

Curriculum for Happiness: An Explorative Line of Thoughts Tackling with Happiness

Hakim Sudinpreeda^{1*} and Anchalee Watcharajinda²

¹ Full time lecturer, M.A., Department of English, Didyasarin International College, Hatyai University.

² Head of Department, Department of English, Didyasarin International College, Hatyai University.

*Corresponding author, E-mail: hakim_s@hu.ac.th

Abstract

With the need to design *curriculum for happiness*, educators' decision of defining the term "happiness" itself is becoming even more essentially relevant. Defining happiness often relies on subjective perspective ("One is happy with A, while others not"), which is in turn bringing more "obstacles" to the stakeholders even if they come up with the same conclusion that two key fundamental elements of happiness are (1) pain and suffering; and (2) belief. Here, there is a need to confirm if any individual's "belief" is certain. Exactly definite answers to the questions are not presented, the continual inquiry is offered. This explorative article claims that testimony holds more credibility for being certain and worthy for the individual to believe in. As the definition of happiness should be defined by it, before the design of curriculum takes place, a major task of the educators is to search for this reliable source, the one which can be used as a fundamental core to the design, making agreement in action among educators and feeling a harmonious certainty.

Keywords: Curriculum for happiness, happiness, certainty, testimony, reasoning

Introduction

Curriculum for Happiness is brought out to the public as a result of the attempt to promote happiness, well-being, as well as all-dimension-development in school. This is certainly centered around the participation between teachers and students. The core concept of which, as defined by a prominent scholar of the field, begins with the question: *What can be done to prepare the children to live a happy life for the rest of their lives?* It is to include that education is not just about learning academics or attaining academic excellences but to build positive relationships between teachers and students

(Rabindranath, 2021). It also should pay attention majorly on fun- engaged-learning approaches, be it in on-site classroom or online.

However, what seems to be the most urgent in designing the curriculum is not about “the design” but its element: *happiness* itself. A proper definition of the word reveals an essential nature of a state of being happy, enabling us as teacher educators to have a common understanding, allowing us to walk in the same direction, which later will lead us to the final destination: designing the curriculum as needed. Defining happiness for designing a curriculum for happiness is like being aware of what to come. A wise man will always spend his time on the preparation stages of a task more than the stages when the task is operated on. A doctor should spend his time more on preparing his tools than on when the operation starts. Likewise, a wood cutter will spend more time chopping down the wood than sharpening the ax.

A philosophical debate regarding the definition of happiness many times will pay emphasis on that which is called “hedonism”: an act of achieving pleasure with immediacy without any negative effects on the individual. One should aim to “get highly satisfied” as much as he/she can. It is really subjective in itself. Consideration of happiness in this point of view therefore seems to make a comparison of it with “needs without limits” as the more the individual possesses to satisfy his needs; the happier he becomes. Yet, according to Rastelli et al. (2021), some psychological experts of the field have tried to focus on minimizing the pain and suffering labeling them as “barriers” to happiness. Being happy in this sense, is just simply lacking pain and suffering without needs to satisfy the needs. There are also some psychologists who focus more on positive traits experienced by the individual too. The question like *how to foster individual happiness?* always remains open to research. Answering this question is indeed important. There are several psychological programs to boost up an individual’s happiness, such as Fordyce’s program, Well-Being Therapy, as well as meditation, which aims to develop mindfulness and emotional regulatory skills. What seems to be the results of these practices are the individuals’ having positive emotions and reducing stress and aggressive behavior.



Objectives

Being aware of the vision of the existing experience regarding happiness is a means to its theoretical possibility, paving the preliminary way for the design. Therefore, in this explorative article, we aim:

1. To examine theoretical concept of happiness, its elements and possibility; and
2. To figure out the possible holistic view of happiness and where to search for the source.

Method

This article was written in the form of an exploratory essay. In an explorative article, “a writer works through a problem or examines an idea or experience, without necessarily attempting to back up a claim or support a thesis”. Rather, the issue taken to discussion is with “deep interest to the writer”, and the author is there to reveal and “illuminate” his aspects of the subject assuming “all people are similar” and *extendedly using* “simile comparing his mind to a runaway horse” (Nordquist, 2019). Taking this theoretical proposal into practice, we then began the study by asking several questions concerning the issue (happiness and curriculum) and gathering information. However, instead of providing exactly definite answers to the questions, we offered continual inquiry into the topic, which is possibly linked with the previous ones.

