1932

Humor in young children

Goodwillie, Patricia Alice

Boston University

http://hdl.handle.net/2144/13035

Boston University
Boston University
School of Education

Thesis

Humor in Young Children

Submitted by

Patricia Alice Goodwillie
(A. B., Smith College, 1930)

In partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Master of Education

1932

First Reader: Abigail A. Eliot, Director, Nursery Training School of Boston.
Second Reader: W. Linwood Chase, Assistant Professor of Education.
Contents

Chapter I. Introduction............................. 1

What is Humor?...................................... 1

Discussion of Extent of Literature on Humor
in Young Children................................. 1

Plan and Aim of this Study........................... 4

Chapter II. Literature Dealing with Humor........... 5

A. Theories Concerning Humor.......................... 5

B. Factors which Influence the Appreciation
   of Humor......................................... 8

   1. Mental Alertness.................................. 8

   2. State of Mind.................................... 9

   3. Environment..................................... 11

C. Do Young Children Have a Sense of Humor?....... 11

D. Nature of Children's Humor.......................... 13

E. Situations which Children Consider Humorous... 13

F. Differences in Humor According to Temperament,
   Sex and Color...................................... 17

G. Value of Humor.................................... 18

H. Cultivation of a Sense of Humor.................... 20

Chapter III. Study of Humor in Young Children...... 24

A. Description of Subjects and of Conditions
   under which They Were Studied.................... 24

B. Data.................................................. 31

   Introduction to Data............................... 31

   1. Play on Words.................................. 33

   2. Nonsense....................................... 34

   3. Changing Names.................................. 35
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>&lt;head&gt;4. Mimicry&lt;/head&gt;</th>
<th>36</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Teasing</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Predicament of Self</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. Oddity</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a.) Unusual</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b.) Unsuitable</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c.) Grotesque or Exaggerated</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. Imagination</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. Absurdity</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. Sound and Motion</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C. Classification and Interpretation of Data</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D. Outcomes of Study Unsupported by Data</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter IV.</td>
<td>Summary of Conclusions Based on Study of Humor in Young Children</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td></td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter I
Introduction

What is humor? One finds, on reading through the literature on the subject, that this question has stimulated much discussion in the past, and has been answered in many different ways. A definition in *The Atlantic Monthly* states that humor is "a perception of contrast, of discrepancy, of incongruity."\(^1\) Katharine Wilson says that it is a point of view and "depends more on an attitude of mind than on something intrinsically ludicrous in the thing or situation,"\(^2\) and Erskine says that it is "the art of adapting oneself to another temperament."\(^3\) Granting these differences of opinion, humor is generally understood to be "the faculty of discovering, expressing, or appreciating the ludicrous or the incongruous," which is the definition given in Webster's dictionary.

Comparatively little of the literature on humor deals with this trait in young children. There are, however, generalizations to be found in discussions of adult

---

humor that can be applied to situations among children.
For instance the following statement, "...mimicry as such is funny even when the personal or artistic traits ridiculed were not,"\(^1\) is useful as a criterion in studying children.

A few direct contributions have been made to the field of children's humor. In 1900 Marguerite Merington published an article in *Harper's Bazar* entitled, "The Child's Sense of Humor;" in 1902 "The Sense of Humor in Children," by Katherine Chandler, appeared in *The Century Magazine*; in 1907 "The Educational Value of Humor," by Stephen S. Colvin, was published in *The Pedagogical Seminar*; in 1910 "The Value of Humor and Nonsense," was printed in the *Kindergarten-Primary Magazine*; and in 1913 *Home Progress* published an excellent article by Nixon Waterman, "A Sense of Humor in Children." Though Merington's article is apt to take a rather sentimental point of view, and the statement is made in "The Value of Humor and Nonsense" that it is admitted that the little child has apparently no sense of humor,\(^2\) these articles each contribute something to an understanding of the subject.


During the last twelve years attention has been directed with increasing interest to pre-school children, with the result that systematic methods of studying these children have, for the most part, replaced the earlier random methods of observation. The most outstanding of the later investigations in this field are: "A Study of Laughter-Situations Among Young Children,"¹ (1928-1931), "A Study of Laughter in the Pre-School Child in the Merrill-Palmer Nursery School,"² and "A Study of the Smiling and Laughing of Infants in the First Year of Life." (1929).³

These researches are not concerned solely with humor, for laughter-situations are not exclusively humor-situations.⁴ The data of both investigations are limited, so far as humor goes, by the fact that laughter alone is considered.⁵

¹Clara Owsley Wilson, A Study of Laughter-Situations Among Young Children.
³Ruth Wendell Washburn, A Study of the Smiling and Laughing of Infants in the First Year of Life.
⁴Laughter may be the response to such factors as successful effort, relief from constraint, mirthful play, as well as the response to the humorous. See Clara Owsley Wilson, op. cit., p. 27.
⁵It is pointed out on page 41 of this study that smiling is also a response to the humorous.
The plan for the present study is:

1.) To make a study of situations of humor among the five children of the younger group (average age two years nine months) at the Brattle Street Nursery School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, with the aim of finding what situations are considered humorous by these children, and under what conditions humor appears most frequently among them.

2.) To compare the findings of this study with those of other investigators.
Chapter II

Literature Dealing with Humor

A.) Theories Concerning Humor.

Many theories have been advanced to explain what constitutes a humorous situation. A few of these will be considered. Hobbes' theory is that a sudden sense of superiority which springs from a sudden act of our own or from the "apprehension of some deformed thing in another," makes us laugh.¹ Woodworth admits that "the element of suddenness, insisted on by Hobbes, is generally essential in a mirth provoker; and the other element in his conception, the sense of superiority to others, can actually be found in a surprisingly large proportion of specimens of ... humor."²

Bergson believes that when an attitude, gesture or movement reminds us of the rigidity of a machine it is humorous.³ Thus repetition and absent mindedness are funny.

Carpenter says that a proposition that is perceived as false, is perceived as deceptive, is suddenly...
presented, and has a free field, in which its effect is not submerged by stronger emotions, is comic. ¹

Colvin states that "all forms of the .... humorous .... have in them suggestions of the strange, the unexpected, the absurd, the incongruous, the malproportioned."²

Allin thinks that ".... the concept incongruity may .... be interpreted with more propriety as the unusual .... Unusual coalitions of wit and laughter .... may at times be eminently fitting or congruous."³ Merington's views are in accord with Allin's: ".... Much that passes popular muster as ludicrous is merely foreign, and not intrinsically funny ...."⁴

The elements of surprise, of the incalculable, the unexpected, are to be found in a joke even in its simplest form according to Orcutt.⁵

Garritt bases his theory of the humorous on the perception of aesthetic incongruity. A work of art that misses its mark, any breakdown of dignity or intensity, mimicry, he lists as typically amusing.\(^1\) He adds that "just because it is the essence of language to express, its failure is more ugly and ridiculous than that of action which may have other justification than expression; it is funnier to stammer than to limp."\(^2\) He says further that "the sudden insertion of spontaneity, of naive indolence or informality into a well-ordered routine is humorous, and it is the spontaneity at which we laugh...."\(^3\)

"The great objection .... to all existing theories of humor (according to Woodworth) is that they are not genetic, or, at least, not based on knowledge of the genesis of the sense of humor in the individual. We ought, first of all, to discover what is the stimulus that naturally arouses smiling and laughing in the infant - it can scarcely be a sense of his own superiority - and to trace out the succession of stimuli that get the power to amuse him as he grows older ...."\(^4\)

---


\(^2\)Ibid., p. 563.

