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Humor as a source for collaborative storytelling: perspectives on dynamic and static stories

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Abstract: In this article, we investigated a creative learning process aimed at a shared story with humor in a group of 7- and 8-year-olds. In this integrated learning process, children first created an individual drawing and a guided writing assignment on a character that would make others laugh and then placed these characters in a story. The stories were collected via collaborative storytelling and the activity was a problem-solving assignment on a humorous children's book. The data were analyzed via theory-driven content analysis using Kyriakou and Loizou's categories of flexibility and originality, as well as the theories of empowerment and the absurd. The results showed that the children preferred scatological humor, which evolved from non-flexible humor to flexible and original humor during the process. The shared stories were divided into static and dynamic stories: static stories presented a solution to the problem, but the humor did not evolve during the collaborative storytelling. The dynamic stories concentrated on the process of problem solving and contained versatile, flexible and original features. It seems that the structure of the creative learning process supported participation and sharing individual perceptions of humor. Further, humor created an engaging starting point for the process and underlines the pedagogical possibilities of humor.

Keywords: children's stories; storytelling; children humor in literary art; children's humorous stories; creative learning process

1 Introduction

Humor has a positive impact on children's language development and overall growth, regardless of their abilities (Loizou and Kyriakou 2016). It provides educators with a window into aspects of children's learning, overall thoughts and development

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(Leung and Yuen 2022; Stenius and Aerila 2022). Prior research (Leung and Yuen 2022) shows that humor has a close relationship to learning concepts, knowledge and other aspects of development. From the early years, humor is an emotional asset for children, since it helps them cope with stressful situations, offers a tool to express difficult topics, enhances the feeling of belonging and entertains them when they are tired or bored (Loizou and Recchia 2019; Stenius et al. 2022). In an educational context, humor is still implemented in a relatively unplanned and sporadic manner. It is often originated by the children and depends on the willingness of the teacher. Even though teachers assess the outcomes of humor positively – such as better working relationships, positive learning outcomes and other social, emotional and behavioral benefits – they seldom utilize humor as a source of or component in assignments (Fovet 2009; Loizou et al. 2011) or develop a sense of immediacy via humor in the classroom (Serafini and Coles 2015).

Humor is often linked to creativity and the construction of humor is generally considered as creative. However, both concepts are very broad (Ritchie 2009). Loizou and Kyriakou (2016) regard verbal and visual humor to be comparable to creativity, as they both involve problem posing and problem solving. Creativity is a skill embedded in all the key competences of lifelong learning (EU 2018), and it supports social development as well as individuals' wellbeing, self-expression and identity (Collard and Looney 2014). Humor is often seen as a kind of creativity that takes the form of a temporary collision, which creates a glimpse of meaning that makes us laugh (Hammershøj 2021), and it is a quality inherent in creative educators (Boyle and Stack 2014). Humor and creative activities enhance the use of each other, since humor and creativity skills resemble each other and include the ability to consider multiple solutions, construct and deconstruct, and be flexible and original (Loizou and Kyriakou 2016). According to Tamblyn (2003), humor is creativity in which new connections between things are found. When using humor to enhance creative experiences and thinking in educational contexts, it is good to use activities and genres familiar to children and place them within the context of children's daily interests and experiences (Loizou and Loizou 2019). Therefore, Loizou and Loizou (2019) suggest using stories, poems and drawings as well as providing children opportunities to describe their outcomes and explain the humor in them. In this way, humor might act as a support for scaffolding creative and original thinking. Additionally, Loizou et al. (2011) emphasize that stories are a natural resource for children to communicate their meaning in different situational contexts. In this way, humorous stories are usually linked to children's lives and having these stories incorporated in learning could have positive outcomes.

In this study, we describe a humor-sourced, creative literary art process with seven- to eight-year-old children in a Finnish primary school. Literary art is a form of art that includes text as its main component but often combines language with visual

and other modalities (Haanpää 2015). In literary art, humor is often manifested in incongruities, using multiple meanings and creating jokes as well as deliberate wordplay (Leung and Yuen 2022). In general, humorous texts that are aimed at children contain sophisticated elements of satire, irony and parody, and require children to think and use their imaginations to associate one event or character with another (Serafini and Coles 2015). During the literary art process presented in this study, the children were first allowed to create humorous characters by drawing and writing individually and then tell a story in groups by utilizing their characters in a shared context. The aim was to investigate what types of humor children create and how this humor evolves during and between the individual and shared phases of the literary art project.

The research questions of the study are as follows:

- What are the typical features of humor in children’s shared stories produced in a creative literary art process?
- What are the structural features of children’s humorous stories produced in a creative literary art process?