The Framework: *Is happiness attainable?*

The fact that we all want to be happy is a normal disposition of being human. Happiness is not like the concept of justice, which is still in the debate among political theorists whether *it is a means or it ends in itself*. Happiness is defined with conclusion, without any disagreement, as it is *the final end*. Therefore, instead of arguing about its characteristics or whether it is attainable, happiness’s scholars work on answering the question: *how is it attained?* In another sense, what seems to concern more of us as educational theorists, is the way to attain happiness.

The main question therefore lies in such a way that: In order for us to be happy, can we simply be virtuous or do we need something else as its means? Means to be happy are quite materialistic one as they are always involved with capitalism’s appetizers. One is not happy unless he is healthy, for example, or he must be wealthy, or have a good



connection with friends. All these “needs” can be acquired, as it is generally perceived, by the capitalist world whose subsidiary task is to offer satisfaction or fulfillment to the needy. This is to confirm the reliability of the idea that we require the capitalists’ external tools (mentioned) to attain happiness or well-being. How can the students be happy if the school asks them to drink water from rusty water-taps? It is necessary to have these means to be happy.

However, speaking with virtue, *greed is not good*. Meaning, it is risky when students are embedded with this idea: too much attached with the capitalists’ external goods could bring to them none but harms and dangers. On the other hand, living with poor conditions is not always ineffective for good gains.

Creative pleasure: Pain worth pursuing

Pain and suffering are fundamental elements every human being must face. In medical science, there is an attempt to “relieve” them, starting from diagnosing their causes and offering the solutions. As the analysis of pain and suffering are comprehended as “normal” diseases, the diagnosis of which should be taken place initially with development of human nature. That means, should humans always live without pain and suffering, there would be no advancement of holistic civilization of an individual. Anytime, therefore, we aim to wrestle with the disease, its *root cause* should be brought into account, whether it is mentally, physically, or spiritually ill.

To be able to signify the truth is a very first step to attain human’s advancement and civilization; therefore, whatever means of truth signification is worth pursuing. This includes an individual, who feels happy to follow his whims and desires without notifying its destructive consequence which can damage and ruin his life. Such a practice, unable to bring about the advancement at the end, is a shameful pleasure, neither virtuous nor worth pursuing. An obvious exemplary person to this kind is the one who is living his life with *ideal* luxury: eating, drinking, owning, and having sexual intercourse with excessiveness. This lifestyle, in fact, is misguided.

Creative pleasure: refers to an act of attaining happiness which does not mean to damage one’s soul or body. It is to do as whims and desires aim but it does not result in damage such as doing things with proportion and not excessively. This includes competition among students, which is permissible as long as it does not stand as an aid

for jealousy and hatred. That is why when it comes into competition, students should be encouraged to compete for a virtuous life rather than for the worldly-wealthy.

Certainty in Belief: Another element

Happiness starts with wishful thinking or to hope that something will happen in the very near future. Thus, one is not happy if he/she does not have this belief system. An act of believing in something therefore is a fundamental and core element of happiness. Psychologists try to reflect on the beliefs and behaviors of individuals and, in response to that, to increase the happiness of the people practicing them (Hone et al., 2015).

Belief, in psychology, is a must to possess. Two of the well-known quotations, to academically prove the statement are: “*Everyone must believe in something*” (Groucho Marx, 1890-1977) and “*We must believe that we are gifted for something, and that this thing, at whatever cost, must be attained*” (Marie Curie, 1867–1934). There is also a communal parable to this:

A man came across an old man who was teaching a group of children how to dig a hole for feeding fish in a well. Surprised with what he had seen, the man begged the reason for what he was doing, saying: “You don’t have to teach them. You are already old, and fish are available in the river nearby. In addition, even if the well is dug successfully, these fish will take years before they will be old enough to be edible. By that time, you may have long gone.” The old man replied, “what you’ve said is true”. “However, my reason for teaching them to dig the hole and feed the fish is not because I am hoping that they should feed me. It is because I want them to learn a life’s lesson: *forbearing is worth practicing*. Well at least, they could dig the hole deep enough for burying my dead body when I am gone.”