\(^3\)Ibid., p. 560.

\(^4\)Robert Sessions Woodworth, op. cit., p. 80.
B.) Factors which Influence the Appreciation of Humor.

1. Mental alertness.

"A sense of humour depends essentially on the presence of certain intellectual factors, such as the power of perceiving shades of meaning, or differences between objects, that pass unnoticed by a clumsy mind ...."¹ (Hellyar).

"Sluggish intellects and dull wits cannot grasp an amusing situation. The perception of humor is a sure indication of mental alertness ...."² (Colvin).

Kimmins says that "there is a considerable body of evidence to show that a sense of humor correlates very highly with intelligence."³ No data, however, are given to bear out the conclusions drawn by these investigators.

On the other hand Enders, who made a study of laughter at the Merrill-Palmer Nursery School, found that "both groups of children—those with average and higher intelligence—laughed practically the same number of times each day."⁴ A record is not given of what the children


² Stephen S. Colvin, op. cit., p. 519.

³ The quotation is from Clara Owsley Wilson's A Study of Laughter-Situations Among Young Children, p. 12.

laughed at. It would be interesting to know if the group of higher intelligence laughed more frequently in response to humorous situations than did the group of average intelligence, and if the laughter of the average group was more frequently in response to pleasure than to humor.

2. State of mind.

Several authorities have discussed the part that the state of mind plays in an appreciation of humor. Hellyar's comments are as follows:

"In a humorous situation, the mental state or mood of the laugher has all to do with his perception of the comic. The particular state of the spectator's mind that must be present before amused laughter can appear is one of mild and generalized pleasure, a feeling of normal content. One must be neither harrassed, nor actively interested; neither bound up in a specific mood or passion, nor engaged in any task; neither curious, nor irritable. The mind, in fact, must be as nearly tabula rasa of definite ideas or emotions as possible. Jollity is the finest aid to the appearance of the laughter of amusement. (It) seems to sharpen the comic appetite. Depression, besides sapping the foundations of the comic mood, blunts comic perception. A pleasant mood calls one's attention to things laughable ...."

Armstrong says,

"It seems....that when you would make a man laugh you must take thought for something more than his sense of humour...."

1 Richmond H. Hellyar, op. cit., p. 760.
The possibilities and dangers are complicated from the moment an emotional element enters: from which it appears that laughter flourishes only where the heart is not involved.\(^1\)

"...The feeling of personal disinterestedness (accompanied by a distinctly pleasurable experience)"\(^2\) is stressed by Colvin as necessary to an appreciation of humor. He also discusses the relation of inferiority to the appreciation of humor:

"...The individual can not be in a state of marked inferiority and dependence in relation to the object that he finds humorous.... The person who stands in the inferior relation can not realize the humor in it, unless perchance, he is able to view this relation from the standpoint of the superior power, thus transcending his own insignificance...."\(^3\)

Hellyar sums up the part played by mental alertness and the state of mind in the following words:

"...Personal sympathy, or general sympathy; habit and long acquaintance; an intellectual grasp of the meaning of an object or event that might otherwise amuse; an uncomfortable or irritating sensation of some kind--these and many other factors may prevent laughter on a specific occasion, quite apart, of course, from a poor eye for the comic or a melancholy turn of mind...."

\(^3\)Stephen S. Colvin, *loc. cit.*
An intelligent element is clearly necessary in any subtle appreciation of the comic.


The fact that humor does not flourish in an atmosphere of fear, restraint, repression, or discomfort is mentioned by Wilson, Waterman, Merington, and Eastman. Enders found that children laugh most frequently when playing with other children, and that they seldom laughed when with adults or alone.

C.) Do Young Children Have a Sense of Humor?

Some doubt has been expressed in the past concerning the existence of a sense of humor in young children. In 1885 Bernard Perez advanced his opinion on the subject in the following words:

"...The sense of the ridiculous seems to be very weak at this age (three and under.) We must not imagine that because children very early show a tendency to pick out and imitate the physical defects of people, they have any notion that they are defects or absurdities.

---

1 Richmond H. Hellyar, op. cit., p. 762.
2 Clara Owsley Wilson, A Study of Laughter-Situations Among Young Children, p. 41.
4 Marguerite Merington, op. cit., p. 1427.
It is only that they are astonished at singular appearances and shapes and want to know the reason of them.  

In 1910 an even stronger statement was made when Orcutt, speaking at a parent-teachers meeting, was quoted as admitting that the little child has apparently no sense of humor, and that the task of developing it in him is a hard one.  

Eastman and Colvin take the opposite stand. Eastman says,

"...Playing children enjoy so indiscriminately every kind of shock or balk or failure of anything to be quite what it should, that we with our egregious wisdom have almost decided that they lack the sense of humor altogether...."

Colvin's views are emphatic:

"...It has often been said that children are lacking in humor. This I am sure is untrue, unless we are to understand by this statement that their notions of humor are crude and inadequate. So, too, are their logical powers deficient, and their moral judgments narrow, their aesthetic sensibilities crude, and their religious instincts savage. Observation and experiment disclose unmistakable evidence of the existence of the sense of humor in very young children...."  

---

1 Bernard Perez, The First Three Years of an Infant's Life, p. 280.  
2 "The Value of Humor and Nonsense," loc. cit.  
3 Max Eastman, op. cit., p. 28.  
4 Stephen S. Colvin, op. cit., p. 522.
D.) Nature of Children's Humor.

"...Much of the so-called 'fun' of childhood falls under the head of that which the more serious and precise grown-ups might term 'silliness'. It is the lightest of chaff; the un­studied and almost unconscious babbling of ebullient childhood.... Childish humor is as unpremeditated as the joy expressed in the play of young animals. In its very spontaneity lies much of its charm...."¹

Eastman characterizes children's sense of humor in this way: "...Their sense of humor is more primed and violent than ours, more close to its real purpose.... They laugh at anything that is really nothing."² He says that children "are not so agile in perception and the apprehension of meanings" as adults.³

"...The situation that provokes mirth in the adult has no power to do so in the child, while the situations that make the young child laugh lose the power to do so as the child grows up...."⁴ according to Woodworth.