1.1 Humor of young school children in their stories and drawings

The most accepted definition of humor was presented by Shultz (1976) and McGhee (1979, 1984, 2002), who claimed that humor arises from incongruity with reality. However, with children, we cannot be sure whether the incongruity is aimed at humor or is a result of a lack of knowledge of reality (Airenti 2016). Loizou (2011) argues that defining humor is complex as it is influenced by versatile factors such as age, gender, education, cultural background and personal experiences as well as knowledge.

According to Franzini (2002), children aged six to eight prefer slapstick humor, clowning, exaggeration, word play and socially unacceptable topics such as toilet humor. However, humor is not closely related to the age of children. For example, teasing and clowning are typical among young children, but older children often use this form of humor as well. Similarly, very small children can produce humor by using irony, even though this is commonly associated with older children (Airenti 2016). By the age of six or seven, children are considered capable of telling simple jokes and true riddles (Bergen 2009) and including humorous incongruities in their stories (Loizou and Kyriakou 2016). At the age of 10, they can explain humor in their words or actions (Bergen 1998, 2006, 2009). In general, children’s humor is a multi-faceted phenomenon, and it is difficult to detect its typical manifestations (Airenti 2016).

Children like to include characters and events from their daily lives to their humorous outcomes, and most commonly, they utilize absurd, incongruous, playful blunders and naughty details from their experiences and environment (Pitri 2011). Loizou's (2005, 2006, 2007) studies explain children's humor in drawings and stories through theories of empowerment and the absurd. The theory of the absurd involves humorous gestures, incongruous actions and incongruous appearance, and the empowerment theory is apparent as children purposefully or unintentionally violate adults' expectations and rules or create violence. The violation of intentions, conventions and facts in humor can also be defined as wrongness (Hoicka et al. 2008). Both absurd and empowerment theories can be present in the same outcome, since children can include absurd elements or incongruity and simultaneously express a sense of power through the characters of the outcome or through the observer's feelings. Loizou and Kyriakou (2016) also included scatological humor (=toilet humor) in the empowerment theory as a representation of violating social rules and expectations. In some cases, children make more stereotypical choices in humor when trying to amuse their friends (Chapman et al. 2007).

In creative activities, humor can promote risk taking and help some children to be more involved in classroom activities (Nilsen and Nilsen 2019). Loizou and Kyriakou (2016) developed an application of Torrance's test (2006) of creativity and employed its' concepts of fluency, flexibility and originality to illustrate children's humor. In their application, fluency is manifested in the number of humorous events, situations and actions; flexibility means the themes and ideas not within the rigid and expected perspective of humor, and originality contains the unique ideas of children. Further, they created categories of color and feature violation, as well as violence and humorous symbols, to illustrate the humor children prefer in their outcomes. According to them, creative humor does not contain humorous symbols, such as clowns, facial expressions and scatological elements. Leung and Yuen's study (2022) on children's humorous pop-up story books shows that in children's literary art activities, humor relates to alliterative names, hyperbolic humor, multiple meanings, wordplay, personification, metaphors and incongruous storylines. Rönkkö and Aerila (2018) investigated humor in creative learning processes with stories and craft making. Their studies indicate that the expressions of humor develop during a creative learning process and the children often change from concentrating on the incongruence in the features to a positive emotional bond to the outcome. For example, a soft toy in the shape of a poo emoji can turn into a beloved sleep buddy.

Children's humorous stories not only refer to the stories that they are telling or writing themselves, but also stories that are aimed at them. According to Serafini and Coles (2015), humorous stories and the enjoyment and surprises in them encourage children to seek humor in their daily lives and see the challenges of life

from a new and often less serious perspective. Loizou et al. (2011) have investigated the humorous stories of kindergarten-aged children. In their study, children's humorous stories contained incongruous events, actions or materials within a social context as well as contain funny words, positions, sounds or gestures used by story participants or inferred in the scenario. In general, incorporating humor to literacy lessons will give children the experience of humor produced by others (Loizou et al. 2011).

In general, creative storytelling and literary art activities direct thoughts from everyday life to other places and may help children gain new perspectives on different aspects of life (Nordbo and Thorod 2014). According to Paley (1990), both the stories told by children themselves and fictional stories in children's books foster children's learning and create a language-rich curriculum. In general, all stories, including creative and imaginary plays, support the development of spoken language and literacy in the classroom (Cremin and Flewitt 2017; Loizou et al. 2011).

