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# 'Happiness education': A pedagogical-political commitment

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**Abstract**

The topic of 'happiness education' has received considerable attention in recent years in educational discourse, not just in academia but also in the public sphere. This movement understands that there is a 'widespread incidence of psychological harm caused by damage to the child's sense of self-worth' (Smith (2008) The long slide to happiness. *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 42(3–4): 560), including damage done by the educational system, and as a response to this, it seeks to make use of 'happiness education' to repair this damage. In the light of this, some commentators, such as Smith (2008), Suissa ((2008) Lessons from a new science? On teaching happiness in schools. *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 42(3–4): 575–590) and Cigman (2008 ) have criticised this 'science of happiness' as being reductionist and not taking into account the richness of life. We join these commentators in criticising this approach to 'happiness education' and refer to Paulo Freire's thought, arguing for a 'rich conception of happiness' in education (cf. Cigman (2014) Happiness rich and poor: Lessons from philosophy and literature. *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 48(2): 308–322). This article is divided into two parts. Firstly, we argue that education should be understood as a political act and put forward a critical view of the simplistic notion of 'happiness education'. Secondly, we present the topic of 'happiness' in the works of Paulo Freire and Georges Snyders, who defended that we must strive for a fuller, richer understanding of 'happiness' in education, bringing back the pleasure to teach and to study, and transform educational settings in places that strengthen and encourage 'happiness' in our lives, especially of those who suffer outside the school or university.

**Keywords**

Happiness Education, Paulo Freire, Georges Snyders, science of happiness

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## Introduction

The topic of ‘happiness education’ has received considerable attention in recent years in educational discourse, not just in academia but also in the public sphere. For instance, in 2008 there were press reports about the introduction of ‘happiness lessons in schools, such as those at Wellington College or South Tyneside (see for example *The Guardian*, 2008; *The Times*, 2008)’ (Suissa, 2008: 575). In addition, in connection with this, Smith (2008: 560) noted that this trend finds its roots in the ‘self-esteem movement’, which is very prominent in the USA and that has started to make inroads into the UK. This movement understands that there is a ‘widespread incidence of psychological harm caused by damage to the child’s sense of self-worth’ (Smith, 2008: 560), including damage done by the educational system, and as a response to this, it seeks to make use of happiness education as a tool to repair this damage.

We note that Layard’s *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science* (2005) has been a very influential force behind this trend, and that some, such as Anthony Seldon, Master of Wellington College, have embraced it with vigour. Suissa (2008), Smith (2008) and Cigman (2008) are critical of this ‘science of happiness’ based on ‘positive psychology’, because they view such an understanding of ‘happiness’ as being philosophically too reductionist, and not taking account of the richness of life. They further note that this ‘science of happiness’ appears to be based on Bentham’s and Mills’ conception of ‘happiness’, as something that is immediate and a response to the individual’s desires and wants. In contrast to this is Aristotle’s notion of *eudaimonia*, which is traditionally translated as ‘happiness’, but that is better characterised by the notion of a ‘good life’, of ‘doing and living well’.<sup>1</sup> This Aristotelian notion differs from Bentham’s and Mill’s because it is not immediatist; it is something that you can only become fully aware of when looking back in time. Thus, Aristotelians would argue that the notion of ‘doing and living well’ captures a more genuine notion of ‘happiness’ that the reductionist conception cannot even begin to grasp; however, ‘[t]he problem is that the siren-call of “happiness” lures towards a false and one-sided vision of that fullness’ (Smith, 2008: 571).<sup>2</sup> This is to say that the crux of the problem is that a reductionist view of ‘happiness’ understands it as *immediate contentment* caused by the ‘maximization’ and ‘the greater the intensity and number of desires one is able to satisfy, the happier one should be’ (Gilead, 2012: 279), and that this is one’s ultimate goal. However, in truth these *immediate contentments* are mere events in a ‘good life’, which is one’s true and final aspiration.