E.) Situations Which Children Consider Humorous

A baby enjoys situations that have in them the element of surprise, Orcutt says, but the surprise must be wholly of a pleasant nature.⁵ Surprise is probably at the

¹Nixon Waterman, op. cit., p. 47.
²Max Eastman, op. cit., p. 28.
³Ibid., p. 227.
⁴Robert Sessions Woodworth, op. cit., p. 78.
⁵"The Value of Humor and Nonsense," loc. cit.
basis of the situation which Kathleen Moore reports:

"It gave the child delight (in his forty-third week) to see a person leave the room and close the door, then suddenly open the door and reappear." ¹ The same child is said to have laughed in his thirty-second week at his father's imitations of the voices of animals.² Professor Valentine is quoted as saying that laughter could be invoked in a certain baby of six months by "imitating the child's own actions or by mere repetition of something...."³

"Before they are fifteen months old, most children will counterfeit very drollly the voices, the songs and cries of a certain number of animals," Perez says, and concludes that "this is a very innocent use of the comic faculty...."⁴

Harriet Johnson cites this humor in two and three year olds in her nursery school: antiphonal chanting,⁵ and making a new distribution of names to the nursery group.

²Ibid., p. 62.  
⁴Bernard Perez, op. cit., p. 281.  
⁵Harriet M. Johnson, Children in the Nursery School, p. 259-260.
"One day Lucy announced that she was Larry, her brother, and gave her name to an adult. She was very merry over it at first; then suddenly her face grew quite troubled and she said, "No, no, I'm not Larry; I'm - Lucy - Brown ...." 1

The little girl about whom Dearborn writes took "obvious delight (at approximately three years) in grotesque combinations of speech, e.g., 'bow-wow horse' instead of bow-wow dog.... For fun she called an elephant 'umpty'."2

Enders found that

"Sound and motion, or the combination of the two, were the most effective elements in the stimulating of laughter of young children.

Motion and sound were present in the laugh-provoking situations of all the children from two to five years of age. There was, however, a slight difference in the actual situations that caused the laugh. The tumbling down of a tower of blocks, or the clattering to the floor of beads, was more certain to cause laughter among the two-year-olds than among the older children. The beginning of word-play was found more frequently among the older children."3

The conclusion that Wilson reached in her study of laughter in young children was that "laughter accompanying the recognition of oddities," "laughter accompanying

---

1 Ibid., p. 264.


3 Abbie Crandell Enders, op. cit., p. 353.
teasing," "laughter accompanying recognition of one's own predicament," and "laughter accompanying violation of convention, play on words, comparisons with indirect allusions, absurdities," tend to increase as the child grows older.¹

Laughter accompanying recognition of oddities, she found comprises about eight per cent of the laughter of children aged two years six months to four years five months. Laughter accompanying recognition of one's own predicament includes about four per cent of the laughter at this age.²

Kimmins says that "cases of puns perpetrated by children under seven years of age are very rare, while many of the reported stories are due to misunderstanding of the words used."³ He says further that "up to the age of seven humorous situations which cause laughter are almost entirely visual."⁴

¹Clara Owsley Wilson, op. cit., p. 41.
²Ibid., p. 37.
³The quotation is from "What Children Laugh At," The Literary Digest, LXXI (October 22, 1921), p. 26.
⁴The quotation is from Abbie Crandell Enders, op. cit., p. 343.
Colvin, 1 Walker and Washburn, 2 Chandler, 3 Kimmins, 4 and Wilson 5 discuss the evolution of the sense of humor, showing the types of humor to which children respond at different ages, (beyond the nursery school years.)

F.) Differences in Humor According to Temperament, Sex and Color.

Wilson and Washburn found that there is a great individual variation in the frequency of laughter in different children. Chandler concludes from her studies of children that "in children younger than ten the sense of humor is not differentiated by sex..." 8 Kimmins says that "in the case of negro children, the development of a sense of humor is generally retarded." 9

1 Stephen S. Colvin, op. cit., p. 522.
4 The material is found in Abbie Crandell Enders, op. cit., pp. 342-343.
6 Ibid., p. 41.
7 Ruth Wendell Washburn, A Study of the Smiling and Laughing of Infants in the First Year of Life, p. 529.
8 Katherine A. Chandler, op. cit., p. 960.
G.) Value of Humor.

Katharine Wilson considers the value of a sense of humor from the standpoint of mental hygiene:

"A sense of humour purges away bitterness by lifting our hurtful experiences to a plane where they delight our minds instead of harassing them; by it we can enjoy our discomforts, especially in retrospect.\(^1\)

We may escape from violent emotions as well as from violent experiences by thinking them funny.\(^2\)

In discussing anger in young children Groves says, "humor is a godsend here, (for) when humor creeps in, anger departs."\(^3\) Armstrong has much the same point of view, "When tempers are lost, all sense of proportion is lost also."\(^4\) (Laughter restores it.)

Waterman states that "observation and reason teach that a true sense of humor is a most valuable asset for a person or a people. It affords a 'safe and sane' means of obtaining a wholesome appreciation of life's varied affairs...."\(^5\) He says that "it emphasizes the value and

---


\(^2\)Ibid., p. 630.

\(^3\)Ernest R. Groves, and Gladys Hoagland Groves, Wholesome Childhood, p. 76.

\(^4\)Martin D. Armstrong, op. cit., p. 64.

\(^5\)Nixon Waterman, op. cit., p. 48."
importance of the droll, whimsical, grotesque and comical, thus serving to minimize the power of things capable of arousing pain, unhappy apprehension and vexation."¹ This point is later illustrated in this way:

"...The child possessing a sense of humor will laugh at the giant's odd costume, his absurdly large feet, or the smooch of color across his nose, while the more serious-thinking child will be awed, if not terrified, by the giant's size and strength."²

Erskine, writing on the cultivation of a sense of humor, says that "if young people now have meager ideas about human nature, and exaggerated notions of the uniqueness of their own personalities, it is because we have unintentionally fastened their attention on the temporary and exceptional aspects of their world...."³ He implies that if we would strive to develop in them a sense of humor, these attitudes would be corrected, for, as Colvin says, "No one can be a humorist and an egoist in the same breath."⁴

¹Ibid., p. 47.
²Ibid., p. 47.
⁴Stephen S. Colvin, op. cit., p. 524.
H.) Cultivation of a Sense of Humor.

"It may be true that a sense of humor is born and not made, but without doubt it can be cultivated...."¹

This is the opinion of Ruth Barnes, who advocates the beginning of nonsense training early in a child's life, and keeping it "in the educational diet always, to balance up too many facts and to teach children to live wholeheartedly in that subtle realm of health-giving and wit-cultivating laughter."²

The influence of parents in the development of a sense of humor is made clear by Waterman:

"...Parents who look upon things of a facetious or humorous nature as being frivolous and superficial will discourage the tendency on the part of their children to cultivate a sense of the humorous...."³

Always it is to be borne in mind that children are great imitators and are eager to do that which their elders do. If the older members of the household exhibit a sense of humor in their words and actions the children will learn to do the same...."⁴

The force of example can be supplemented to advantage by wholesomely humorous stories, books, games and

²Ruth A. Barnes, loc. cit.
³Nixon Waterman, op. cit., p. 47.
⁴Ibid., p. 49.
pictures, and "the children should be encouraged to improve innocent play upon words, make believe stories, conundrums, simple rhymes and parodies. Once they have formed the habit of looking for humor they will find it everywhere."¹

Groves says that "we should strive to inculcate, by example through our attitude toward our own obstacles, the frame of mind that permits a person to view his own buffetings with some of the equanimity with which he is wont to view those of his neighbor."²