In literary art projects, verbal and visual art are often connected to allow for more versatile forms of self-expression (Haanpää 2015). Drawing is a natural way for small children to express themselves and come up with verbal stories (Sloan 2009). The creative elements of children's stories resemble the elements of humor, as the creativity in stories is manifested in the originality of the content, the richness and color of the language, the surprise and versatility of the events and the witty insights of the author. Even humor itself is considered a creative element in children's stories. (Haanpää 2015) Telling stories together with other children is a collaborative and creative performance during which the creative ideas of individuals are linked together and built on the ideas of others (Cremin and Flewitt 2017). In humorous stories, collaboration often means an accumulation of humorous ideas so that the previous child's humorous idea is increased by the exaggeration or transformation of other children (Stenius and Aerila 2022). Children's stories are never created in isolation, but they convey children's values and experiences (Jalongo 2019). In stories told in collaboration with other children, the stories promote shared values and rapport between speakers (Cremin and Flewitt 2017).

2 Methods

2.1 Research context

The data were collected in an intervention conducted in two primary groups in an urban area of western Finland during the 2021 spring term, from the end of April to

the end of May. The intervention, which was a creative learning process, was planned by two researchers with the teachers of the primary groups alongside a project worker who was responsible for implementing the video for the motivational phase and saving the research material to a cloud service. Researching this type of creative learning process in the context of the Finnish educational system is very current, since the Finnish curriculum for basic education (2014) emphasizes participatory, broad-based and longer-lasting learning entities.

The literary art process illustrated and investigated in this article is part of this wider creative learning process and contains several individual assignments, including drawing completed by guided writing and a soft toy and stick puppet as well as shared assignments, such as a story and a kamishibai theatre presentation. The activities were structured in a manner consisting of four phases, namely motivation, orientation, core assignment as well as activity and reflection (see the NaCra approach for the structure of activities; Aerila and Rönkkö 2023). Both the literary art and the overall learning process began with a motivational phase aimed at activating the schemas for humor (Figure 1). Chosen for that purpose was Dav Pilkey's humorous children's book, *The Dog Man* (2018), a story of a character with the head of a dog and the body of a human that bears a close resemblance to a character in comics. In the excerpt selected from the book, the Dog Man's opponent, Petey, develops a device that can remove words from books, which results in all the characters in the book becoming stupid. The excerpt was chosen for the versatility of its humor (wordplay, scatology, feature violation, violating the rules and incongruence with the real world) in the hope that it would encourage the children to be creative in their use of humor. The excerpt was read aloud by the project worker and recorded. The video was shown to the children, and it was interrupted twice with a prompt for small group discussions on humor.

The motivation phase ended with the orientation phase, which involved the guided writing assignment and the drawing. The children were asked to draw a character that would be funny to others. And the drawing was supported with an individual writing assignment (Figure 1). The writing assignment was guided by subheadings concerning the character's favorite activities, food and hobbies, and it resembled a page of a friendship book. After completing this orientation phase, the children were divided into 11 groups of 3–4 children, which were chosen by the teacher for the main assignment, which was the storytelling activity (Figure 1). In the storytelling activity, the children were asked to complete the excerpt (a summary of what they had seen in the video) of Dav Pilkey's *The Dog Man* (2018):

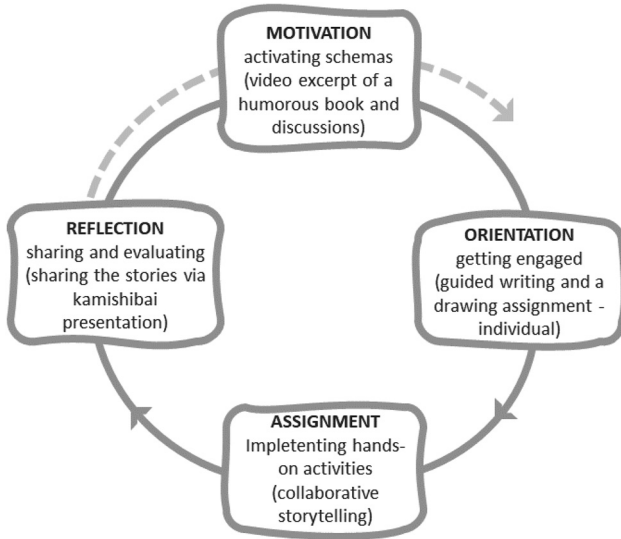


Figure 1: Implementation of the literary art during the learning process (Aerila and Rönkkö 2023).

Pete the Cat, Dog Man's enemy, had stolen all the books in the world, and since people didn't read anymore, they became quite like bums. Dog Man also became a chump, and he didn't know how to solve the problem. Fortunately, Dog Man had realized he should ask for help from his friends [names of the characters]. So one morning, they decided to set out to solve the problem.