In the light of this, it is Cigman’s (2014) article that seems to be of most help to us here. She notes the tension between these two different conceptions of happiness and proposes a ‘poor conception of happiness’, which we can associate with Bentham, Mill and ‘positive psychology, and a ‘rich conception of happiness’, which would be Aristotelian by nature. It is worth quoting her characterisation of ‘rich happiness’. Cigman (2014: 315–316) says:

What I reasonably want for you, as for myself, is *eudaimonia*, a kind of happiness that is worth having. This is embedded in a life, and is likely to contain many unhappy experiences. When I say that I want a person to be happy in a rich sense, I am not talking about experiences. What I mean... are at least two things: one, I want her to be reasonably *lucky*, to have basic goods (reasonable health, wealth, friends, etc.), without which happiness is hard or impossible to achieve; and two, that she should acquire a rich rather than a poor conception of happiness. Given basic goods, what I want most of all is that she should learn what happiness in its richest sense *means*, and aspire to achieve this and impart it to others. Indeed, achieving it and wanting it for others are deeply connected.

In this article we wish to deal with the issue of ‘happiness education’ from the perspective of critical pedagogy, so as to demonstrate that it is not mute to it. In order to do so, we refer to Paulo Freire’s works and ideas, arguing for a ‘rich conception of happiness’ in education. Thus, this article is divided into two parts. Firstly, we argue, following the thought of Paulo Freire, that education should be understood as a political act and put forward a critical view of ‘happiness education’. Secondly, we present the topic of ‘happiness’ in the works of Paulo Freire and Georges Snyders, who defend that we must strive for ‘happiness’ in education by bringing back the pleasure to teach and to study, and transform educational settings in places that strengthen and encourage ‘happiness’ in our lives, especially in the lives of those who suffer outside the school or university.

## **Education: A pedagogical-political commitment**

In order to understand education as a possible tool for the promotion of a ‘rich conception of happiness’, we need to re-contextualise it within a critical perspective, and this fundamentally means that we must rethink the relationship between teacher and student. In connection to this the thought of Paulo Freire is seminal and remains relevant due to its critique of traditional theoretical and practical approaches to education, termed by him as a form of ‘banking education’ (Freitas, 2004a, 2004b).<sup>3</sup> The expression *banking* education metaphorically refers to the understanding of teaching as depositing, considering the practices in which teachers view students as containers to be filled by the educator. The more the teacher fills the containers with his/her ‘deposits’, the better his/her students will be (Freire, 1987), and consequently the better teacher he or she will be considered, due to the process of ‘marketisation’, and its student satisfaction surveys and ranking tables.

There has been much debate about teachers’ attitude to teaching and the necessity of overcoming ‘banking education’, which is still present in educational systems throughout the world. We note that this might be the case due to that which we call the traditional ‘didactic contract’, even if the educator is not aware of it. This is a set of rules, most of which are implicit, that is present in the pedagogical relationship between the different actors that interact in the classroom (Freitas and Gessinger, 2008). Within this traditional setting the teacher is the one who teaches; the one who knows; the one who thinks; the one who has the word; the one who disciplines; the one who chooses and prescribes his/her choice; he/she is the one who acts; the one who chooses the programmatic content (Freire, 1987), leaving the student in a very passive role. The traditional ‘didactic contract’ often remains unquestioned in its *banking* nature, making it problematic for meaningful relationships and knowledge to emerge.

Certainly, many educators reflected on this and intended to change their own teaching practices, so to turn them into a liberating form of education, but were met by several difficulties. First of all, there is the students’ attitude, which is strongly influenced by educational experiences of a *banking* nature, reducing the potential for transformation. Then, there are other aspects such as the following: (i) a passive culture in which students are only required to attend classes; (ii) the perception that the teacher is the trustee of all knowledge; (iii) the students’ motivation is seen as being the exclusive responsibility of the teacher and an outcome of his teaching techniques; (iv) the expectation of immediate practical application of the knowledge; (v) the perception that further content is an outside requirement; (vi) the continuous search for ready-made answers for problem solving; (vii) the tradition of studying for an exam (Freitas, 2004a, 2004b).