If we analyze the lesson of the story, we could have realized that belief is something that overpowers the old man and controls his actions. Similarly, belief should be implanted in every individual and he or she should abide therein. Looked at in this sense, belief is like a navigator to the ship sailing in the ocean. Belief is to guide our actions. The separation of the two, thus, without any of which, is false. An individual, before taking any actions, has to begin with assessing the situation as it is. If the assessment of the situation does not happen, the prediction on which the action depends is not accessible.



If the prediction of the future does not take place, one cannot do anything at all. Likewise, the individual cannot stand still as not doing anything at all, because that makes his/her life unworthy of living. He/she will rather die than live. When the individual is desired to move on, he/she must have a certain type of belief, like the navigator guiding the ship.

However, naturally we cannot simply believe something merely because it is guiding our actions, because our belief is involved with the state of being convinced, which comes out as a result of certainty. This is to say that, our belief must be proved certain, only then our actions can follow. Certainty, in this sense, is a characteristic a certain type of belief must possess to make sure that the individual (the believer) is not to give it up. It is a firm conviction of a person which is incapable to be destroyed. To sum up, a believer of a belief system should not just claim his/her belief through the actions expressed, rather he/she would be “certain”. Now, it is the issue of considering one’s certainty.

However, one's belief itself must be consistent with the source of knowledge which is itself certain. The belief, set and approved by this very source of knowledge, is an authentic sound belief that helps one to attain salvation or happiness. By contrast, if it is inconsistent with such a source of knowledge, then it is inauthentic, and therefore astray. In addition, adhering to the sound belief preserves one's life and wealth and makes it forbidden for anyone to attack him without right.

Certainty and insufficiency of reasoning

Any particular belief is able to claim its truth value as “certain” if the evidence is exposed. This is because our state of mind regarding certainty always demands an intellectual proof which is called reasoning. A belief of a person is not surely certain because he has insufficient evidence to back up the claim rationally enough. Therefore, reasoning, or a person’s ability to use logical flows is a core to this end. However, there should be a case, where evidence is presented, exposed to all the claims reasonably, but a person is still not convinced and insists that it is irrational. The person’s heart and mind, therefore, bring about an uncertainty and intellectual confusion about the belief. This brings a rise to the absence of certainty or conviction to the belief.

When we diagnose the problem above, we could have seen that what makes this person “convinced” of a particular belief is not at all the exposure of the evidence. In addition, it is not his intellectual capacity that obstructs from being certain, rather it is his



attitudes towards the belief and its essential elements. This view corresponds with a scientific finding of the connection between personal emotion (or attitudes, feelings) and his certainty (Burton, 2008, p.23). The fact that emotion has an impact on our certainty (not just intellectual capacity alone) has a lot to “notice” us that there are many occasions that we are certain in something even if we have no idea about it or we are not certain in the other even though we know it already very well. For example, we drive a car which has little oil, but we still continue driving even if we are not aware if there is a petrol station available up ahead. Along the journey, we have been feeling certain about the existence of the station (without any knowledge of it). On another occasion, we are still not certain even if all the evidence is presented to prove. There is a moment when we drive home, not long after leaving it, just to *double check* to make sure if the house’s front door is locked, even if it is manifest that the house’s key attached to the car’s is “non-removable”, confirming that the key cannot be removed from the padlock when the lock is open. Meaning, the house’s door is already locked since its key is removed. However, it seems that the evidence has nothing to do with our certainty; we are still in doubt, driving home “just to make sure” anyway.