Inventing an ending to the excerpt was a problem-solving task for which the children had to solve the problem of people's stupidity and the missing texts in the books. During the assignment, the children were not guided or encouraged in solving the problem but were allowed to compose the ending as they wished. All the stories they shared had the same structure: (1) presentation of the humorous characters, (2) excerpt of *The Dog Man* (2018) (see above) and (3) the story told during the collaborative storytelling.

The collaborative storytelling was implemented via participatory storytelling (Aerila and Kauppinen 2021; Karlsson 2020). In it, each participant could join in the storytelling freely, in any way they wanted, by listening to and accepting others' suggestions, adding their own suggestions to the story or commenting on others' ideas. In this process, the experience of participation was strengthened by the participants designing their own characters individually prior the storytelling as well as by implementing the collaborative storytelling in small groups and with an adult to ensure the children's safety and that each one would have their voice heard. Free-form storytelling is generally considered to be a democratic tool in producing

knowledge about the children's world of ideas and supporting their right to present their own perspective, experience participation and express their thoughts (Aerila and Rönkkö 2015; Backman-Nord et al. 2023).

The storytelling activity began by presenting the funny characters from the individual assignment phase. This information was written by the researcher at the beginning of the shared story. The excerpt from The Dog Man story was then read to the group, and the children were asked to orally continue it as they wished while a researcher wrote down their story word for word. At the end of the activity, the shared story was read to the children, and they had the chance to work on it further. When the children were happy with their story, the collaborative storytelling ended.

2.2 Data and data analysis

In this study, the process and outcomes of a group of 36 pupils aged 7–8 years were investigated. The study data consisted of individual drawings ($n = 36$), guided writing assignments ($n = 36$) and shared stories ($n = 11$). For the study, the names of the characters are presented as the children named them in Finnish. In cases where a name meant something tangible, it was translated, and both the Finnish names and their translations are presented in Table 1. In the Results section, these names are in their English form. Further, the children's guided writing assignments and the shared stories were initially translated into English by the researchers and then proofread by a professional.

Table 1: Characters of the stories by group.

Stories	Characters
Story 1	Silvia = Silvia, Paukkunen = Little Fart, Babna746 = Babna746, Haiseva Lintumakkara = Stinky Bird
Story 2	Muumipappa = Moominpappa, Lemu = Pong, Kakka = Poo, Tipiti = Tipitii
Story 3	Kakkaperhe = Poop Family, Pekka = Pekka, Superliskoihmisleijona = Super Lizardman Lion
Story 4	Blöö = Blöö, Outo = Odd, Tuhnupoi = Fart Boy
Story 5	Putki = Tube, Hauska = Funny, Korona = Covid
Story 6	Superkakkapökäle = Super Poop, Petetri = Petetri, Frans = Frans
Story 7	Pekka = Pekka, Patu = Patu, Kakkahaamu = Ghost Poo
Story 8	Pete = Pete, Kakkapää = Poo Head, Kakkanen = Poopy
Story 9	Värikäs Pissa = Colourful Pee, Talohirviö = House Monster, Löysätäti = Loose Aunt
Story 10	Aau = Aau, Perti = Pertti, Petri = Petri, Kakkapää = Poo Head
Story 11	Mauro = Mauro, Lilli = Lilli, Koiraperdi = Dog Perdi, Rekku = Rocky

Table 2: Implementation of qualitative theory-guided data analysis.

Categories (Loizou 2007; Loizou and Kyriakou 2016)	Contents of the analysis
	Phase I
Flexibility/non-flexible humour	Themes and ideas within the rigid and expected perspectives of humour; themes and ideas not within the rigid and expected perspectives of humour
Originality/humorous symbols	Unique/conventional ideas of children
	Phase II
Absurd	Incongruous actions
Empowerment	Scatological humour Violating adults' rules
	Phase III
Source of humour	Book excerpt Main characters Collaborative storytelling

The data were investigated, starting with the shared stories. The aim was to analyze the sources, types and features of humor in the shared stories to ponder the meaning of the creative process for the humor in the stories. The data were analyzed using theory-guided qualitative content analysis (Elo and Kyngäs 2008; Krippendorff 2019). The theory-guided analyses focused on Loizou and Kyriakou's (2016) application of Torrance's test using the concepts of flexibility and originality as well as the characteristics of the theories of absurd and empowerment (Loizou 2007). During the analysis, the shared stories were investigated as individual outcomes and as the result of a creative literary art process (Table 2).