Further, this does not happen only at primary and secondary education levels, but has implications for tertiary education. When students first come to university they bring with them their experiences from school, expecting the same sort of ‘didactic contract’. This shows how harmful the traditional didactic contract is because it impinges on students’ autonomy and their relationship to knowledge, and knowledge creation. An example of their problematic relationship with knowledge is that they continue to view ‘knowledge and knowledge creation’ only as important if it leads to a grade, and as having an impact on their qualifications or degree. A frequent question asked by students is ‘Do I need to do this assignment if it not going to get a grade?’, which is quite revealing of relationships previously established. This scenario makes it very difficult for a ‘rich conception of happiness’ to emerge, because there is no space left for it. The student’s focus on the ‘here and now’, which leads to a ‘poor conception of happiness’ in education.

It is well known that Freire does not only provide a critique of ‘banking education’, but he also proposes an alternative, a liberating conception of education based on dialogue, which problematises asymmetrical relationships between teacher and students. Freire’s understanding of dialogue is centred around valuing different non-hierarchical modes of knowledge while inviting individuals to experience and dialogue with these modes. In his *Pedagogy of Hope*, Freire presents us with an example of this play between modes of knowledge based on his own experiences with a group of country-dwellers, which is very revealing of his understanding of education. We quote Freire (2006: 37–38):

I’d like to try a game with you that, to work right, will require our full effort and attention. I’m going to draw a line down the middle of this chalkboard, and I’m going to write down on this side the goals I score against you, and on this other side the ones you score against me, The game will consist in asking each other questions. If the person asked doesn’t know the answer, the person who asked the question scores a goal. I’ll start the game by asking you a question. (...)

‘What is the Socratic maieutic?’

General guffawing. Score one for me.

‘Now is your turn to ask me a question,’ I said.

There was some whispering, and one of them tossed out the question:

‘What’s a contour curve?’

I couldn’t answer. I marked down one to one.

‘What importance does Hegel have in Marx’s through?’

Two to one.

‘What’s soil liming?’

Two to two.

‘What’s an intransitive verb?’

Three to two.

‘What’s a contour curve got to do with erosion?’

Three to three.

‘What’s epistemology?’

Four to three.

‘What’s green fertilizer?’

Four to four.

And so on, until we got to ten to ten. As I said good-bye, I made a suggestion. ‘Let’s think about this evening. You had begun to have a fine discussion with me. Then you were silent, and said that only I could talk because I was the only one who knew anything. Then we played a knowledge game and we tied ten to ten. I knew ten things you didn’t, and you knew ten things I didn’t. Let’s think about this.’

Freire understands that the dialogue between modes of knowledge is full of potentialities because no one knows everything and no one is void of knowledge (Freire, 1996). Within this conception of a dialogue between modes of knowledge, Freire argues that the teacher should invite students to question their reality, providing an avenue to break away from their conditioning and oppression, something that is done through critical reasoning and a new understanding of reality. However, this transformation does not happen immediately and it would be naive to understand the dialogical process in education as being the sole force changing the world. It is more helpful to conceive of it as an important formative tool that contributes to the individual's understanding of reality, and through this new expanded understanding of it, seeks to transform the world into a better and less oppressive place. Gur-Ze'ev is another thinker who understands that education is not the very medium to change society; rather, it is the medium to transform the individual who will then change society. That is to say, the critical individual is the medium for transformations in society. Gur-Ze'ev (1998: 485) defends 'the possibility of practical reason within the framework of struggle for developing the reflective potential of human beings and their ability for articulation of their world as a realization of their reason'.

Insofar as the transformation of the relationship between teachers and students, Freire understands that 'the teacher does not give a class to students, rather the teacher develops it in collaboration with students' (our translation; Rios, 2008: 27). For this to take place, it is necessary for the individual to question established relationships since these are both 'product' and 'producers' of how he or she engages with the educational process, determining his or her understanding of how important 'co-responsibility' is in education. This means that they need to break away from teacher-centred education and expository classes, and embrace the notion of education as a process consisting in 'learning to dialogue' (Fiori, 1987); Freire (1996: 25) says: 'one who teaches, is educated through teaching, and one who studies, teaches through being educated' (our translation). If understood in this way, the educational process is a pedagogical-political commitment shared by teacher and students, changing relationships, views of reality and transforming the world along the way.

