

ATINER CONFERENCE PAPER SERIES No: EDU2013-0395

Athens Institute for Education and Research

ATINER



ATINER's Conference Paper Series

EDU2013-0395

**Happiness Education –
The Role of Education in Boosting
Happiness**

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URL Conference Papers Series: www.atiner.gr/papers.htm

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ISSN 2241-2891

12/06/2013

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This paper should be cited as follows:

Suojanen, I. (2013) "Happiness Education – The Role of Education in Boosting Happiness" Athens: ATINER'S Conference Paper Series, No: EDU2013-0395.

Happiness Education – The Role of Education in Boosting Happiness

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Abstract

Happiness studies often concentrate on health, money, work and age. Even though education and happiness are clearly connected, the educated having greater possibilities for happy lives, there are only fine guidelines on what happiness in education should and could be. We need to have more information to establish baseline levels for happiness education and to proceed to more solid research. The goal of this paper is to define some guidelines for the role of education in enhancing happiness, and also to justify the importance on concentrating on pupils' happiness not only in primary school, but also on the university level and in workplace education as well. The paper suggests that happiness should be recognized as an educational objective. Since many studies across the happiness research have found out that education increases happiness, those studies and findings should be acknowledged and taken into use. Happiness education could very well be a mixture of different scientific approaches, such as philosophy, psychology, sociology and economics.

Keywords: Happiness education, happiness research, higher education

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Introduction

Happiness has become a popular topic during the decent decades. Not only self-help books are published and widely sold, but universities also teach happiness studies, vast happiness databases are created, thousands of scientific articles are published, global happiness conferences are held.

Happiness studies often concentrate on health, money, work and age. Even though education and happiness are clearly connected, the educated having greater possibilities for happy lives, there are only fine guidelines on what happiness in education should and could be. We need to have more information to establish baseline levels for happiness education and to proceed to more solid research.

The goal of this paper is to define some guidelines for the role of education in enhancing happiness, and also to justify the importance on concentrating on pupils' happiness not only in primary school, but also on the university level and in workplace education as well. The paper suggests that happiness should be recognized as an educational objective. It also works as a brainteaser for the educators and such to consider how happiness is acknowledged in their everyday work in the field of education.

Since many studies across the happiness research have found out that education increases happiness, those studies and findings should be acknowledged and taken into use. Happiness education could very well be a mixture of different scientific approaches, such as philosophy, psychology, sociology and economics.

There are plenty of terms and names for happiness: joy, meaningfulness, satisfaction, ecstasy, zest, eudaimonia, pleasure, and fulfilment (e.g. Seligman 2003). Happiness can also be seen as a synonym for the quality of life or well-being (Veenhoven 2010). In the science world the term *subjective well-being* is very much used. D. Haybron (conference on Measures of Subjective Well-being for Public Policy 13.7.2012) uses the term *emotional well-being* when referring to happiness. However, to make it easier for the reader, I have decided to use the word happiness throughout to cover all these different terms. Hence my apologies for tautology.

Defining Happiness

What is happiness? It depends on whom you ask. According to neuroscience, happiness physically happens on the left side of our brain right behind the forehead. That is where we experience good feelings, and if something damages that part of the brain, we get depressed. The electrical activities can be read by electrocodes e.g. in the situations where people are given pleasant and unpleasant pictures to see or flavours to taste. (see e.g. Layard 2005.) Philosophers have been searching for happiness for centuries and they have different definitions on happiness too. Among neuroscientists and philosophers there are two other disciplines with a distinct interest on happiness:

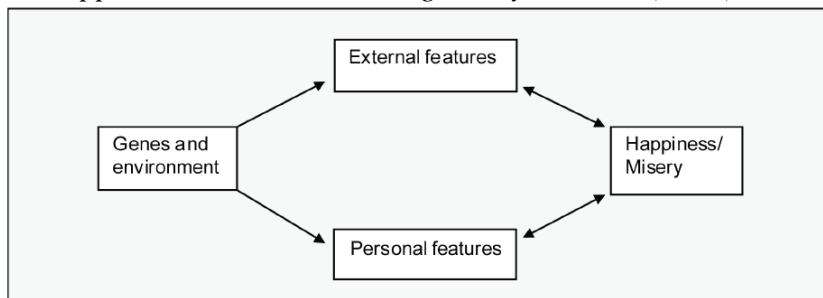
psychologists and economists. The psychologists want to understand the feeling and the economists want to know what people value (Gilbert 2012).