What happens to us as in the latter phenomenon is analogous to “philosophical skepticism” or being excessive in doubts. Our inability to be certain is driving us to be excessively uncertain, and the cause of this is not merely the mental incapability. There is a case that the reasoning approach of a person, who is considered “intellectually wise”, can get him into the state of “doubt” about a thing even if it is clearly manifested or a state of “certain” even if it is not. This could possibly be because reasoning is not always to guarantee a person’s justification. In short, confidence or conviction does not always attain through reasoning. In fact, there is another possibility to look at certainty: Certainty is an emotional state. It is the emotion of a person that brings him a state of being certain in something and not merely his intellectual state. This implies that when he feels not certain in something, it is not because that thing is rationally problematic, rather he is emotionally problematic. For example, one may have experienced a bad habit of a friend who is associated with a political group which is opposite to his favor. Later, his bad experience with the friend builds up an emotional connection with the group, such as hatred. Whenever he participates with any representation of the political group through whatever means, he will emotionally feel unwell with the representative. Even if this guy



is evidentially not the same as his friend. In this sense, his emotion leads him to uncertainty and not his intellect at all.

Defining *Happiness*: Consideration of the source of knowledge

Since *certainty* is involved with acquiring knowledge in such a way that the one who possesses it, it is impossible for him to be shaken into doubt in what he believes. There should be no waiver in his heart. Therefore, it is useful for us to consider a certain type of knowledge sources: “objective knowledge” (universal facts, e.g., one plus one equals two) and “subjective knowledge” (personal opinions). Uncertainty is as a result of too much adherence to the latter. An individual expressing his reasoning subjectively is no longer reliable (in which he might say “I dislike this university because my enemy studies here.”).

Knowledge concerning “good” and “bad”

In objective knowledge, the definition of good (*right; justice*) or bad (*wrong; injustice; evil*) exceeds the realm of being human, regulated by the ultimate source of knowledge. This regulation distinguishes between obedient and disobedient humans. It is objectively simple that one is *good* if he acts or restrains according to what has been commanded. The entire judgment depends on this source that always remains persistent in refereeing. However, this also *should include* what makes a person happy.

In addition, if one is to rely on the source of knowledge, which is subjective, followings are the possibility of the definition of *good*: (1) what is good can maximize pleasure (wellbeing) and minimize harm (hedonism), (2) what is good depends on the judgment of the consent, and (3) what is good can benefit survival (revolution theory).

Hedonism’s Happiness: The key idea lies that everyone can do whatever he/she wants as long as it does not harm anyone. By this mean, one can consider committing suicide is permissible as it does not harm other people; while in fact, it is quite opposite, producing “a number of harmful psychological and economic effects” (Cholbi, 2021). Another risk of this view is that it leads to having a “utilitarian society”, maximizing net happiness in a society. What concerns more from this is that it is possible that “gangrape” would be permissible, as the rapists have “more” fun than the victim.

Consent's Happiness: It promotes the idea that social pressure is there to regulate, and propagate the knowledge, whatever defines by the consensus that is good must be accepted, even if it is *evil*. This also includes the fact that if one is to accept the consensus views that the society is better when there is no a particular minority remained, then he/she should also accept that the killing of the Jew by the Nazis is permissible. There is a strong consensus supporting regulating knowledge without actual awareness.

Evolution's Happiness: This group supports the idea that as long as you can keep your species continuing its existence, then there is nothing wrong, even if you oppress others. It is tantamount to the concept of animal's survival. So, simply speaking, they take animals as their role model, even if the rapist in the sea called "dolphins" or murder in the bee-hives called "mother-bee".

Knowledge Ontology: Objective source of knowledge

As mentioned above, "objective" simply means *universal* facts without getting infiltrated or spoiled by personal opinions. In the case of source of knowledge, objective should refer to the source which is free from individual feelings or his limited capability. That means, any individual cannot blame any form of knowledge just because it seems to him 'irrational'. The foundation of this knowledge, thus, must be "outside" the person, it should transcend human's subjectivity. The fact that the sun rises on the east and sets on the west will remain true, even if the whole community were to agree that it is the opposite. This is to remind us that, whenever we are to define knowledge about a certain thing we need it from the objective source, not subjective. Since both rational and empirical sources of knowledge are considered "subjective" by the definition, therefore, what we have left to consider is the source of knowledge which is called "testimony".