It is therefore arguable that there are some elements that are necessary for liberating education, and these are as follows: (i) the importance of recognising the classroom as – and actually changing it into – an environment of dialogical interaction between teachers and students, and between students; and (ii) the urgency to re-instil a love for knowledge, and for teaching and studying at school and university. Certainly, this is not something that can be easily achieved because the educator's intention to change and encourage a liberating and critical understanding of education is a necessary, but not sufficient element in the conversion of *banking* education and the kind of relationships it fosters between teachers, students and knowledge. This is to say that students must also embrace the liberating understanding of education because they are co-actors in the process. However, given that educational systems are driven by attaining goals, by grades, it becomes very difficult to encourage students to be co-actors and love the process of studying *in itself*; that is, the educational system encourages a culture founded on a 'poor conception of happiness', on being happy on the here and now, to the detriment of a 'rich conception of happiness', on taking joy in the long-term process and effects of education *in itself*.

It is thus crucial that students are encouraged to experience 'dialogue', and this should not be conceived as something linear and that offers immediate results, because it faces a number of challenges of various natures. For instance, affective and relational issues, such as being shy, reserved or afraid to err become inhibitors of 'dialogue', of expressing his or her 'word'.

This reveals that banking education, and its traditional didactic programme, becomes a true inhibitor of a 'rich conception of happiness' in education because it does not allow students to develop dialogue, a critical view of reality. Moreover, *banking education* prevents students from dealing with particular fears, uncertainties and even perhaps stress, which are very much part of life. It is possible that in attaining a critical view of reality, students (and teachers) become frustrated with the oppressive structures still present in society, but through their engagement in the transformation of society, they might be able to reach a 'rich conception of happiness' in education by being able to look back and say: 'I have lived and done well' because of education. As Roberts (2013: 470) says:

If education is, among other things, a process of deepening understanding – of extending and enhancing consciousness – some searching ethical questions arise... For it is not merely a matter of recognising that we all suffer from despair; it is also necessary to acknowledge that we may play a role in increasing despair... In fostering the development of a reflective or critical consciousness, we also open up the possibility for greater suffering [and we would add, for greater happiness too].

To be human is to experience both the positive and negative sides of life; that is, as Unamuno (1972: 154; cited in Roberts, 2013: 469) says: 'How would one know one existed unless one suffered in some measure? How turn inward, achieve reflective consciousness, unless it be through suffering?'. Therefore, it is arguable that those who work within a 'positive psychology' perspective seem to ignore this encompassing view of the human being, preferring a reductionist one in which we always need to be 'happy'. In opposition to this, as we have been arguing, is critical education, which understands that those inhibitors (e.g. fear to fail; being shy to speak) are not obstacles; rather, they are challenges because it recognises that individuals are not void of knowledge and have a life history full of 'positive and negative emotional events', it understands the classroom as a space of trust where all should feel welcomed to express themselves *fully*. Further, education involves a 'risk',

...and that is perhaps the greatest problem with making education into a risk-free experience, into a zone where we can no longer be put into question, where we can no longer be addressed, where we can no longer be touched, where I am never at stake, so to speak. (Biesta, 2013a: 145).

Thus, critical education is aware that the educational process is complex and involves not just cognition, but also emotion. Hence, during the dialogical process and manoeuvring between reasoning and feeling emotions, teacher and students establish a deep mutual connection, discovering new ideas, openings and possibilities in reality. Freire (2005: 54) says:

Whatever I know I know with my critical mind but also with my feelings, with my intuitions, with my emotions. What I must not do is stop at the level of emotions, of intuitions. I must place the objects of my intuition under serious, rigorous investigation: I must never disregard them.

To sum up this section, as we stated previously, the teacher's commitment to an emancipating form of education is necessary, but it is not sufficient to overturn the banking conception of education. This commitment, however, represents a willingness to face the many difficulties that are inherent in opting for a critical form of education. Students must also be involved in this process, and the real challenge is making both teacher and students co-responsible for the process, constructing viable alternatives together so to change

the very nature of their relationship. This process of transformation is not easy, but it can be just as pleasurable, because instead of seeing obstacles, it sees real possibilities, and this is something deeply connected to a 'rich conception of happiness' in education, as we shall argue now in further detail.