The analysis was conducted in three phases. In the first phase, the humorous features were named and the details and features of the progress (plot) of the stories investigated. As the analysis revealed a large amount of scatological humor, a lack of violent elements and similarities in the use of characters and creation of endings, these categories were investigated in more detail in the second phase. Further, the source of the humor (individual funny characters, the excerpt of the book or a new element) was determined. As the individual drawings and the guided writing assignments contained similar features, they were examined together. The first and second phases of the analysis progressed to the third phase. In this phase two categories – dynamic and static – were formed using the following perspectives: the development of creative and humorous elements of the characters or the story and the quality and number of humorous features in the stories. The data were initially

analyzed by each researcher individually, and the individual results were then combined and investigated together, aiming for consensus in the results.

The study was conducted in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Prior to collecting the data, informed consent was obtained from the 37 children participating in the study and their guardians. This included written consent to use the children's data for research purposes and ensuring that the participants and their guardians were fully informed about the study, the data being collected and how it would be used. One participant did not provide consent for their involvement, and another was absent during the implementation. Teachers coded the pupils by number and scanned the outcomes for the researchers.

3 Results

3.1 Typical features of humor in shared stories

The data analysis showed that the humor in the shared stories focused on empowerment theory. The humor related to violence and opposing adults' rules was implemented less often, and scatological humor was implemented more widely. The humor in the stories was derived from different sources of the literary art process: the Dog Man excerpt, individual characters and collaborative storytelling. However, in all the shared stories, the main characters were individually created humorous characters, and during the storytelling process, no new characters were invented. In the stories, the humorous features of the characters were transformed in a positive and communal direction.

The video of Dog Man excerpt contained many violent features, and the humor in it was based on the aggressive behavior of the characters and followed the theory of empowerment. In the shared stories, violent or aggressive features were applied only mildly and rarely. In one story, the characters—Tube, Hawk and Covid—decided that they needed to use a weapon if the books with letters are not found:

No books found. Gotta take out the gun. They pull the trigger. At the same time, the books return to libraries and schools. (S3) In the same story, there was a side plot of the hawk. The hawk was very sleepy and at the end of the story and they must wake it up by jumping on it: First, the hawk must be awakened. — They hop on the Hawk and off they go (S3).

In the stories, the most common features were scatological, which is a typical type of humor for children (Van der Geest 2016). Scatological humor was the most common humorous feature in individual characters ($n = 13$). Many names referred to scatology: Colourful Pee, Poop Family, Dong (see Figure 2), Fart Boy, Little Fart and Stinky Bird Sausage (see Table 1). In the analysis, this scatological humor was categorized as non-

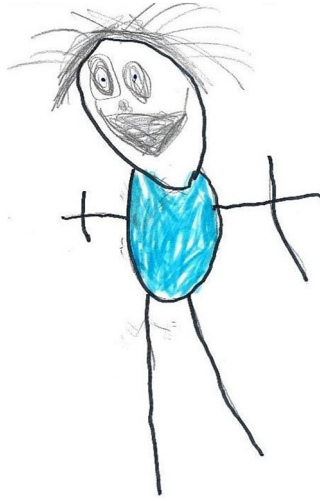


Figure 2: Drawing of Dong (4).

flexible humorous symbols, as in many cases, the name of the character was the only humorous element and the humor emerged from the incongruence of the scatological name and the ordinary things the character liked, ate or had as a hobby. For example, Little Fart (see Figure 3) liked the same things as any person, such as running, meatloaf and soccer, and Poo Ghost was interested in judo.

In some stories ($n = 3$), the scatological humor of the characters evolved from non-flexible humorous symbols to more flexible and original humor. For example, in one story, poop expanded from names into almost every detail of the story and the characters even lived in a poop city:

They went home to the City of Poo, which is a smelly city where houses are built with poop. Houses are built so that poop is brick and diarrhoea is mortar. Finally, they tell the other residents what has happened and the others get upset. Then they return to the City of Poo. (S8)

In another story (S11), the main characters needed to rise to the sky, and for that, the other characters created stairs out of poop. In general, even though scatological humor was the key feature of the individual characters and there were scatological characters in most groups ($n = 9$), it was not a dynamic element in most of the stories, and only one-fifth ($n = 3$) of the stories utilized it as a key feature.

Most stories accorded with the empowerment theory, and the overall atmosphere of the stories was about the joy of being together. They all had happy endings in which the individual characters became friends; they had a party, ate together or did some activity. Further, during the story, the characters collaborated, and the



Figure 3: Drawing of Little Fart (1).

humorous features of the characters became insignificant or positive. In the story of Colourful Pee, House Monster and Loose Aunt, the characters were very different:

Löysätäti is an eccentric person who eats horse manure, meditates and gives off super smells, Talohirviö can move from place to place, he eats rocks, plays hide and seek as well as eats houses and Värrikäs Pissa eats toys, runs and uses colour as a force. (S9)

However, despite their differences, they co-operated and were able to creatively take benefit of their different abilities. In the story, the characters noticed that there is a device that can return the words to the books, but it is covered with poop. After realizing this, Loose Aunt was able to eat the poop covering the device, the House Monster moves the device, and Colourful Pee cleaned the device by peeing on it. At the end of another story, the main characters—Poop Family, Pekka and Super Lizardman Lion—walked hand in hand to the park and lived happily ever after (S3).