Wilson shows that parents can, by their attitude, lead children to laugh at their own predicaments. A case is cited, for instance, in which a mother accidentally spilled dish water on her child, who began to cry. The father said, "That's funny," and laughed, and the child then laughed too.³

Some of the suggestions which she gives for encouraging the development of a sense of humor are: "encourage laughter at one's own predicaments as a matter of good sportsmanship"; "encourage good-natured bantering, joking, and repartee"; purposely provide materials and set up wholesome situations which produce laughter"; "plan

¹Ibid., p. 49.
²Ernest R. Groves, and Gladys Hoagland Groves, op. cit., p. 76.
³Clara Owsley Wilson, op. cit., p. 23.
opportunities for the enjoying and telling of funny situa-
tions, experiences, jokes, riddles, and word play...."; "provide for the reading of humorous stories by the teacher and children...."; help children to enjoy good cartoons, and encourage them to draw cartoons...."1

Margaret McLaughlin believes in having a definite place in the school curriculum for humor. Humor projects, such as producing comic supplements, and writing limericks, reading funny stories, writing parodies of particular poems or of styles of writing would be well worth while.2

"...To educate in humor is to furnish a liberal training; to humanize," Colvin says. "The teacher can have no higher ideal than that of teaching his pupils to laugh aright; for he who laughs well laughs wisely, laughs magnanimously, laughs highly.... It is high time that the unnatural seriousness of the schoolroom should be at an end. The best school government must be that which makes some concessions to child nature."3

1Ibid., p. 42.
2Margaret M. McLaughlin, "Plea and a Project," Educational Review, LXVI (September, 1923), p. 81.
3Stephen S. Colvin, op. cit., p. 521.
This summary of the literature on humor barely touches on the vast amount of thought and study that has been given the subject. Material was selected which would lead to a better understanding and appreciation of children's humor, and it serves as an introduction to the study which is to follow: Humor in Young Children.
Chapter III
Study of Humor in Young Children

A. Description of Subjects and of Conditions under Which They Were Studied.

The data were gathered from observations of a group of children at the Brattle Street Nursery School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, during the months of March, April, and May, 1932. There were five children in the group; Susan, (aged two years two months in March), David, (aged two years eight months in March), Nina, (aged two years eleven months in March), Binda, (aged three years in March), and Adams, (aged three years four months in March). There was thus a difference of a year and two months between the ages of the youngest and oldest, and the average age of the group was approximately two years nine months at the time the study was undertaken.

The background of these children was excellent. They came, without exception, from homes of culture, where they had had every advantage necessary for normal child growth. The fathers of three children are professors at Harvard University, and the fathers of two are business men. Three of the mothers are college graduates; the other two are graduates of high school. The homes of four children were in residential districts of Cambridge, and that of the fifth, Susan, was in a residential district of Belmont, near
Cambridge. Each child had his own sleeping room, and a yard to play in. The children were strong and well, and during the year there were few absences from school because of sickness. Although no intelligence test was given them, I believe that the children are far above average in intelligence. My opinion is based on experience with other groups of children of the same age, and on the fact that the response and activities of this group were characteristic of children older than two and three years. The group does not represent a cross section of American children, but rather the American child of the upper class, who will go through grammar and high school and probably on to college.

The nursery school hours were from nine to twelve o'clock, five mornings a week from Monday through Friday. There were two groups of children, the older, and the younger group. In the "older group" there were fifteen children of approximately three and a half years to five years of age, in charge of the director of the school and a student assistant. In the "younger group" there were the five children of average age two years nine months with whom this study is concerned, in charge of one teacher, the writer. The two groups were kept separated as much as possible in order to avoid any over-stimulation of the younger by the older children, but when the two groups were
on the playground together it was impossible to keep them absolutely separated.

The nursery school was held in a private house on Brattle Street, in an old and beautiful residential district of Cambridge. The owner of the house gave her music room, bathroom, and hall on the first floor, a large playroom, small sitting room, bathroom and hall on the third floor, and the front porch and grounds outside for the use of the nursery school. A spacious lawn in front of the house was enclosed by a thick hedge which insured the safety of the children, and here they played on fine days. The outdoor equipment consisted of two sand boxes, sand toys such as spoons and pans, a jungle gym, a swing, a see-saw, rings, packing boxes, tricycles, kiddy cars, hammers and nails.

The programme of the younger group was simple:

1.) The children arrived at school at about nine o'clock and played outdoors until a quarter of ten.

2.) At this time they went inside and took off their outdoor clothing.

3.) There followed a ten minute music period. The director played the piano, and they marched, ran, and jumped to music, played musical games such as "The Little Mice are Creeping," and beat time to music with rhythm sticks, bells, triangles and drums. At about five minutes past ten the music period was over.
4. The children now went in to the bathroom to go to the toilet, have a drink of water, and wash their hands for luncheon. They were encouraged to do everything for themselves, all but the youngest, Susan, could unbutton their underclothes, and all washed and dried their hands themselves.

5. When they had finished in the bathroom, or at about twenty minutes past ten, they went in to the sitting room, which was used as the nursery school room for the younger group, where books and pictures were to be found. I read to them if they asked for a story, but usually they preferred to look at the books themselves, and made up stories to fit the illustrations, or commented on what they saw.

6. At about ten-thirty books were put away, we sang a few songs, sang grace and

7. had mid-morning luncheon, which consisted of a graham cracker. The children took turns passing the crackers, a different child serving each day.

8. After luncheon, or at about a quarter of eleven, steamer rugs were spread out on the floor and the children lay down for a twenty minute rest. Following this they rolled up their rugs,

9. went to the toilet,

10. put on their outdoor clothing,
and went outdoors again, where they played until called for at twelve o'clock.

The time allotted to the different activities varied somewhat from day to day. If on a particular day the children showed an especial enjoyment of the music period the time for music was lengthened, or if they were absorbed in reading books, or in singing, they read or sang for a longer time. The programme was flexible.

In bad weather, when it was too cold or rainy to play outdoors, there were blocks, pegs, beads, crayons, paint, paper, scissors, plasticene, dolls and dishes to be played with in the nursery schoolroom, and the rest of the programme proceeded as on sunny days, with the music period, bathroom procedure, songs, luncheon and rest.

During these hours I watched the children and took note of the humorous situations that occurred, of who took part in them, and of what the reaction of the child or group was to them. These situations were later classified as to type and will be presented under "data". Since I was not only the recorder of the situations but also the teacher of the group, and had no assistant, I was at times unable to record humorous situations if they arose when my attention was necessarily directed elsewhere.