### Freire and Snyders on happiness and education

The term 'happiness' is very rarely employed by Paulo Freire, but it is very much present in his understanding of education. In fact, 'happiness' is one of the entries in the Paulo Freire Encyclopaedia (Streck et al., 2010a, 2010b). This entry asserts that Freire conceived of 'happiness' as a common good, and connected it to both education and citizenship. Rios (2010: 181), author of the entry, asserts that Freire 'did not make overt use of the word "happiness", but referred to the *phenomenon*, inserted it in his educational proposal, revealed it as part and parcel of many of his key-concepts, and pointed to it throughout his works' (our translation). Also, and in this connection, we note that the theme of 'joy' in education is present in the works of Paulo Freire, often re-occurring in the ones from the 1990s. 'Joy' is also an entry in the Paulo Freire Encyclopaedia, and Redin (2008: 30), the author of the entry, states that 'the "joy" spoken by Paulo Freire is not a naive sort of euphoria; rather, it is something founded on one's own efforts' (our translation).

In the book *Educação na Cidade*, which is the publication of an interview that Paulo Freire gave to Moacir Gadotti (cf. Freire, 1991), he touches on the theme of 'happiness in education' by referring to his experiences as Secretary of Education of the city of São Paulo, Brazil, between 1989 and 1991. Freire is very preoccupied with this issue and the difficulties in implementing it, arguing that this must not weaken one's commitment to education, and hinder the pedagogical, political and social responsibility of teachers and of students. It is possible that Rousseau (1911; 2001: 486) would have empathised with Freire's position because in *Emile: or, On Education* he tells Emile about the difficulties involved in the educational process, but also of the joy that is involved in it:

My young friend, when I took you, a new-born infant, in my arms, and called God himself to witness to the vow I dared to make that I would devote my life to the happiness of your life, did I know myself what I was undertaking? No, I only knew that in making you happy, I was sure of my own happiness.

Freire explicitly criticises new pedagogical trends, such as what would be the case of 'positive psychology and happiness classes', that seems to prioritise 'happiness' over 'critical reasoning', and clarifies that he conceives of 'happiness' in education as something that is not, should not, be easy and immediate, because education is something demanding and involving difficult tasks. This shows that Freire subscribed to a 'rich conception of happiness', and rejected the easy fix of a 'poor conception of happiness' in education.

In *Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to Those Who Dare Teach* Freire writes about the 'act of studying', emphasising that commitment and discipline are something very important to it. Freire (2005: 52) says that '[s]tudying is a demanding occupation, in the process of which we will encounter pain, pleasure, victory, defeat, doubt, and happiness. For this reason, studying requires the development of rigorous discipline'. It is, however, important to note that Freire alert us that it would be a mistake to promise students that 'happiness' is a compensation gained in the future through the 'act of studying'; rather,

Freire wants us to invite students to perceive their ‘act of studying’ as a process that in itself brings them pleasure, and he conceives that this is one of the greatest challenges of teaching, the challenge of creating the conditions for true ‘happiness in education’. Freire (2005: 7–8) says:

The problems of teaching imply educating and, furthermore, educating involves a passion to know that should engage us in a loving search for knowledge that is – to say the least – not an easy task. It is for this reason that I stress that those wanting to teach must be able to dare, that is, to have the predisposition to fight for justice and to be lucid in defense of the need to create conditions conducive to pedagogy in schools; though this may be a joyful task, it must also be intellectually rigorous. The two should never be viewed as mutually exclusive.

Freire also comments on the relationship between ‘happiness’ and having ‘commitment and discipline in the act of studying’ in his *Pedagogy of Hope*. Freire (1992, 2006: 69) says:

There is no room, in the constitution of this needed discipline, for an identification of the act of studying, of learning, of knowing, of teaching, with pure entertainment – learn as a kind of toy or game, without rules or with lax ones. Nor again must it be identified with insipid, uninteresting, boring busywork. The act of studying, teaching, learning, knowing, is difficult, and specially, it is demanding, but is pleasant, as Georges Snyders never omits to remind us. It is so crucial, then, that educators discover and sense the joy that steeps it, that is part of it, and that is ever ready to fill the hearts of all who surrender to it.

