

Creating a sense of togetherness through shared laughter in children's interactions

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Laughter is recurrent in children's everyday activities, especially in peer play where it features in calibration of aligning courses of action (Corsaro, 1992; Cekaite & Aronsson, 2005; Butler & Wetherall, 2006). Laughter is not only a way of showing joy or mirth (Hooff & Preuschoft, 2003), but is often used to deliver complaints, disagreements, and to display alignment or disalignment, thus indexing social orders and hierarchies through conversation (Tholander & Aronsson, 2002; Edwards, 2005; Arminen & Halonen, 2007; Holt, 2010).

Most interactional research on laughter has primarily dealt with adults. The focus of studies on laughter in children's interactions tends to concern 'problematic' laughter such as teasing, and 'laughing-at' in adolescent or pre-adolescent groups (Tholander & Aronsson, 2002; Andrén & Cekaite, 2017). The few studies that have examined laughter in younger children have focused on parent-child interactions (Walker, 2013). They show that children as young as 18 months use laughter interactionally. Such laughter occurs in conjunction with children's transgression-in-progress: children skillfully calibrate the untoward act as laughable (Walker, 2013). Since much of children's social life is spent in peer group interactions (e.g., in early childhood settings, Cekaite et al, 2014), how emotion (in this study, laughter), is used as social acts in organizing young children's peer interactions and social relations, constitutes a relevant area of exploration. Interactional studies of young children's laughter in peer groups are largely lacking, however. Moreover, recently, several studies have pointed out that laughter is multimodal and that a combination of multimodal recourses such as gaze, intonation, facial expression, gestures and talk are used throughout the trajectory of laughter (Haakana, 2010; Griffin, Aung et al., 2013). However, multimodality of laughter is still a largely uncharted area.

Using multimodal interaction analysis (Goodwin, 2000) the present study examines how laughter and smiling are used as social acts in 3-5 year old children's peer interactions. More specifically, the study will examine the interactional multimodal organization of children's laughter initiation and the interactional work used for achieving and sustaining shared laughter. We will specifically explore how laughter is used interactionally to display alignment, establish a shared 'laughable', and thus create a mutual embodied display of togetherness between peers. We will show that children skillfully use multimodal resources and mutual monitoring in orchestrating laughter as a shared and interactionally achieved embodied display of positive emotion.