Workshops are 1 hour and 30 minutes in length.

#### Suggested topics are:

Dramatic Play/ Puppets

Communicating with Parents

Music and Movement

Infant and Toddler Topics

Hands-On Math and Science

Nature in the Classroom

Preparing for Accreditation

Behavior Management

Environments

Block Play

Literacy

Emergent Curriculum

Exploring Art

Parent Involvement

As a presenter you/your group will be paid \$100 per workshop in total as well as free admission for one presenter to the conference (A \$100 value including breakfast and a plated lunch). If you/your group are presenting for the entire day you will be paid \$350 in total.

Please call Kate Stanley at 603-491-4667 (Weekdays) or 323-9320 (Evenings), Lisa Ranfos 226-3791 ext. 24 (Weekdays) or 485-6202 (Evenings), or email [springconference@nhaeyc.org](mailto:springconference@nhaeyc.org) if you have any questions. Proposals may be mailed to NHAEYC Spring Conference, PO Box 632, North Conway, NH 03860 by January 6, 2006.

#### Presenter Information

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Position/Role: \_\_\_\_\_

Day Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_ Eve Phone # \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Position/Role: \_\_\_\_\_

Day Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_ Eve Phone # \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever presented before? Yes No If so, where? \_\_\_\_\_

Please list a reference and phone # for that presentation \_\_\_\_\_

#### Please attach:

One copy of the Workshop Abstract (a brief summary for the conference program, including workshop title) and one copy of the Workshop Description (one double-spaced typed page) that includes the goals, outline and other info that will be helpful for the review committee.

*New Hampshire & VermontAEYC Administrator's Conference  
Request for Presenters/Proposals 2006*

*Proposals due by December 1, 2005*

Please use this form to indicate your interest in presenting at the Administrator's Conference on either Friday May 5 or 12, 2006 (date to be determined soon). There are three options to consider; full day seminars, Three hour seminars, and a 1 and 1/2 hour seminars. A full day seminar has a Three hour morning session and a 1 and 1/2 hour afternoon session. The intended audience is administrators and supervisors so could include directors, program administrators, lead teachers, and family child care providers. Presenters are paid an honorarium for their services.

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I am interested in presenting and I am providing my information below.

Name of presenter: \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Phone number \_\_\_\_\_

Email address \_\_\_\_\_

Proposed Topic  
-----

If you are not interested in presenting but know of someone you would like to see present at this conference provide their name below and contact information if you know it.

I am not interested in presenting but I think this person would be great

Why I think they would be great

Contact information if known:

Please mail this form to:

Lori Harris  
910 Stage Rd.  
Plainfield, NH 03781

## *New Hampshire Happenings*

The time has come for the dissemination of the Early Learning Guidelines.  
Check your local times and locations and sign up to attend!

<u>City</u>	<u>Where</u>	<u>When</u>	<u>Time</u>
Berlin	NHCTC Campus 2020 Riverside Drive, Berlin Sue Cloutier Sandy Alonzo 1-800-445-4525 ext. 1462	11/15/05	6:00 PM
Claremont	Sugar River Valley Regional Tech Center 11 South Street, Claremont Michelle Johnson Cathy Paradis (603) 543-4295	11/15/05	6:00 PM
Concord	East Side Learning Center 164 East Side Drive, Concord Ellen Wheatley Lisa Ranfos 1-800-307-2737 ext. 9084	11/15/05	6:00 PM
Conway	Runnels Hall Rte 113 Chocorua Margaret Leitch Copeland Shannon Quinn 1-866-261-7555	11/15/05	6:00 PM
Keene	Southwestern Community Services 69Z Island St Dottie Bauer Kathy Torrey 1-800-529-0005 ext. 163	11/15/05	6:00 PM
Laconia	Lakes Region Community Services 67 communications Drive Linda Graham Maureen LaClair 1-800-649-8817 ext. 174	11/15/05	6:00 PM
Littleton	646 Union St, Suite 100 Judy Glenney 1-800-445-4525 ext. 1462 Helen Schotanus	11/15/05	6:00 PM
Manchester	Easter Seals 555 Auburn Street, Manchester Denise Corvino Nancy Pynchon 1-800-870-8728	11/15/05	6:30 PM
Nashua	Kids Inn 67 (Amherst St) Rt. 101 A Sue Stepick Deirdre O'Hare 1-800-852-0632 ext. 718	11/15/05	6:30 PM
Portsmouth	Rockingham County Community Action 7 Junkins Ave (Seybolt Building) Nancy Evans Jody Carson 1-800-310-8333	11/15/05	6:30 PM
Rochester	Rochester Library Community Room 65 South Main Street Pat Meattey Carol Heald 1-888-440-4914	11/15/05	6:00 PM
Salem	Rockingham Community Action 8 Centerville Drive Barbara Hemingway Karyn Moschella 1-800-310-8333	11/15/05	6:30 PM

## *New Hampshire Happenings*

### Quest Center

Check out the virtual Early Childhood Job Bank! To advertise job positions, send an email to [QuestCenter@lrcsc.org](mailto:QuestCenter@lrcsc.org) with your information. Jobs will be posted one time but feel free to contact them again if you need it rerun. To receive job postings, send an email to [QuestCenter@lrcsc.org](mailto:QuestCenter@lrcsc.org) and request to be added to the mailing list. All job search correspondence is confidential. This service is provided at no cost to NH child care providers thanks to grant funded support from the Child Development Bureau/DCYF.