As we can see from the quote, Freire mentions explicitly Georges Snyders, the French philosopher of education who is relatively unknown in the English-speaking world, as the inspiration for his defence of ‘happiness education’. Freire wrote the preface of the Portuguese version of Snyders’ book *Des élèves heureux: Réflexions sur la joie à l’école à partir de quelques textes littéraires* (1991; cf. also Snyders, 1993), which was published in Portuguese in January 1993, soon after Freire’s *Pedagogy of Hope* (1992, 2006). In the preface, Freire reveals that these works complement each other, and argues that there is no hope without happiness. In this work, namely *Des élèves heureux*, Snyders (1991) comments that the school as an institution of formal education is characterised for being a place where ‘obligations’ must be fulfilled, and that this works as an opposing force against ‘happiness’. However, Snyders contends that this does not need to be the case and that the school can amplify ‘happiness’ by re-conceiving ‘obligations’ so to allow for the experiencing of forms of ‘happiness’ that transcend these ‘obligations’. That is, not an easy and immediatist form of ‘happiness’, but something that goes beyond this. In this way, as Cigman (2014: 321) notes whilst commenting on the ‘rich conception of happiness’: ‘students learn that happiness is no simple matter’, and we would add that the same applies to teachers.

According to Snyders, ‘obligations’ are necessary for the promotion of ‘happiness’ in education, because they are the way in which students can access experiences that they would otherwise not experience. However, despite believing that it is possible for ‘happiness’ to flourish out of ‘obligations’, he also admits that there are dangers to his proposal. He recognises that students have an almost natural attitude against ‘obligations’, and when these are considered in themselves they cannot be considered as something liberating. For this reason, Snyders argues that teachers must both justify to students the legitimacy of required ‘obligations’ (i.e. the *why* of the obligation), and deeply involve them in the elaboration of ‘obligations’ required in the educational process



(i.e. the *how* the obligation should be implemented). It is only in this way, according to Snyders (1993: 108), that it is possible to achieve a new conception of “‘obligation’ that is something fundamentally and culturally relevant’ (our translation).

Both Freire and Snyders (1986, 1988, 1991, 1994, 1995) defended that ‘happiness’ in education is a right of all, and particularly to those who suffer outside the educational system. Certainly, their primary concern is for those who live in dire conditions of poverty and who experience hunger and violence at home and in society, which is something, unfortunately, part of the reality in many countries, such as Freire’s Brazil; however, in truth it applies to us all, because even in the comfort of our homes in developed countries, other forms of suffering and oppression, such as lack of opportunity and unfair treatment, can be a reality. This is obviously connected to issues of social justice and in this connection it is interesting to refer to Griffiths (2010), who commented on the issue of social justice, education and what she calls ‘delights’, a term she deems very closely connected to hope, love, rejoicing and joy. Griffiths (2010: 10) says:

[E]ducation may help secure a flourishing economy on one hand, and a responsible citizenship on the other. At the same time, both the economy and responsible citizenship need to be subordinated to education insofar as it gives a point to having a flourishing economy and a responsible citizenry... Not everyone experiences the benefits of an education for itself. There must be many reasons for this. Such injustice is unlikely to be merely individual chance... I suspect that delights in formal education are correlated with social class.

We also note that the topic of ‘happiness’ in education has an epistemological dimension, since it is conceived that the complexities involved in the process of education are directly associated to cognition and emotion – as we noted in the previous section. When Freire highlights emotion as part and parcel of the process of education, he seems to be connecting the political, pedagogical and epistemological dimensions of education to the aesthetic one, by revealing how the latter mobilise the interests of individuals towards the previous ones (Freitas, 2004a). Freire (2005: 54) says:

Whatever I know I know with my critical mind but also with my feelings, with my intuitions, with my emotions. What I must not do is stop at the level of emotions, of intuitions. I must place the objects of my intuition under serious, rigorous investigation: I must never disregard them.