I made no attempt to introduce situations which might appeal to their sense of humor, and recorded only those humorous situations which arose spontaneously in the group.
Instances of humor that occurred while the children were playing outdoors were seldom recorded, for I was usually out of earshot. (It is a policy of the school for the teacher to remain in the background as much as possible during the playtime of the children.) It seemed to me, however, in watching from a distance, that the children were engrossed in their play, (making pies and houses in the sand box, sliding, climbing the jungle gym, riding tricycles, hammering,) and that they played independently of each other for the most part. To check up on this I stayed close by them for two days (without apparently paying any attention to them,) and found no instances of humor occurring at that time. When the children talked they discussed what they were doing or what they were going to do, asked for pans and spoons, called the attention of another to what they had done; and when they laughed they laughed in response to a feeling of pleasure, as when they had finished a slide, climbed to the top of the jungle gym, beaten another in a race to the sand box. On rainy days when the children played inside and I had an opportunity of watching them at close hand, I found that but few humorous situations arose during playtime. (The tumbling down of a block building caused laughter on two occasions.) I assume, therefore, from observations of these children, that the data on humor situations arising among them are
only slightly affected by the fact that records were not taken during outdoor play. It would be interesting to study this point further, with other groups, to see if my assumption holds good. It is at least in accord with the opinion of Hellyar, who says that to appreciate a humorous situation "one must be neither harrassed, nor actively interested, neither bound up in a specific mood or passion, nor engaged in any task, neither curious, nor irritable. The mind, in fact, must be as nearly \textit{tabula rasa} of definite ideas or emotions as possible."\footnote{See page 9.}

The major part of the data was collected when the children were taking off and putting on their outdoor clothing, going through the bathroom procedure, looking at books, having songs, eating their crackers and resting. It might seem that this would be the busiest time of the morning, a time when the children's minds would be particularly preoccupied, and therefore a time when humor would be least likely to appear. With this group of children it was not so. They were busy with their hands, perhaps, but little of the routine required the concentration they put into their play, and they were ready to enjoy humor situations.

As it has been pointed out above, the data are limited for three reasons:
1.) The group was very small. It was too small as a basis for real conclusions, but large enough to be suggestive.

2.) A few omissions in the recording of humor situations were unavoidable as I was not only the recorder, but the teacher of the group, and could not make note of the situations if my attention was directed elsewhere.

3.) A policy of the school is for the teachers to remain in the background as much as possible during the playtime of the children. No record, therefore, was taken of the children as they played outdoors, for I was usually out of earshot. There was undoubtedly some material omitted on this account, although, as I have explained, I do not believe that much material was omitted.

B. Data.

The data that are to be presented fall under ten heads: play on words, nonsense, changing names, mimicry, teasing, predicament of self, oddity, (including the unusual, the unsuitable and the grotesque or exaggerated), imagination, absurdity, and sound and motion. The classifications were made in this way. After the material had been gathered I studied the instances of humor recorded, with the aim of finding why the different situations had seemed humorous to the child or children responding to them. In most instances it seemed to me that the situations were so
clearly humorous because of one particular factor or another that they almost classified themselves. For instance Nina, who speaks very distinctly and well, imitated Binda's pronunciation by saying she wanted to sing "Dack and Dill," instead of "Jack and Jill," and laughed. Knowing Nina, and having seen the situation I realized that it was purely mimicry that prompted Nina to laugh. She was not teasing Binda, she was not being nonsensical, she was not being absurd, but she was mimicking. One could raise the objection that the classifications are arbitrary; one might say that the situation which I have just cited should fall under the head of teasing. But I feel that I alone can judge under what heads the humor should fall because I knew the children intimately, and I saw and believe I understood the situations. A few of the classifications were not so easy to make as the one above, but having given the situations thought and consideration I believe they are classified correctly.

For the naming of some classifications I have employed terms which Clara Owsley Wilson used in her "Study of Laughter-Situations among Young Children" such terms

1See page 36 for this illustration.

2It appeared at first, for instance, that the instances of humor classified under the unsuitable might also be classified under imagination.

3Clara Owsley Wilson, op. cit., p. 27. For résumé of this study see pages 41-46 of this thesis.
as predicament of self, and oddity which includes the unusual, the unsuitable and the grotesque. Other terms I have added, such as nonsense and changing names, which she does not include in her classification.

The situations which are presented have been numbered serially, in order to facilitate the making of a second classification which will be introduced later, under "Classification and Interpretation of Data." The second classification is made for the purpose of determining on what specific elements the situations depend for their humor. Visual, and verbal elements, the element of sound (other than verbal) in combination with motion, and the verbal element in combination with motion are the four groups of this classification.

The forty-five instances of humor recorded during the study of the younger group, of average age two years nine months, at the Brattle Street Nursery School, will now be described.

1. **Play on Words.**

(1.) Nina, coming out of bathroom with panties unbuttoned, says "Miss Pat, button 'em, button 'em, button 'em - Charlie Putnam, Putnam, Putnam." (Charlie Putnam is the name of a boy in the older group at the school) She laughs heartily.
(2.) Nina - "I'm going to the faucet to get water, I'm going to get water at the faucet; Esty Foster, Esty Foster, Esty Foster goes to the faucet, Esty Foster goes to the faucet." (Esty Foster is the name of another boy in the older group.) She smiles - very pleased.

(3.) Some one asks Binda, "How are you, Binda, pretty well?" "No, pretty swell." "Pretty well?" "No, pretty swell." Smiles - amused.

2. Nonsense.

(4.) Binda and Adams, "Ding dee dee dong, dong, dong," "Dang dum ding dum." They change the syllables and repeat back and forth to each other as if they were carrying on a conversation, both smiling.

(5.) Binda and Adams, "No come in, no socks, no crackers, no table, no house" etc., each adding a new item, both laughing.


(7.) David, "Buna man, buna man, buna man." The whole group takes it up and chants, "buna man, buna man" again and again, laughing heartily.

(8.) David, "Dee dee man, dee dee man," all the children take up the chant and say "dee dee man" again and again, laughing.
(9.) Adams, "My do, my do." David, "My do ee, my do ee." They repeat many times, first one, then the other, both laughing.

(10.) The children are asked, "What song would you like to sing?" Binda, "Niminy, niminy, niminy." She will give no other answer, and the whole group takes up the chant, laughing heartily.

(11.) Nina and David, "Baa, baa, baa, baa" to David's mother. She repeats it to them, laughing, and they say it back to her, laughing, and repeating twice.

(12.) Nina, "Gammy Binda, gammy Binda." Binda laughs and repeats with Nina "Gammy Binda, gammy Binda" again and again, both laughing.

(13.) Nina, to David, "You bookie you." Both laugh. The whole group takes up the chant, pointing to different children, saying "you bookie you," and laughing.

(14.) Binda, pushing Adams upstairs, says, "Fushee," at each step, and both laugh.

3. Changing Names.

(15.) Nina puts on Susan's cap, says "Now I'm Susan." Other children change caps, saying "Now I'm (the name of the person whose cap they have on.)" Change three times, and laugh hilariously.

(16.) Nina says, "You are Miss Channing, and I am Miss Brebbia," (the names of the two teachers in the older group at school) and laughs.
4. **Mimicry.**

(17.) The children are asked, "Shall we sing Jack and Jill?" Binda says, "Yes, Dack and Dill." "All right, Jack and Jill." Nina says, "No, Dack and Dill," in imitation of Binda's pronunciation, and insists it must be "Dack and Dill." Laughs.

(18.) Susan, "My pants too hard," (tugging at them to pull them up). David, pretending to pull his up, "My pants too hard." Laughs.