3.2 The structural features of the humorous stories

The aim of the collaborative storytelling was to solve two intertwined problems presented in the excerpt/summary of the Dog Man: (1) how to return the letters to the books and (2) how to make people wise again. All stories ($n = 11$)

presented a solution to the problem of the books and most included making the people wise again. The solutions for the missing letters were twofold: the letters were either returned to the books or new books were written. In the stories, the individually created characters were illustrated as heroines and on the side of the good, and if there was a protagonist, it was Petey, the cat from the Dog Man book. Petey was illustrated as an angry and stupid cat in a very hyperbolic manner and the incongruence between him and the main characters was part of the humor. In general, the shared stories were in accordance with the storytelling skills of children of the same age as those in the study (Jalongo 2019; Morrow 2016).

In the analysis, the stories were divided into two categories based on the use of humor and structural choices: static and dynamic stories (Table 3).

One-third of the stories ($n = 3$) were static, having almost no flexible or original humor or creative elements. It seemed that in static stories, the children utilized the individual characters, but were not able to develop the characters or story in a creative or humorous manner, and the humorous features were not flexible or original. It seemed that almost the only incongruity in the stories was the names of the characters (see previous chapter). In general, the stories adhered to the guidelines of the assignment and concentrated on removing the problem, not on illustrating the process of solving the problem. For example, in the story of Moominpappa, Dong and Poop, they decided to return the letters by writing more books on themes that had been stated earlier as features of the characters and the story contains almost no incongruity or surprise:

Table 3: Use of humour in static and dynamic stories.

	Structural features	Humorous features
Static stories	Followed the instructions	Non-flexible humour
	Solved the problem	Incongruence between the character names and actions
	Protagonist	Hyperbolic humour between the protagonist and the main characters
	The humour did not evolve during collaborative storytelling	
Dynamic stories	Followed the instructions	Flexible humour
	Solved the problem	Original humour
	Illustrated the process of solving the problem	Surprising, consistent humour starting from the main characters
	The humour evolves during the collaborative storytelling	

Moominpappa walks a lot and can reach high places. Pong smells bad and plays soccer. Poo enjoys doing poop-related things, has a soft body and a big butt. Tipitii wears a small hat and likes to do tricks. — At first, they looked at things on the computer. Then they started writing their own books on the computer. In total, there were two thousand different books. Lemu wrote about soccer, Tipitii about sports, and Moominpappa wrote several non-fiction books. Poo wrote stories about poop. (S2)

Other static stories focused on illustrating Petey's stupidity and making fun of him. In a story (S10) of Aauu, Pertti, Petri and Poo Head, the children gave Petey a lot of candies and stole the books from him as Petey eats the candies. After taking the books back to the library, they decided to eat candies themselves. The candy theme emerged from the storytelling, and it had no relation to the characters or their features. From the perspective of humor, the children used the poo element in a non-flexible manner, as Poo Head (see Figure 4.) ate poo, not candy like the others.

Two-thirds of the stories ($n = 8$) were categorized as dynamic stories because they contained flexible and original humor. In dynamic stories, the humor emerged from two sources: (1) the features of the characters and (2) the collaborative storytelling. In these stories, the problem-solving process was very dynamic. The children constructed the solution by utilizing and developing the characters' features and humor consistently and with surprises. In dynamic stories, the features of the characters were used in



Figure 4: Drawing of Poo Head (25).

problem solving and these features were developed during the storytelling. For example, in a story (S1) of Silvia, Little Fart, Babna 746 and Stinky Bird Sausage, Paukunen had many hands, and it used all its hands to create more books. In Blöö, Odd and Tuhnupoi's (see. Figure 5) story, Tuhnupoi's ability to teleport was taken advantage of:

Tuhnupoi followed by teleporting. Then he guarded them and put a bridge so that Petey couldn't go and he had to build that book return machine. There was one problem. I had to get those books back quickly. Then Tuhnupoi took the device with him and teleported to the library. He then returned the books to libraries around the world. (S4)

In dynamic stories, the children also invented creative and humorous features during the collaborative storytelling. For example, in a story of Mauro, Lilli, Dog Perdi, and Rocky, Dog Perdi could poop rainbow formed poop and they used the idea of poop in many forms: to create stairs from poop, to change the rainbow poop into orange and at the party, they all pooped in their pants. Further, they invented new elements from popular culture (Minecraft, TV zombies and a portal), developed the features of their characters (e.g. having no hands) and added new details (e.g. travelling to a faraway city called Rovaniemi and snakes).