Given the above, we must understand education as a political act full of complexities. It is political because, implicitly or explicitly, it is guided by the intentions of pedagogical practices behind it, and it is full of complexities because the work of the teacher cannot guarantee absolutely a match between the expected goals and what is achieved in education. The active engagement of the educator is necessary but it is not sufficient to promote the success of the educational process, because the student is also an active actor in this. The teacher is not a ‘manager’, who by and large can guarantee a matching between aims and achievements, and the student is not a ‘consumer’ that can buy knowledge off the shelf. Rather, and as Biesta (2013a: 57) says:

[T]he experience of ‘being taught’ is about those situations in which something enters our being from the outside, so to speak, as something that is fundamentally beyond the control of the ‘learner’. To be taught – to be open to receiving the gift of teaching – thus means being able to give such interruptions a place in one’s understanding and one’s being. This is why, following

Kierkegaard, such teachings, when they are received, are a matter of subjective truth, that is, of truth to which we are willing to give authority. (cf. also Biesta, 2013b; Guilherme, 2015)

The analogy of education as a ‘market’, of teachers as ‘facilitators’ and of students as ‘consumers’, that is, the current trend of ‘marketisation’ in education is highly misconceived if we understand education as a political act full of complexities. We argue that understanding education as a ‘market’ leads us to a ‘poor conception of happiness’ in education because the consumer-student has always to be immediately satisfied because of the logic that ‘the consumer is always right’, hence leading us to the continuous focus on student’s satisfaction surveys. In fact, Verducci (2013: 500) notes that Noddings (2003) is very critical of market forces in her book *Happiness and Education* as being a hindrance to ‘happiness education’. She says:

Chief among them are unmitigated market forces that prioritize economic aims and the application of the business model to schooling. The latter, with its penchant for measuring impact, contributes to the current obsession with standards and high stakes at testing. Further, although people might agree that education for happiness ought to be an educational aim, they may question whether it is one best suited for schooling.

In opposition to this is critical education, which requires a ‘rich conception of happiness’ in education due to the many complexities and dimensions involved in the educational process. If we consider that teaching is something interactive because of its relational nature, then we understand that the results of pedagogical practices are significantly influenced, but not necessarily determined, by the intentions of the educator who organised these practices. The manner by which the students welcome the teacher, his or her proposals for work and commit themselves to the educational process are also aspects that influence the quality of the educational relationship and the results of the educational process (Tardiff and Lessard, 2005). Thus, teachers and students transform each other through the process of education, discovering particular avenues for educating themselves together while mobilised by cognition and emotions that emerge from their interactions. Noddings’ work on the ethics of care and education is also relevant for our argument about the importance of the right kind of interactions in education. Noddings (2002: 23–24) states that

The key, central to care theory, is this: caring about (or, perhaps a sense of justice) must be seen as instrumental in establishing the conditions under which caring-for can flourish. Although the preferred form of caring is cared-for, caring-about can help in establishing, maintaining, and enhancing it. Those who care about others in the justice sense must keep in mind that the objective is to ensure that caring actually occurs, Caring-about is empty if it does not culminate in caring relations.

In education, this means that ‘we should want more from our educational efforts than adequate academic achievement and . . . that we will not achieve even that meager success unless our children believe that they themselves are cared for and learn to care for others’ (Noddings, 2007: 1). It is within this perspective that we should be creating the possibilities of promotion of ‘happiness education’, not an immediatist and ‘poor conception of it’, but a rather ‘rich conception of happiness’ based on liberating and critical experiences that will stay with and form the individual throughout his or her life.

Some would criticise all this talk about ‘happiness’ in education as sheer utopia.<sup>4</sup> However, the importance of utopias rest on them working as benchmarks for us, as something that we should aim to achieve. Likewise, it is arguable that dystopias also work as points of reference that should be avoided.

Freire’s political pedagogy [is] a plea that pedagogy can make a difference in creating a more humane world. One would naively and unfairly attribute to Freire the notion that pedagogy alone can reshape society, but in his legacy he keeps alive for us that liberationist educators can continue to play a major role in attaining that goal. (Collins, 1988: 122)

Thus, the realisation of this utopia of ‘happiness’ in education occurs through the transformation of relationships in education, which within the Freirean context is done through liberating practices that conflict with traditional and dominant perspectives in education, as well as requiring from individuals the problematisation of reality, of acquired knowledge and of certainties (Santos, 2009).