(19.) David, "That's hunny." (Funny). "Yes, it is funny." (Teacher). Binda, laughing, "No, it's hunny, it's hunny."

(20.) Binda, at rest time, wags finger at teacher the way the teacher does when she wants a child to lie down, and smiles.

(21.) Teacher clears her throat, and David clears his, with studied expression on his face, then laughs.

5. **Teasing.**

(22.) Nina is found (in isolation at rest time) with only one sock on. One shoe can be found, but the other sock and shoe are missing. She is asked to find them, and she says she can't. "I can't find them, the wind blew them away." She is told that they will have to be found before she can go outdoors. Finally, after looking under chairs, under tables, and under the rug she sits down and takes off
the sock, revealing the other sock and shoe underneath. She smiles as she takes off the sock.

(23.) Adams puts his cracker up to Binda's mouth. "Take a bite." As Binda starts to bite it he pulls it away. Both laugh. Binda does same to Adams, and both laugh.

(24.) Nina pretends to give cracker to David, then grabs it away. Nina laughs.

6. Predicament of Self.

(25.) Susan spills some of her orange juice on her dress, and laughs.

7. Oddity.

a.) Unusual.

(26.) Nina carries chair on her rear - "Funny way to carry my chair," smiles.

(27.) Nina sits across two chairs - "Funny way to sit," smiles.

(28.) David sees picture of snake in basket in Little Black Quibba, by Helen Bannerman, and says, "He's gone to bed in there, isn't that 'hunny?" (funny.) He smiles.

b.) Unsuitable.

(29.) Susan puts circular block around her neck, says "See my collar," and laughs.
(30.) Nina puts wastebasket on her head. Adams points, laughing, and says "See Nina's hat." Other children laugh too, and when Nina emerges from wastebasket she is laughing.

c.) Grotesque or exaggerated.

(31.) David squats down, with toes pointed out, hands on hips, and begins walking in this position. Says, "See the 'hunny' man," and continues walking back and forth across the room like this. He laughs, but no one else laughs.

(One of the older children, Alice, comes in our room wearing a mask which she has made. David is the only child in the room at the time. He looks startled, begins to cry. Alice is asked to take the mask off and show David who she is. The teacher explains to him how the mask was made. Alice puts it on again. David still looks dubious, teacher laughs, he smiles slightly - finally laughs. This would seem to show that the grotesque is not humorous until it is understood.)

8. Imagination.

(32.) David stands book on end, puts another book crosswise on top, says, "See the book has a hat," and laughs.

(33.) Adams, seeing book standing up open on table, says, "Look at open door, look at open door," and laughs.

(34.) Adams stands book up, puts several on top. "See my house." Smiles. All children laugh and copy.
(35.) For several days the children slide down the stairs on their stomachs, saying "I'm a doggie," and laughing.

(36.) Every day at luncheon the children eat a bit of their crackers, say, "See my boat," then begin to "sail" them over the table. The "boats" collide, and the children laugh hilariously. (This little ritual lasts about one minute.)


(37.) At luncheon, as crackers are being passed, Binda and Adams say, "No crackers, no crackers, no crackers." The other children take up the chant, all laugh.

(38.) The next day, as crackers are being passed, Binda and Nine say, "No crackers, no crackers, no crackers," smile broadly.

(39.) Nina, "I have a soldier in my tummy." Looks amused - smiles slightly.

10. Sound and motion.

(40.) Nina builds tower of blocks, knocks it over purposely and laughs, builds it up again, knocks it over purposely and laughs.

(41.) Adams builds an elaborate house with blocks and is very pleased with it. David kicks it down and laughs as blocks fall; Adams is furious.
(42.) Adams and David put blocks away in big box, banging them in hard, each trying to see who can make the loudest noise, both laughing.

(43.) Susan laughs as cover of the sand box is taken off and falls to the ground with a bang.

(44.) Nina runs bicycle against the railing of the porch, (until asked to stop) and laughs each time as it strikes.

(45.) David beats a pan with a spoon, and laughs.
C. Classification and Interpretation of Data.

In order to make some comparisons between this study and the one by Clara Owsley Wilson called "Study of Laughter-Situations Among Young Children"\(^1\) which was referred to in Chapter I, a résumé of the latter will be given.

Wilson's study is an investigation to determine -

1. In what kinds of situations is spontaneous laughter a factor with young children?

2. What differences are shown between children of the following ages:
   a. Infants - one to twenty-nine months.
   b. Nursery children - two years six months to four years five months.
   c. Kindergarten and Primary children - four years six months to nine years five months.

3. What other influences affect laughter among children in certain situations?

Only audible laughter was recorded in the study. Situations where the child merely smiled were eliminated.

An exhaustive analysis of the literature was made which included classifications of theories of laughter,

\(^1\)Clara Owsley Wilson, _op. cit._
theories of laughter, investigations of children's laughter, relation of laughter to intelligence, effect of environment on laughter, value of laughter, cultivation of laughter, and a summary of the literature.

A total of 601 infant records were made, 481 nursery records, and 1,033 kindergarten and primary records, making a total of 2,115.

In studying infants, records of situations where laughter was a factor were made by fourteen mothers of their own children in their own homes. No especial effort was made to induce laughter, but ordinary situations in the family and in the home, during which the child audibly laughed, were described briefly, with the child's age and the date. The record keeping of laughter situations among infants extended over a period of three years, beginning January 1, 1928.

From the study of infants Wilson found that the greatest number of laughter-situations seemed to involve physical experiences of the child himself, or use of his own powers. Next to that came watching or hearing others, then romping, and friendly greetings. There was a wide variety of situations and considerable variation in the age at which these occurred. Four mothers reported little or no laughter during periods of illness. There seemed to be great variation in the frequency of laughter among
the different children. Apparently laughter was infectious.

In studying laughter-situations among nursery, kindergarten and primary children records were made by the teachers of these groups. No effort was made to induce laughter. The nursery observations were made in three nurseries, and the kindergarten and primary grade records were made in eleven schools in eight western states.

The laughter-situations of the nursery school children were classified as 1. tickling; 2. instantaneous relief - from discomfort, constraint; 3. greeting laugh - response to friendly voice, face; 4. mirthful play - playful handling - romping - romping with contest; 5. use of own powers - successful effort; 6. enjoy watching or hearing (persons, things, characters); 7. association of the familiar and pleasant, anticipation or recurrence; 8. pretense, imagination, fancy; 9. oddities; 10. predicament of self; 11. teasing; 12. play on words; 13. convention violated, or rule, not decorous, trivial enters solemn, dignity upset; 14. absurdity or faulty thinking.

The use of the child's own powers was accompanied by the greatest number of laughs at both ages in the nursery school, especially with the larger physical activities such as running and jumping. In the younger nursery school group, aged two years six months to three years five months, enjoying watching (persons, things, characters,) was
accompanied by the next greatest number of laughs (twenty-three cases); pretense, imagination, fancy (sixteen cases), and oddities (sixteen cases), came next, with predicament of self (fifteen cases), teasing (twelve cases), and play on words (three cases) following.