Testimony refers to an act of accepting a certain kind of knowledge through "the say so" of others as a means of converting the knowledge to us as the listeners, or learners. Most of our fundamental knowledge, such as names of a location, oil's prices, our date of birth, or even the personality of our spouse, are given through testimony. In addition, when asked about the reason for our belief in a certain thing, there is a possibility that we will back up the reason by the say-so of the experts in the field. Our serious consideration of wearing a medical mask to prevent ourselves from the COVID-19's infection will initially then reveal that we believe in what is proposed by medical doctors in virology. Perhaps,



due to their specialization in viruses, we seriously implement virologists' prescription, without questioning them, rather than considering economists. Philosophically, there is no disagreement in considering testimony as a source of knowledge but its validity: what makes this source of *knowledge* valid?

Justification of this source of knowledge is known among philosophers that it can be done either by *reductionism* (originally proposed by David Hume 1711-1776) and *anti-reductionism*. Reductionism approach of justifying the validity of testimony is laid on other sources of knowledge namely *empiricism* (collective experience) or *rationalism* (reasoning). That means, if a certain testimonial knowledge does not coincide with the two sources, then it is unreliable. This includes the self-observation of "the size of the sun". When one raises his thumb up in front of the sun, his vision will inform him that the size of the thumb is much smaller than that of the sun. According to reductionism, one should put more reliability on his vision (that the sun is smaller than his thumb) than on the astrological professor's words. On the other hand, the words of the professor (that the sun is the biggest star) will be guaranteed "reliable" only when the individual's eyes inform him so.

However, David Hume's reductionist account of testimonial knowledge is recently opposed by Professor C. A. J. Coady (1936-present) who asserts that testimonial knowledge can justify its validity without depending on personal observation or collective experience. Meaning, any knowledge is not necessarily justified only when the knowledge is "in line" with the observed facts (Coady, 1992, p.28). This means the say-so of others are always proved true without one's necessity of proving it using his own reasoning capacity. Even if we were to deny the personal observation, claiming it is possible to have a person's biases, and that we prefer the observation of "many more persons" (plural) in a form of collective experiences; we would still rely on the observation's result that these persons have observed, which is in another sense dependent upon their testimony anyway. To conclude, the fact that testimony must be justified through other sources of knowledge (such as collective experiences of others) simply means that its justification must be conducted relying on others' testimony, for the reason that a person is not able to have a direct observation with the same details himself.



In argumentation study, testimonial knowledge can be analogous with “the say-so of the experts in the field”. It was Professor Stephen Toulmin (1922-2009) who proposed the model for argumentation analysis called “Toulmin model”. In the model, there is an element namely “backing”. For any claim to have reliability, it must be logically functioned with “warrant”, which is justified only with “the authority”: “experts’ views” on a particular issue. According to Toulmin, “authority figure” is there to “sanction” (Mutohhar et al, 2020). This is to prove that relying on experts is something acceptable rather than “a must” to do. However, not all experts can say a thing without *fabricated lies* while in fact, experts will lie to us sometimes (Smith, 2021). It is true that it (testimony) makes us able to acquire knowledge but with some strict conditions (Lehrer, 2006). This is why a discussion on testimonial knowledge is always involved with some characteristics of the person who informs us the information, which should be convincing enough for us to plant “the degree of trust” we have upon him, and this degree of trust depends on our capability in assessing his trustworthiness, which needs our own trustworthiness in accepting the result of the assessment.

Where to find out this *reliable source* of happiness?

What we have discussed so far reminds us that should we need to design a curriculum for happiness, the definition of “happiness” itself must be taken into account. Since, the definition is various and the certainty of which can be attained by “testimony”, we then are not able to comprehend it without knowing what the testimonial source of knowledge should be. However, the following are some possible clues to look for the criterion of happiness: the testimony attaining them should be taken seriously into practice.

To search for the right source of testimony, we should always be reminded that, as discussed above, relying on our capacity of reasoning alone may not be the best choice. The reason is, in defining “happiness” the answer is not “anything” but only the “right” answer. This is in fact a logical matter of “you can do whatever that makes you happy” but “not whatever you do can make you really happy”.

You are taken to a remote island by boat. The island is surrounded by a highly-protective bricked fence with a single locked door connected with the pier’s corridor. Standing there in front of the door, you are asked: What is there on the island? You may



be up for answering it immediately, but reasoning does not help you much this time: what you can do your best is to logically assume. In another sense, you would try to be the most “reasonable” you can, revealing that perhaps the island is a prison of inmates who conducted the most serious crimes, while knowing very well that it is not certain. It could be a zoo, a wide-life conservation park, or completely empty.