## Final thoughts

In this article we argued that ‘happiness’ is a formative force in the educational process. The idea of being ‘happy’ is very often regarded as something relating to our personal lives, as something characterised by spontaneity, by choices and personal preferences, and fundamentally by an immediate sense of pleasure. However, as we have argued, it is possible, and indeed fundamental, to be ‘happy’ at school or university because this is directly connected to a critical and liberating educational process. For this, we need to subscribe to a ‘rich conception of happiness’ in education.

It is very unfortunate that this ‘rich conception of happiness’ in education, which is defended by Freire, is not part of the current hegemonic culture in educational systems. However, this does not mean that we should settle for the ‘poor conception of happiness’ that is currently being defended and encouraged in schools and universities, and that focus on ‘making students happy by satisfying their desires’ as well as ‘teaching them to be happy’. We further note here that this is a very problematic situation because it is excessively demanding on the system, and it may actually lead to both teachers and students experiencing more ‘frustration and unhappiness’ than the aimed ‘immediatist and poor conception of happiness’, because not all of their desires can be fully satisfied. On one level, the expectations become just too demanding to become reality, but on another level, as we have argued in this article, such a situation is not conducive of the kind of a ‘rich conception of happiness’ in education. It is perhaps interesting to quote Gilead (2012: 281), who notes:

[E]ducation must supplement the enhancement of human capital with some means of limiting people’s desires . . . however, augmenting human capital without restricting desires is like pouring water into a bottomless pit. This is especially true in present consumer society, which is based on an incessant process of arousal and intensification of our desires . . . [T]he contribution to happiness made by increasing human capital is dependent on an additional dimension of education for happiness – specifically, the ability to limit desires and preferences. It is this capacity that determines the framework and boundaries of desire satisfaction and that makes happiness feasible.

Rather, we should strive for the concretisation of the utopia of a ‘rich conception of happiness’ that is critical and liberating in education with conviction, continuously trying

to democratise it so that it is experienced by all. To promote ‘happiness education’ through a critical perspective means to understand the pedagogical-political commitment between teacher and students, and between students, that creates the possibilities for regaining the pleasure to teach as well as that of studying within the educational setting. It is only when conceived in this way that the classroom, the school and the university become dialogical spaces that encourage a ‘rich conception of happiness’ in education.

Certainly, this understanding creates demands, such as the maximisation of dialogue between teachers and students, which is viewed as one of the pre-conditions for the realisation of a ‘rich conception of happiness’ in education. Thus, we would argue here that this represents a challenge to us all to realise this utopia in reality; in addition, we would also contend that it is a fecund field of investigation that deserves more attention by educationists, so to enable the development of a ‘pedagogy of happiness’. In doing so, in sharing and seeking to dialogue with each other about this issue, will enable us to find solutions to the obstacles we face, and that make it difficult for the realisation of this utopia.

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### **Notes**

1. We note that all these translations of eudaimonia are problematic because they do not fully capture the true meaning of the concept. A good way of understanding eudaimonia is to refer to Aristotle’s deathbed test, which is, for Aristotle, the only way one has of knowing that one has lived a ‘good life’; that is, to be able to look back on one’s life and say: ‘I lived a good life’. Aristotle says: ‘[T]he happy man [is] “one who is active in accordance with complete virtue, and who is adequately furnished with external goods, and that not for some unspecified period but throughout a complete life”’ (II0Ia20) (cf. Aristotle, 1976).
2. Plato’s discussion on ‘false pleasures’ in the *Philebus*, one of his lesser known dialogues, seems to also be relevant here. In the *Republic* and the *Philebus* Plato argued that pleasures are an important component of a ‘good life’; however, in the *Philebus* he also commented that there are some ‘false pleasures’ that do not play a role in the ‘good life’. (cf. Gosling, 1959; Reidy 1998).
3. NB: For more information about the life and works of Paulo Freire, a very good source is *Paulo Freire: Uma Historia de Vida*, which was written by his second wife, Ana Maria Araujo Freire (cf. Freire, 2008).
4. The concept of ‘utopia’ within a critical pedagogical framework should not be understood as an ideal or Platonic form that is, by its very nature, unchangeable. Rather, given that problematisation is a core attitude in critical pedagogy, utopias are ever changing because they are required to undergo and respond to criticisms.

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