In the study of kindergarten and primary children it was found that there was a steady decrease in laughter accompanying mirthful play or romping. There was also a decrease in laughter with physical activities. Laughter when watching or hearing others seemed to increase with the older children. Pretense accompanied by laughter decreased, but laughter with recognition of oddities or with teasing situations greatly increased. Over a third of all the laughter records of these ages were connected with teasing, and nearly one fourth with odd situations. Play on words showed an increase.

Wilson concluded, after personally observing four kindergarten and primary rooms over a period of four years that where there is a happy atmosphere, free from fear or restraint, there is more laughter. Also, it seemed evident that the expressive behavior of the children greatly resembled that of the teacher. Where the teacher was a cheerful, sunny type, the children laughed more frequently. In order to check on this three rating charts were devised, one to scale the formality and restraint in the room, and
two to scale traits of the teachers, cheerfulness and sympathy. Three supervisors were asked to rate the four rooms and teachers observed. From the rating it appears that the judgment of the three supervisors supported the observations of Wilson, namely that there is more laughter in a happy atmosphere, free from fear or restraint.

Throughout the study there are numerous illustrations of laughter-situations, and tables classifying the laughter-situations arranged according to chronological and mental ages, and the frequency at different ages, summarize and clarify the data.

Wilson comes to these conclusions:

1. There is evidence of much conditioning of laughter by parents and teachers.

2. Methods commonly employed by adults to discourage laughter are: ignoring the child, shaking the head "no," scolding, or saying, "That isn't funny." Methods used to encourage laughter in a child are: paying attention to him when he laughs, smiling approvingly, laughing with him, or saying, "That is funny," or some smiling remark....

3. Some of the methods commonly employed to discourage laughter result in repression rather than education.

4. There is a great individual variation in the frequency of laughter in different children.

5. There is more laughter among children in an atmosphere free from restraint.
6. The variation in type of situation accompanied by laughter shows a trend away from body control to a more intellectual and social interest as the child grows older.

7. There seems to be a fairly definite trend of development in types of situations where laughter is a factor as the child grows older.

Wilson states that the physical and social values of laughter have been sufficiently established to justify taking cognizance of it in the curriculum, and she offers suggestions which she believes would help in the developing of laughter in children.

This summary has been given in order that some comparisons may be made between Wilson's study and mine. Wilson's study concerns laughter, mine concerns humor, and includes other responses besides laughter. I found that the appreciation of humorous situations was shown in three ways: by laughter, by smiling, and by an amused expression of the eyes. Sometimes the eyes of the child twinkled, sometimes there was a coy look out of the corner of the eyes, but the amused expression always ended either in a slight smile, a broad smile or a laugh when the child saw that some one else appreciated the humor too. Laughter occurred thirty-four times, and smiling eleven times in response to humorous situations.
The data show that there are individual variations in the appreciation of humor in different children. (This fact is in agreement with the conclusions of Wilson and of Washburn¹ that there is a great individual variation in the frequency of laughter in different children.)

In sixteen of the humorous situations Nina was the one who first appreciated the humor of the situation, or who made the humorous remark or did the humorous thing that resulted in smiling or laughter. David was the first to appreciate or give expression to the humor of twelve of the situations. Binda was the first to appreciate or give expression to the humor of eleven of the situations. Adams was the first in eight of the situations, and Susan in three of the situations.

Several factors seemed to influence the extent to which the different children appreciated or gave expression to humor. These factors were the temperament of the child, his age, his experience with other children, his home environment. A brief description of each child will perhaps lead to a better understanding of the influence of these factors.

Nina, who showed the greatest sense of humor, was a happy-go-lucky, carefree, impulsive child, the daughter of

¹Ruth Wendell Washburn, op. cit., p. 529.
an American father and a Russian mother who possesses a keen sense of humor. Nina, though not the oldest child in the group, was a leader, she was bubbling over with ideas, she enjoyed every experience to the utmost, she was irrepressible, she was unafraid, she was friendly, imaginative and alert - a sociable and a dynamic child. Her five year old brother, whom she worshipped, had a subtle and keen sense of humor. Nina's home environment and her temperament were the factors which were responsible for the extent of her sense of humor.

David was quiet and gentle; he had a happy, even disposition. He was an only child and had never played much with other children before going to nursery school. He seemed to enjoy watching other children play quite as much as he liked playing himself - he watched them in a reflective way, sizing up the situation, taking it in. He was backward in speech, talked baby talk and did not enunciate well. His mother and father had a good sense of humor, and joked and played with him a great deal. The type of humor which appealed to David was of a simple, elementary type. He liked the sound of nonsense words, of loud noises, he appreciated the unusual. Although his humor was not on the same intellectual plane as Nina's it appeared frequently, in a quiet way. His temperament, his home environment and his limited experience with other
children influenced the character and extent of his humor. Binda was an excitable child, happy, warm-hearted, alert and energetic. She was always eager to join in the fun, to be in the midst of whatever was going on. She enjoyed the companionship of other children, and was friendly and sociable. She was used to playing with other children, had a younger brother but no older brothers or sisters. Binda's temperament was responsible for the extent of her sense of humor.

When Adams came to nursery school in the fall he was a very retiring, unresponsive child. It took about an hour in the morning before he forgot himself and talked and played with the other children. Something within him seemed to keep him back, to keep him from "loosening up." He never joined the others during the music period, but sat and watched with a scowl on his face. He needed very careful management because he would fly into a temper tantrum if he were crossed. Until the middle of the year there was little improvement, and then suddenly Adams began to change. His expression became more open and happy, and even his walk, which had been lumbering and heavy, became light and buoyant. The moment he got to school he ran to play with the other children, and one day during the music period he said that he wanted to march, wanted to be "Humpty Dumpty," wanted to do all the things that the other
children did. Adams had broken through his hard-shelled reserve. At first he was a solemn, serious child, and a sense of humor seemed to be non-existent in him, but after he blossomed out his appreciation of humor developed more and more. When one understands the history of his development one can understand why Adams' response to humor was not so frequent as the response of three children younger than he.

Susan was not quite two years old when she came to nursery school, and it took her several months before she adjusted herself to the group and became part of it. She was an only child, a merry, happy little girl, alert and friendly. The fact that she is recorded as having been the first to appreciate or give expression to the humor of only three of the situations is due not to a serious frame of mind, but to her lack of experience with other children, and to the comparatively great difference (six months) between her age and the age of the next youngest child in the group. The other children more or less overshadowed Susan.

It has been shown that there is an individual variation in the appreciation of humor in different children which is dependent on such factors as the temperament of the child, his age, his experience with other children, his home environment. Another fact which the data bring out is
that humorous laughter is often infectious. (This fact is in agreement with the statements of Kimmins,¹ Eastman,² and Wilson, who says that apparently laughter is infectious.) In ten, or 22.2% of the humorous situations the whole group laughed after one or perhaps two children had responded with smiles or laughter.

The distribution of the humor situations, arranged according to the frequency of their occurrence in the group, and the per cent value that each represents, is set forth in Table I.