For Bentham (1789), happiness is a psychological experience and “the sum of pleasures and pains”. Freud (1929) linked happiness with primitive urges, as an orgasmic experience. Diener (1997) defines happiness as being satisfied with life while feeling good, whereas Sumner (1996) sees it as a positive attitude towards life. According to Veenhoven (2010) happiness is a mixture of hedonic level of affect and contentment, hedonic level referring to various affects reflecting on one’s mood and contentment referring to the level we meet the aspirations for life. He also calls it the “overall enjoyment of one’s life as-a-whole”. (Veenhoven 2010.)

Frey and Stutzer (2000) see three possible sources for happiness: personality and demographic factors, micro- and macroeconomic factors and institutional factors. Personality and demographic factors include variables mentioned in table 1. The variables in micro- and macroeconomics are income per capita, employment and inflation. The greatest institutional factors are democracy and federalism. (Frey & Stutzer 2000.)

Layard, Clark and Senik (2012) divide happiness into factors very similarly too. They believe that our genes and environment together make us who we are and determine the main features in our lives. These features can be divided into external and personal features, which lead into happiness or misery, as figure 1 shows.

Figure 1. *Happiness Features according to Layard et al. (2012)*



The external features are work, income, community and governance, values and religion. Personal features are mental and physical health, family experience, education, gender and age. These are all key determinants of happiness. (Layard et al. 2012, 59.) All these factors, features, domains and elements prove that happiness can be influenced by a mixture of several aspects.

Blanchflower (2008) has listed the aspects bringing happiness and unhappiness into Western lives as in table 1.

Table 1. Aspects bringing Happiness and Unhappiness by Blanchflower (2008)

<p>Happiness is higher among: Women Married people The highly educated Active involvement in religion The healthy Those with high income The young and the old – U-shaped in age The self-employed People with low blood pressure The sexually active and especially those who have sex at least once a week Those with one sex partner Those without children</p>	<p>Happiness is lower among: Newly divorced and separated people Adults in their mid to late 40s The unemployed Immigrants and minorities Those in poor health Commuters People with high blood pressure The less educated The poor The sexually inactive Those with children</p>
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In Ojanen’s (2009) research on the barometer of happiness in Finland, the results were very similar to Blanchflower’s. Those living in a relationship were happier than people living alone or as a one-single parent. People earning less than 1000 euros per month were less happy than those with a better income. The unemployed were unhappier, whereas people in a management position happier than average. Education had a connection to happiness, the respondents were happier the more educated they were. However, sex, age or location made no difference in Ojanen’s research. (Ojanen 2009.)

Layard (2005) points out three key facts about human nature and happiness. First he claims that human wants are always heavily dependent on what other people have. We want to keep up with other people and compare our lives to theirs. (Layard 2005.) Education, background, media and work environment also have a great influence on what we think we should want and have. We are group-animals and on seek for social respect (Veenhoven 2010). Layard calls this a *status race*, which always leads to winners and losers. The second key fact is that people want security. They hate unemployment and since they cannot have a full control on keeping their jobs, they are unsecure, which affects their happiness. The third key fact is that people want to trust and to be trusted. Mobility and anonymity make it much harder these days. (Layard 2005.) Thin (2012) strongly argues that happiness is social and therefore “emerges from good social relations, from enculturation and from fair institutions”.

Happiness is typically measured by asking people how happy or unhappy they are. This is called a retrospective evaluation. The questions on happiness can be posed in various contexts: clinical interviews, life-review questionnaires and survey interviews. The questions can also be posed in different ways: directly or indirectly, and by means of single or multiple questions. (Veenhoven 2010.) Also longitudinal research is used in happiness research, it

allows following up the changes within time and to see how certain changes affect the investigated aspect.

Importance of happiness is no longer a philosophical or psychological question. It is clearly becoming both economical and political question too. People want to be happy and they value happiness highly in their lives. In value preference studies, happiness ranks very high. People rank happiness much higher, than professional moralists give credit for. (Veenhoven 2010.) If we live in a democratic society, people's need and desire to be happy should not be neglected. Therefore, if people find happiness important, governments should be interested in enhancing it too (P. Dolan, conference on Measures of Subjective Well-being for Public policy, 13.7.2012).