They then set off to another world to find the books. Petey, the cat, had sent the books to another world, kind of like in Minecraft. They decided to jump into the TV and Minecraft, and there was an endless portal from there. Then Mauro said, 'Why can't we make books ourselves, we have hands!' 'But I don't have hands!' the others said. Then they went to Rovaniemi, and then they went back home. Mauro pooped in his pants. Rekku said 'Pshhhh,' and the snake bit Koiraperdi on the butt. Then they fetched one book from one portal, which contained all the books. Then there were endless snakes and zombies. In the end, they were able to defeat the snakes and zombies with cooperation and poop power, but Rekku got orange poop on his pants. At home, everyone pooped in their pants and everyone laughed. (S11)



Figure 5: Drawing of Tuhnupoi (14).

In another story, the children developed the solution based on the Dog Man excerpt, as they noticed that Petey had only removed letters from books, not other texts:

They started looking for texts in the library and the forest. But no texts were found. Not a single letter! And not a single word. Suddenly, the Poop Family and Super Lizardman Lion saw a letter in the butt. They shouted to Pekka, "Hello! There is one letter here." Then Pekka snapped and said, "Petey the cat took the letters from books, but not from posters or advertising texts." They are now looking for posters and advertising texts. They found a lot of them and wrote down all the texts. (S3)

Dynamic stories contain many features from creative writing and highlight the meaning of collaboration in storytelling. This was apparent in the structures of the stories: they did not have consistent plots, but they offered the children a space to share their ideas and thoughts freely in a permissive atmosphere. It seems that in dynamic stories, the Dog Man excerpt was not a source of humor, but the characters and collaborative storytelling were much more significant. Further, they indicated that non-flexible humor can evolve to become more flexible and original in integrated processes and in collaboration.

4 Discussion

4.1 Similarities in humor in shared stories produced in a creative literary art process

In the study that was conducted, children aged 7–8 years participated in a creative literary art process that aimed to collaboratively create a humorous story. This collaborative storytelling intervention, coupled with the integration of humor, was facilitated by the creation of individual drawings and written assignments centered on humorous characters. Notably, every child in the study successfully created a humorous character and provided an explanation of it in a separate written task. Moreover, all the individual characters seamlessly found a place within the shared stories.

This study corroborates earlier studies into the humorous features favored by children in their creative output (e.g. Chapman et al. 2007; Leung and Yuen 2022; Loizou et al. 2011; Loizou and Kyriakou 2016). Notably, scatological humor emerged as a predominant feature, appearing both in individual characters and as details woven into the shared stories. In general, bodily secretions and excrement emerge as favored humorous features among children, replaced by sex in later stages of life (Van der Geest 2016). Employing scatological themes in characters' names offers an uncomplicated method to infuse the narrative with something amusing, distinct and mildly improper (Norman 2016). Van der Geest (2016) asserted that the aim of

scatological humor is to induce laughter by presenting situations or stories that deviate from the norm and are thus perceived as humorous. This perspective resonates with the study's findings, exemplified by one child's comment that he had drawn a humorous poo character due to its reliable comedic impact on others.

The creation of the humorous stories was effectively supported by various humor-related stimuli in the study, including an excerpt from a humorous children's book, the individual humorous characters and the interactions during the collaborative storytelling. As in previous studies (e.g. Loizou 2005, 2006; Loizou et al. 2011), children valued these stimuli, as the shared stories exhibited humorous features influenced by all these sources. Diverging from Dowling's study (2014), despite the inclusion of aggressive humor in the excerpt from the children's book, the narratives in this study contained minimal to no expressions of violence or aggression within their comedic content. In their research, Rönkkö and Aerila (2015) highlighted the manner in which humorous features, including those of an aggressive and scatological nature, within the context of creative learning can progress towards the generation of feelings of warmth and positivity. This dynamic also held true in this study, where, despite the distinct features of individual characters within the collaborative storytelling, all the characters became friends in the shared stories, culminating in happy endings.