¹The material for this is found in Charles M. Diserens' and Mabel Bonifield's "Humor and the Ludicrous," Psychological Bulletin, XXVII (February, 1930), p. 116.

²Max Eastman, op. cit., p. 229.
Table I. Distribution of Situations of Humor.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situations of humor</th>
<th>Number of situations</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nonsense</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>24.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oddity</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sound and motion</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mimicry</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imagination</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play on words</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teasing</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absurdity</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing names</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predicament of self</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>45</strong></td>
<td><strong>99.8</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is shown here that nonsense was the type of humor to which this group of children responded the greatest number of times, forming practically twenty-five per cent of all the humor recorded. Oddity, and sound and motion, which ranked next to nonsense in frequency, together form only a slightly higher per cent than does nonsense.

There are some comparisons to be made between the data in Table I and Wilson's data. In children of approximately the same age as the children with whom this study is
concerned Wilson found that enjoying watching or hearing (persons, things, characters)\(^1\) was accompanied by a greater number of laughs (twenty-three cases) than was imagination (sixteen cases), and oddity (sixteen cases). Predicament of self (fifteen cases), teasing (twelve cases), and play on words (three cases) followed in order of frequency. It appears, therefore, that the frequency of the occurrence of humorous situations among the children I studied differs from the frequency noted in Wilson's study. This comparison is only suggestive, since Wilson's classifications and mine vary somewhat, and I have included smiling as well as laughter for a response.

There is another classification that can be made, in order to determine on what different elements the situations depend for their humor. Some of the situations seem to be humorous because of the verbal element in them, some because of the visual element, some because of the element of sound (other than verbal) in combination with motion, and some because of the verbal element in combination with motion.

In order to classify each of the situations under one of these heads they have been numbered serially, (1.), (2.), etc., and are grouped below under the four heads to which they belong.

\(^1\) "Watching or hearing" in her classification roughly corresponds with "sound and motion" in mine.
The situations that seem to depend on the verbal element for their humor are: (1.), (2.), (3.), (4.), (5.), (6.), (7.), (8.), (9.), (10.), (11.), (12.), (13.), (16.), (17.), (19.), (21.), (37.), (38.), (39.). These situations have been classified before as play on words, nonsense, changing names, mimicry, and absurdity.

The situations that seem to depend on the visual element for their humor are: (20.), (22.), (23.), (24.), (25.), (26.), (27.), (28.), (29.), (30.), (31.), (32.), (33.), (34.). These situations have been classified before as mimicry, teasing, predicament of self, oddity, and imagination.

The situations that seem to depend for their humor on the elements of sound (other than verbal) in combination with motion are: (40.), (41.), (42.), (43.), (44.), (45.). These situations have been classified before as sound and motion.

The situations that seem to depend for their humor on the verbal element in combination with motion are: (14.), (15.), (18.), (35.), (36.). These situations have been classified before as nonsense, changing names, mimicry, and imagination.

Table II shows the distribution of the elements on which the humorous situations depend, arranged according to the frequency of their occurrence, and the per cent value that each represents.
Table II. Distribution of the Elements on Which Humorous Situations Depend.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements</th>
<th>Number of situations containing these elements</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verbal</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>44.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>31.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sound in combination with motion</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal, in combination with motion</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>99.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From these data it appears that verbal humor is more frequent among children of average age two years nine months than is visual humor. This conclusion is in disagreement with the statement of Kimmins, "Up to the age of seven humorous situations which cause laughter are almost entirely visual."¹

D. Outcomes of Study Unsupported by Data.

There are several observations that I made during the course of the study which are unsupported by data, and which I should like to study further.

¹The material for this is found in Abbie Crandell Enders, *op. cit.*, p. 343.
I noticed that on days when I was tired or tense, or when one of the children had been corrected and felt tense, the tenseness was immediately communicated to the other children, the atmosphere was not so calm and relaxed as it should be, and humor did not appear. In other words in an atmosphere of restraint and tension humorous situations did not arise. With this in mind it would be interesting, I believe, to investigate the effect of a teacher's moods on the reactions of the children. Wilson made a study which is somewhat similar, and found that where the teacher is a cheerful, sunny type the children laugh more frequently. But even a teacher with a cheerful, sunny disposition has days when inwardly she does not feel in such good spirits as she would like to appear outwardly. She may try, and may believe that she succeeds in masking this inner feeling, but it is my belief that it is communicated to the children, and that they react to it. This point I should like to study.

A second observation that I made was that humor seldom appeared when the children were pre-occupied, as when they were engrossed in play. Their play was serious in that they concentrated on climbing the jungle gym, on hammering, on making pies in the sand box, and when they laughed their laughter was in response to pleasure rather than to humor. It may be that the particular group of children

1See page 44.
studied was exceptional in this respect. It would be worth while to study the question with other groups of children of the same age, and to compare the results of such an investigation with results obtained from study of older children of four and five years.

There is a third question that should be studied further. Is appreciation of the humor of the grotesque spontaneous or is it learned? Is it not necessary to understand in what way the grotesque varies from the usual before its humor can be appreciated? An example of reaction to the grotesque is given in the data describing how David was frightened by seeing a child wearing a mask. The mask was taken off, shown him and explained to him, he saw that it was not the face of a monster, he became acquainted with the idea of a mask, and he finally laughed. This single instance is not sufficient for drawing a real conclusion as to whether the appreciation of the humor of the grotesque is spontaneous or learned.
Chapter IV
Summary of Conclusions Based on Study of Humor in Young Children

1. The group of children studied was too small as a basis for drawing real conclusions, but the conclusions are suggestive.

2. The conclusions of the study agree with conclusions reached by some investigators, and disagree with those of others.

3. Children respond to humorous situations with an amused expression of the eyes, with smiles and with laughter. Laughter is, however, the most frequent response.

4. There are individual variations in the appreciation of humor in different children dependent on such factors as the temperament of the child, his age, his experience with other children, and his home environment.

5. Humorous laughter is often infectious.

6. Situations which are considered humorous by children of average age two years nine months fall under the heads of nonsense, oddity, sound and motion, mimicry, imagination, play on words, teasing, absurdity, changing names, and predicament of self, stated in order of frequency.

7. Verbal humor is more frequent among children of average age two years nine months than is visual humor.
8. The study of humor in young children should be carried further. It would be interesting to investigate such questions as:

What effect do a teacher's moods have on the reactions of the children?

Do humorous situations arise when children are preoccupied?

Is an appreciation of the humor of the grotesque spontaneous, or must it be learned?
Books


**Magazine Articles**


"Humor in the Classroom." Industrial Arts and Vocational Education, XX (May, 1931), p. 170.


"What Children Laugh At." The Literary Digest, LXXI (October 22, 1921), pp. 26-27.


Barnes, Ruth A. "Nonsense Materials and How to Use Them." Elementary English Review, VI (June, 1929), pp. 147-150.


Colvin, Stephen S. "The Educational Value of Humor." The Pedagogical Seminary, XIV (December, 1907), pp. 517-524.


Wallis, Wilson D. "Why Do We Laugh?" The Scientific Monthly, XV (October, 1922), pp. 343-347.


Monographs