Bok (2010) reminds that the main problem in measuring happiness is, that the subject is still quite new. Although refining happiness has been the dilemma of philosophers and poets for centuries, only during the last few decades using science has been realized (Gilbert 2012). Even though hundreds of researches are carried out and lots of articles and books written about happiness, it is still seen as a "young science". The definitions of happiness vary a lot and so do the ways of measuring it. Therefore, it is often hard to compare the results between studies or replicate them, and the confidence of accuracy might be questioned.

Due to the novelty of this field, new discoveries are constantly made and so "the happiness research is bound to be less stable and more prone to controversy than most". (Bok 2010.) This should stabilize with time though, and with more research and confirming of the results, the subject will become less uncertain. Facing these dilemmas and finding answers to them is necessary.

Happiness Increases with Education

My recent study on happiness shows that the more educated the person is, the more likely s/he is happy. The study focused on Finland (N=1014) and the global data of 54 countries (N=66,566) included in the 5th wave (during the years 2005 -2008) collected by the World Value Survey. Scientists and research around the globe support these findings. Happiness increases with education, especially when comparing the responses of people with only primary school studies to others. People with primary school education or less, are more likely to be unhappy than people with university studies. Also, when we compare the percentages among the very happy responses, the results also suggest that people are more likely very happy when they have continued their studies after primary school. (Suojanen 2012.)

The study shows that the more educated the person is, the more likely s/he is happy. In Finland happiness increases with education, especially when comparing the responses of people with only primary school studies to others. People with primary school education or less, are more likely to be unhappy than people with university studies (table 2).

Table 2. Happiness and Education (%) (Suojanen 2012)

The level of education	Finland			Global		
	Happy	Very happy	N	Happy	Very happy	N
Primary school education or less	84	26	286	77	33	20 884
Secondary/vocational	94	34	389	83	35	16 731
Secondary/university preparatory	98	26	80	84	36	15 095
University	96	36	257	89	35	13 445
	p<0,001 Cramer's V<0,3	p>0,05 Cramer's V<0,1		p<0,001 Cramer's V=0,1	p<0,001 Cramer's V<0,1	

The same pattern appears when we look at the results on the global scale. Even though Cramer's V -test shows less than a reasonable connection between the variables, the test results from the Kruskal-Wallis analysis support a significant correlation between education and happiness ($p<0,001$). Also, when we compare the percentages among the very happy responses, the results from the global data also suggest that people are more likely very happy when they have continued their studies after primary school. (Suojanen 2012.)

Education and happiness are connected, which becomes clear with this data and is also supported by previous research (e.g. Bok 2010; Veenhoven 2010). The results show a significant, but weak connection between happiness and education. Those with no more than primary school education are more likely to be unhappy than those with a higher education.

According to Bok (2010) education is one of the most important factors when wanting to enhance the happiness of citizens:

‘It stands to reason that any serious attempt to increase well-being should give a prominent place to education. Schools and universities are the obvious institutions to assume this responsibility by trying to cultivate interests and supply the knowledge that will help young people make more enlightened choices about how to live their lives.’

Since research shows that education is one of the main factors in creating happiness, shouldn't more money be given to schools and universities to raise the happiness levels of citizens? Why does it seem to be the exact opposite now? Bynner, Schuller and Feinstein (2003) are worried about the financial control exercised by the Finance Ministry in England and for education being subjected to claim its share in budget allocations. They say that educationalists should try to answer the methodological challenges faced with in the reductions. (Bynner, Schuller & Feinstein 2003.)

Political scientists have also found a correlation between education and voting rates. Political activity is much higher among those who have a university education than among lower educated citizens. (Bok 2010.) When

people are educated they are more likely to feel part of society than alienated from it, this is because they feel that society has something to offer (Bynner et al. 2003).

Social activity and belongingness are found to increase the happiness levels of individuals (Veenhoven 2010). Presten and Hammond (2002) explain this by education promoting social integration. Education is found to be very effective in developing social networks and lowering tensions between ethnic and age groups. These, in return, increase tolerance and active citizenships. (Presten & Hammond 2002.) Education is obviously not the only factor to enhance joining, engaging and trusting in society, but it is a powerful predictor according to Green, Presten and Sabates (2003). They also note that even when other variables such as wealth, income, age and gender are controlled, education still holds an important base to encourage for social activity.