4.2 Static and dynamic stories in a creative literary art process

In the study that was conducted, the shared humorous narratives were classified into two distinct categories, static and dynamic stories, based on the humor and structural elements that had been employed. Most of the shared stories fell within the dynamic category, indicating their inclusion of flexible and original humor featuring surprising yet consistent details coupled with logical enhancements to problem-solving scenarios. Additionally, humor in the context of the creative learning process evolved through the collaborative storytelling activity. This development could potentially be attributed to the interactive nature of humor, which tends to emerge and develop within interpersonal interactions (McGhee 1979; Shultz 1976). In this study, while the creative process commenced with individual humorous characters, the humorous stories were collaboratively created and refined, fostering interaction. Given the striking resemblance in character composition among the groups formed for collaborative storytelling, it is plausible that the group dynamics played a role in shaping humor utilization and story structure. In essence, this study underscores humor's inherent process-driven nature. A good example of this is how the scatological humor evolved and manifested in the dynamic stories in a highly creative form.

A third of the narratives were classified as static stories, characterized by a comparatively less creative utilization of humor and a higher presence of non-flexible

and irrelevant humorous features. A study conducted by Samson and Hempelmann (2011) distinguished incongruities in humor as central and background incongruities. In the context of this study, it appears that the static stories leaned towards background incongruities, employing humor to enhance amusement, aversion and absurdity, but without a central role in the plot progression or narrative cohesion. This tendency may explain why humor within these stories was unchanging and did not undergo transformation during the creative learning process.

4.3 Methodological considerations

This study and its outcomes hold the potential to benefit future researchers and educators interested in integrating humor into their lessons. The structure and guidelines of the learning process significantly influenced the development of the humorous stories. The individual assignment of crafting humorous characters at the beginning of the creative learning process provided the children with material for collaborative storytelling, enhancing their engagement (refer to Rasku-Puttonen 2006). Moreover, the instruction for the individual assignment was to design a character that would elicit laughter from others. This formulation prompted the children to consider their peers and fostered a sense of community during the individual assignment, as noted by McMillan and Chavis (1986).

The insights garnered from humor within the creative learning process and the category of dynamic stories reinforce the idea that humor thrives within communities and communication networks (Loizou 2011). The creative literary art process facilitated the growth of humor skills, aligning with Loizou's (2011) argument that offering diverse contexts for children to practice humor is crucial for understanding its nuances and cultivating a humorous disposition. Heintz et al. (2022) broke down humor skills into three categories, namely the comprehension, appreciation and production of humor, all of which were exercised in the collaborative storytelling exemplified in this study.

Throughout the learning process, the educators welcomed all forms of humor, regardless of whether they conformed to their preconceived notions of suitable school humor. This inclusive approach is likely to have bolstered the children's confidence and feelings of achievement while simultaneously fostering an acceptance of diverse characters. As argued by Piipponen et al. (2021), storytelling activities can facilitate shared understanding among children. In traditional classrooms, some children can fade into the background, but within an integrated framework like this, they can actively participate and acquire skills for employing and comprehending humor. Kuipers (2009) posited that shared humor engenders a sense of likeness that nurtures camaraderie. In this study, the learning process, and particularly the humor, cultivated the children's sense of belonging and validation; when children

presented their own comical characters to their peers, they gained a sense of their role within the group. Additionally, the collective laughter evoked by these characters forged immediate connections among the children.

One notable limitation of the study that should be considered pertains to the fact that the data collection was conducted within the confines of two classrooms. The realization of the learning process was orchestrated by two teachers who were guided by the instructions furnished by the researchers. Moreover, during the time of the intervention, certain limitations persisted because of the Covid-19 restrictions in Finland. The children had been at the school since the beginning of the school year in Autumn 2020, but the researchers were not able to attend the study's implementation on the school's premises, apart from the collaborative storytelling, which took place in the schoolyard.

5 Conclusions

With children becoming increasingly individual, both as learners and as a result of their backgrounds, it is important to look for the things in common among them without prejudice. In this study, humor appeared to be such a factor; all the children had had enough experiences of humor to realize their characters, and the humorous features of the characters were familiar enough to start the shared ideation in the collaborative storytelling activity. According to De Bruin et al. (2018), this kind of learning process results in increased motivation and enhanced integrated learning.

Creativity, storytelling and humor hold intrinsic value for learning, well-being and participation, yet they often remain undervalued within educational contexts, which are frequently governed by teachers' terms (Backman-Nord et al. 2023; Fovet 2009; McWilliams et al. 2014). In this study, ample creative and humorous freedom was granted, merging separate assignments with humor, thereby nurturing individual expression, creativity and collaboration (De Bruin et al. 2018; Wright 2018). Samson et al. (2009) highlighted humor as a universally relevant, laughter-triggering tool that aids in coping with life's challenges; this was reflected in the increased laughter during the creative learning process in this study and is indicative of successful primary school learning experiences.

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