### Preschool Technical Assistance

Need Help? Call PTAN for free onsite technical assistance or training to support your program's efforts to maintain children with special needs or challenging behaviors. You'll discuss your concerns with a caring individual who will work with you to develop a "consultation plan" that is uniquely responsive to your program's needs. All services are provided at no cost to NH child care providers thanks to grant funded support from the Child Development Bureau/DCYF as well as many other organizations. To learn more call Joan Izen, Project Coordinator at 1-888-584-8200.

### The Family Resource Connection

The Family Resource Connection is a free service offering information on thousands of resources related to child development, education, child care, disabilities, parenting, and health related issues related to young children. Any New Hampshire parent, teacher, child care provider, health practitioner, social service provider, or interested person in early childhood can access these books, videos, and materials by emailing, mailing, or calling Alice Nye (1-800-298-4321) with your requests. The Family Resource Connection of the NH State Library is a collaborative effort funded by the NH State Library with collaboration with the NH Department of Education and the NH Department of Health and Human Services.

### Child Care Resource and Referral

New Hampshire Child Care Resource and Referral Network is almost ready to launch its own website where families, providers, community members can access information around finding, providing, and advocating for quality child care. This site will include a child care finder and links to resources. Providers can locate and register for statewide trainings. The website, [www.nhccrr.org](http://www.nhccrr.org) is in the test stages and soon will be accessible to all!

### Did you know being a member of NHAEYC has many benefits?

For one, NHAEYC has funds available to help pay for members to attend professional workshops or conferences. An application can be obtained by visiting our website at [www.nhaeyc.org](http://www.nhaeyc.org). Funding is limited and applications must be received at least one month before the date of the conference in order to allow time to process the request. Unfortunately, funding is not available for room and board at the conferences or for tuition of college courses. The Scholarship Committee reserves the right to limit the amount spent per member and to deny or approve any request. This scholarship is a great way for members to be able to attend workshops and conferences they might not otherwise be able to afford.

Being a member of NHAEYC has many other benefits. Check out the latest information regarding the Credential Incentive Program, Conferences, etc. by calling the NHAEYC Office at 1-888-225-4884 or visiting us online at [www.nhaeyc.org](http://www.nhaeyc.org).

### Free Kids Count Book

The Annie E. Casey Foundation has released the 16<sup>th</sup> annual Kids Count Data Book. To request a free copy of the 2005 edition, please visit [www.kidscount.org](http://www.kidscount.org) or call 1-410-223-2890 for a complete list of all publications and products.

NEW HAMPSHIRE ASSOCIATION  
FOR THE EDUCATION OF  
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46 South Main Street  
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### Family Child Care Scholarship

Recently, NHAIEYC, along with a collaborative effort with the NH Child Care Resource and Referral Network, were awarded a scholarship grant from NAEYC. This grant was designed to increase our membership of Family Child Care providers in New Hampshire. Along with the help of many R & R's, we have awarded 19 of the 30 scholarships. Congratulations to Patricia Katkin, Darla Rheaume, Pamela Domigan, Karen Poirier, Kelly Turner, Michelle Chick, Gail LeBreque, Jocelyn Hackett, Angela Stimpson, Janice B. Abbott, Stephanie Desaulniers, Lorraine Coulumbe, Katherine Jesseman, Janice Silver, Olga Gombins, Cindy Bechard, Denise Rurka, Silvia Quiroga, and Brooke Arthur. If you know of a Family Child Care Provider who has attended a minimum of four trainings with through the R & R's, please have them contact the NHAIEYC office or their local R& R for an application. These scholarships are on a first come first serve basis!

*Our Cover story was written by Paul McGhee, President of The Laughter Remedy in Wilmington, DE. He is a developmental psychologist who is internationally known for his research on children's humor and now works full time as a professional speaker. Paul can be contacted at 302-478-7500, haharemedy@del.net or via [www.LaughterRemedy.com](http://www.LaughterRemedy.com).*

### Save the Dates

*November 15, 2005* Dissemination of Early Learning Guidelines

*December 7-10, 2005* Annual NAEYC Conference in Washington, DC.  
Information can be found by going online at [www.naeyc.org](http://www.naeyc.org)

*April 2-8, 2006* Week of the Young Child

*April 29, 2006* Spring Conference with Keynote Address by noted author Sue Baldwin.

*May 13, 2006* Second Annual NHCCR&R Making Connections Conference will be held at Interlakes Regional High School in Meredith, NH.