The research shows that highly educated people are more likely to be happy with their lives. The universities have also a great role in happiness by providing capabilities for their students to do well in their lives. Educated people have more options, better chances and more tools to influence their lives. And they do most likely have better paid jobs as well. Even though income does have some influence on our happiness, when the salary reaches certain level – that is, to receive a reasonable salary – we do not care about it that much. What we care is the security the income offers – availability to money. (Bok 2010.)

Educated people also have more self-disciplines to maintain healthy habits. Being healthy correlates significantly with happiness too. Educated people are healthier: the tendency to obesity and to smoke decreases within education, especially within higher education (Hayward, PannoZZo & Colmen 2005).

It is not only about the physical health, but taking part in learning helps people to sustain their mental health too. Depression, caused by unemployment and material poverty, is much more likely among those without education. (Bynner et al. 2003.) The Center for Research of the Wider Benefits has investigated the benefits gained from learning across the life course since 1999. In one of their research reports Preston and Hammond (2002) list esteem and efficacy as the most important benefits of further education. According to them esteem may lead to improved psychological health and efficiency to increased activity to participate in the community. (Preston & Hammond 2002.)

Another explanation for a higher happiness among the highly educated is that they most often have personal characteristics and family backgrounds more suitable to happiness. According to Dockery (2010) those who have achieved university-level education often have parents with greater wealth, and they have less likely moved from home at an early age. He highlights that these aspects also have a lasting impact on happiness. (Dockery 2010; see also Castriota 2006.) These aspects are especially crucial in the countries where education costs and the tuition fees of universities are high.

Veenhoven (2010) claims that even though there is a correlation between happiness and the level of education, not all highly educated are happy. Hartog and Oosterbeek (1998) have also found out in their study, that higher education

does not necessarily bring up the happiest citizens. They made a survey among 1893 Dutch individuals and to their surprise the results showed that the happiest group of all were those with only a secondary education of a general, non-vocational nature. They were also healthier and wealthier than any other education groups. Veenhoven (1996) says that in the advanced countries the effect of education may have become negative. (Hartog & Oosterbeek 1998.) Dockery (2010) conducted a longitudinal study of happiness and education in Australia in the years 1997-2005. According to his studies there was no significant association between these two subjects. What mattered the most was how high the expectations for the level of education in the future were and whether they were achieved or not. (Dockery 2010.)

One of the most significant findings of Dockery's research was the influence of the country's economics on happiness. He found out that those with university certificates were more concerned on how the economy is run in their country and this shaped their happiness too. Whereas the happiness of those with a lower education was dependent more on their lives at home and the standard of living. What made this finding so astounding is that people usually express the lowest levels of happiness on the factor of how the country is run. (Dockery 2010.)

A high level of education has its downsides too. Castriata (2006) discusses the expectations highly educated people meet especially in the field of work. It is not only the high expectations that they have for their careers and which are more difficult to meet, but also the expectations of others. If a person is overqualified it does not only possibly make him/her frustrated, but the society often sees it as inefficient and a waste of resources. (Castriata 2006.) Education can also lead to depression (Bynner 2003). These are supported by the findings of Dockery as well as the thoughts of Layard (2005) that happiness is not only what we achieve, but also how we fulfill the expectations created by ourselves and the societies around us.

The higher educated are often healthier and wealthier than the average. Maybe the education itself does not bring happiness, but its outcomes do. Hayward et al. (2005) also remind that a more important indicator of happiness than high-education, is the population's average literacy score. The better educated the whole population is, the higher the chances are for the overall happiness of the nation.

Conclusions: Happiness Education

What could the role of happiness education in enhancing happiness be then? On primary school level it could search for answers and guidelines on how to promote enjoyment, and to courage and support children in developing a positive attitude towards life. The happiness of pupils, both as a success factor and an outcome, and the contribution of education to lifelong happiness should be considered. On the university level happiness classes could be more widely offered and also integrated within other studies than philosophy or psychology.

Management studies and business schools can promote more information on the customs on how to create happier work places and what are the advantages of doing so. (see Thin 2012.)