“The lack of certainty” about happiness is really a huge error in this sense as it would bring a lot of damage to the students, extremely against the praising view of Stephen Toulmin. According to whom, ambiguity and uncertainty are among “values” of being human who usually commit errors (Toulmin, 1992, p.30). A simple way to know what is on the fence-protected island is when someone who has been in there tells you (you are not yet allowed to enter the door and visualize with the eyes). However, in order to be certain in what he informs, this person must hold characteristics that notify his sufficient credentials confirming his trustworthiness.

This can be implied into the attempt of setting up a curriculum for happiness: the very first step of defining happiness itself. As happiness can be defined using merely our reasoning capacity, which is itself unable to reveal valid knowledge, but through testimony. Now, for further research, we are in need of looking at a possibility of attaining this knowledge or the person who claims to be able to define happiness without relying on his own rational faculty. It should be a bigger issue and worth trying to attain otherwise the curriculum for happiness is voiceless.

Conclusion

There is no disagreement towards the fact that happiness has been defined as it ends in itself. This includes an individual’s ability to achieve what is under his desire does not merely indicate that he is happy: too much attached with desires leads to being greedy. On the other hand, having pain and suffering is not always blameworthy; in fact, being a creative tool to attain happiness. What to remind further is that even if all elements are gathered, they are not effective if there is no belief within the individual. Belief in another sense is another key fundamental core of being happy. It is the consideration of belief (whether what we believe is certain) that illuminates the fact that simply using reason to back up the individual’s certainty in his belief is not sufficient due to the fact that reasoning capacity itself has limitations. Rather, testimonial knowledge should not be



left behind as it is considered “more superior” in terms of reliability compared to the knowledge which holds its original source from reasoning. When all its conditions are fulfilled philosophically, the testimonial knowledge then becomes certain. As the definition of happiness itself should be “certain” prior to the design of *curriculum for happiness* to take place, happiness should be defined by but the testimonial source. The paper ends with the question: if we were to search for this source (the one who will inform us about the certain definition of happiness), then what is next?

References

- Burton, R. A. (2008). *On being certain: Believing you are right even when you are not*. New York, USA: St. Martin's Press.
- Cholbi, M. (2021, November 9). *Suicide*. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Retrieved February 22, 2022, from <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/suicide/#SocUtiRolBasArg>
- Coady, C. A. (1992). *Testimony: A Philosophical Study*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hone, L. C., Jarden, A., and Schofield, G. M. (2015). An evaluation of positive psychology intervention effectiveness trials using the re-aim framework: a practice-friendly review. *J. Posit. Psychol.* 10, 303–322. doi: 10.1080/17439760.2014.965267
- Lehrer, K. (2006). Testimony and Trustworthiness. In: Jennifer Lackey, J and Sosa, E, ed, *The Epistemology of Testimony*.
- Mutohhar, Sudinpreeda, H., Nitiphak, S., Jahlae, A., & Ketamon, T. (2020). The 11 th Hatyai National and International Conference. In *The Place of Argumentation in Academic Paper through the Application of the Macro-Toulmin* (pp. 2006–2019). Hatyai.
- Nordquist, R. (2019, November 4). *What is an exploratory essay?* ThoughtCo. Retrieved February 24, 2022, from <https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-an-exploratory-essay-1690623>
- Rabindranath Srihari. (2021, December 11). *EEF Inter-Forums*. Facebook. Retrieved February 15, 2022, from <https://www.facebook.com/EEFInterForums/>
- Rastelli, C., Calabrese, L., Miller, C., Raffone, A., & De Pisapia, N. (2021). The art of happiness: An explorative study of a contemplative program for subjective well-being. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.600982>



- Smith, N. (2021, March 28). *Yes, experts will lie to you sometimes*. Yes, experts will lie to you sometimes - by Noah Smith. Retrieved February 19, 2022, from https://noahpinion.substack.com/p/yes-experts-will-lie-to-you-sometimes?utm_source=url
- Toulmin, S. E. (1992). *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity*. University of Chicago Press.