What is it then, that universities should value when desiring to support the future happiness of their students? According to Bok (2010) this is not sufficiently explored. What is still unknown and little searched for, is what kind of participations and experiences at schools and universities actually lead to greater happiness in lives. Bok asks why universities devote so much for providing a broad education, but value so little to the outcomes of their efforts on their alumni. He suggests that universities should focus more on finding answers to the question: how can we enhance the happiness of our students also years after graduation? (Bok 2010.)

One thing that universities can do in pursuit to increase happiness is to teach them what is known of it – the methods of measuring, the accuracy of results and, naturally, also the findings. The interest on happiness at universities is already growing. Few years ago the University of Harvard launched a course on happiness, which attracted over 800 undergraduates (Bok 2010). The number of students tells about the interest and also about the need for similar courses in faculties around the world.

Happiness at work could be enhanced through education too. Through workplace education the employees can be helped with finding positive synergies between work and personal life, and employers can learn to monitor workplace happiness and ways to provide meaningful and enjoyable work experiences (Thin 2012).

Work is one aspect of happiness. For many, it might not be the most important aspect though. Many satisfying and enjoyable activities occur outside the workplace. Therefore it is suggested that schools and universities should not only concentrate on training students for their future jobs, but also cultivate their interests on many levels and prepare them for a variety of options and aspects that can increase happiness in their lives. This has not, however, been the main goal of political leaders e.g. in the United States during the last decades. Their main goal has been to train the students to help the country's economy to grow. (Bok 2010.)

Thin (2012) suggests following questions to be asked under the education sector:

‘Is happiness recognized as an educational objective? Are the direct outcomes of education, such as wisdom and skills, plausibly linked to happiness? Is the enjoyment of education to be monitored? Does educational research focus on correlations between happiness indicators and other educational indicators?’

These could be good questions to start with. Based on the research on the field, happiness should be recognized as one of the educational objectives. Principals around the globe should be able to say that the happiness of their pupils and students, is one of the goals among others. We have PISA tests, why

not have happiness evaluation as well? The possible correlation between happiness and learning capabilities should be in the focus of educational research.

If we look at the table concluding the research on the field of happiness (appendix 1), we can see that many studies across the happiness research have found out that education increases happiness. These studies and findings should be acknowledged and taken into use. Just like happiness economics is a mixture of psychology, utility theory and macroeconomic policy, happiness education could very well be a mixture of different scientific approaches. Philosophers, psychologists, sociologists and economists all would surely have a lot to give to happiness education, too.

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Appendix 1. *Happiness in philosophy, psychology, sociology and economics (Suojanen 2012)*

	Philosophy	Psychology	Sociology	Economics
Construct of happiness	- authentic happiness - hedonism - flourishing	- subjective well-being - flow	- quality of life - subjective well-being	- quality of life
Scientists	Aristotle Bentham Griffin Feldman	Diener Seligman Csikszentmihaly Ojanen	Veenhoven Thin	Layard Kahneman Frey Bok
Measures of happiness	- experience sampling methods - happiness questionnaires - methodological questions	- World Value Surveys - Gallup World Poll	- life-review questionnaires - self-report surveys - clinical interviews - content analyses - World Value Surveys	- Human Development index - self-report surveys - new technologies

Research subject	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - defining happiness - measuring happiness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - finding ways to improve people's lives - want to understand the feeling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - defining how happiness is valued in different societies - what characteristics of society correlate with happiness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - seeks for instruments to improve happiness of the citizens - focuses on income, inflation and employment - wants to know what people value
What causes happiness?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - knowledge - friendship - accomplishments - "we flourish by fully exercising our human capacities" (Haybron 2008, 25) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - relationships - relative income - employment - education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - wealth of the nation - social participation - freedom - cultural pluriformity and modernity - social inequality adds unhappiness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - employment - self-employment - education - increasing income - health
Conclusions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Happiness is extremely important in people's lives. - Happiness leads to many good outcomes in life. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Happiness is about being satisfied with life, while feeling good. Happy people: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - are more sociable and creative - live longer - have stronger immune systems - make more money - are better leaders - are better citizens (also at the workplace) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Happiness is not only a mental state but also a condition of society. - Happiness is the overall enjoyment of one's life as a whole. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Democracy and federalism enhance happiness. - Economic development is one solution for boosting happiness.