Opinion Article

Recipes For Happiness: Conversations On Happiness And Well-Being In The School Environment

ABSTRACT

Background: Since ancient times, the debate around happiness has been present in philosophical reflections. In the face of an increasingly complex society, impacted by several crisis, the need and urgency to debate conceptualizations of happiness and well-being is evident, and educational institutions may play a relevant role in this process. **Objective:** Considering philosophical and current psychological perspectives on well-being, this paper seeks to analyze children's perceptions of happiness through the analysis of an anthology of recipes for happiness created by elementary school children in a public school in Brazil. **Results:** The results demonstrate the importance of understanding children's perceptions of happiness to support effective interventions that allow us to progress toward well-being and fulfillment.

Comment [1]: Write down how many aspects or how many works will be analyzed

Keywords: happiness, children, positive education, positive psychology, philosophy.

1. INTRODUCTION

The debate on the meaning of happiness has been present in philosophical reflections since ancient times and permeates the organizational environments of institutions, including schools and this conversation has gained traction as humankind is faced with an ever-increasing array of challenges. In a global context that has been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, schools have suffered impacts that have not only harmed learning but have also aggravated the crisis of meaning that this institution has been experiencing for quite some time. Hence the need to discuss happiness and well-being in school environments, as a way of fostering the collective construction of policies that make it possible to intervene in the structuring of healthier and safer societies.

In this context, well-being is understood as a state in which the individual is not only subjectively happy but also healthy and prosperous [1]. Considering this, how can we talk about well-being and happiness in the school environment? What perspectives on happiness can guide this debate? How can this knowledge be applied to positively impact students' well-being and generate more meaning and appreciation for belonging in a life with meaning and purpose?

This paper aims to reflect on conceptualizations of well-being and happiness, considering philosophical and psychological perspectives, and analyzing the point of view of 6th-grade students from a public school in Brazil on the issue. The introduction provides a brief appraisal of happiness considering the classical perspectives of ancient

philosophy, with emphasis on the perspectives about Hedonism and Eudaimonia, present in the thought of Aristippus of Cyrene, Epicurus, and Aristotle. Next, the contributions of positive psychology called by some the "science of happiness", are outlined, with emphasis to studies conducted in the Brazilian context. With these perspectives in mind, arguments on the relevance and need to debate happiness in the school environment are presented, supporting the thesis that happiness is a requirement for building a school environment that is conducive to human development and that recognizes well-being as a critical purpose in life. Finally, the concept of happiness is explored from the point of view of children as presented in the anthology "The Art of Happiness", specifically on the work of 6th-grade students who creatively provide the ingredients and method of preparation for their "Recipes for Happiness".

1.1 Philosophical perspectives on happiness and well-being in educational contexts

Happiness has been a theme of philosophy since its origins, including the debates around Hedonism and Eudaimonia. The roots of hedonism can be traced back to Aristippus of Cyrene (433 BC). Born in Cyrene, the Sophists settled in Athens following the teachings of Socrates. According to the Cyrenaic School, pain and pleasure ought to be accepted as two states of the soul. In this sense, it is established that pleasures have the same level, being the result of a movement, an action, and the absence of disturbance or pain does not necessarily equate to pleasure. The Cyrenaics considered isolated pleasure to be the supreme good, happiness being the sum of all pleasures [2]. In the discourse of the followers of this philosophical school, the search for pleasure becomes a perceptible movement since childhood, as humans act to avoid displeasure.

The ideas of Epicurus (341 BC), born on the island of Samos, present another perspective on happiness. On the outskirts of Athens, he founded the Epicurean School, in a garden that would become the place to build an ethic based on moderation, establishing a counterpoint to the approach of the Cyrenaics. For Epicurus,

> “Pleasure is our first and inherent good. It is the starting point for every choice and every aversion, and to it we return insofar as we make feeling the rule by which we judge every good thing.” [3]

Thus, if pleasure is the first good, happiness is the supreme good, and it is up to humans to exercise in the things that bring it "since, if it is present, we will have everything, and if it is absent, all our actions will be directed towards achieving it" [3].

On the subject of pleasure, there are noticeable dissonances between the ideas of Epicurus and the Cyrenaic approach. In the view of Aristippus and his followers, no matter the moral cost of pleasure, even if it comes from shameful acts or absurd actions, pleasure is desirable, it is good. For Epicurus, pleasure, being the first and inherent good, will not be chosen without criteria, and is sometimes discarded when there is a glimpse of later suffering. In the same way, he reasoned with pain, which may cause aversion at first sight, but can lead to pleasure when placed under medium- or long-term lenses and is therefore chosen based on the mediated stimulus.

In Epicurus' view, the Virtues are fundamental to happiness. In his writing called Letter to Meneceus (2021) [3], he highlights wisdom, a necessary asset for the young and the old, as well as prudence, a virtue that guides man in the choices he will make to shape his destiny. Just as for Epicurus, virtues were essential to Aristotle's concept of ethics and happiness (384 BC). The Stagirite, Plato's disciple and founder of the Lyceum in Athens, would bring us the concept of Eudaimonia. According to Silva (2017, p. 31) [4], "Aristotelian Eudaimonia as a result of ethical action is an activity of the soul following the perfect virtues, aiming at a good that can be both for oneself and for other citizens. Since the good of the polis is the most important, the good to be sought must be that which benefits the entire city."

Therefore, pleasure cannot be an end to be achieved for its own sake but will naturally result in activities that are part of a man's trade. Pleasure can enhance human actions as long as it is done in moderation.

> Thus, we must set limits on our actions, understanding that the right path is the just measure, that is, the virtuous life. We have seen that we are naturally led to seek pleasure and turn away from what brings us suffering. "One should not, therefore, fight pleasure, for it makes our life colorful, so much so that all our actions have pleasure or pain as their norm, more or less" (Aristotle, 2015, P, 53). One should thus value pleasure and determine the right way to use it virtuously [4].

Thus, for Aristotle, pleasure can be present in human life and is not something to be rejected or avoided. Pleasure must be understood not as something that intoxicates or numbs the human being in the perception of the present time and life's experiences, but as something that makes life lighter, enhancing the action of the virtuous man in the search for the most precious and desired good of all, happiness.

Epstein (2014) [5] reports that some philosophers believed that we could achieve happiness by living in the pursuit of pleasure and avoiding pain, considered hedonism, while others understood that the pursuit of pleasure would not be enough and that it was necessary to improve one's potential, to be at the service of something beyond oneself, in a eudaimonic sense.

How can this type of reflection be linked to dialogues about happiness and well-being in school contexts? How can science help to validate these perspectives? Although, as we have seen, hedonic and eudaimonic well-being

originated in distant times, we can find in current debates several studies on these aspects in the educational field to better understand students and teachers and, in this way, promote the well-being of each of these actors. In the hedonic field, it is easy to find studies that are aimed at exploring subjective well- being, a concept that can be understood as happiness itself [6]. Within education, this issue is commonly directed at students [7-10] and teachers [11-13].

An integrative review conducted in the Brazilian context by Pinto and Pedroso (2023) [14] focused on subjective and psychological well-being that used Brazilian samples. At the end of the review and reaching the number of 47 studies, it was found that just over 50% of the articles focused on the study of subjective well-being, suggesting that Brazilian researchers more often conceptualize well-being through the lenses of experiencing positive and negative emotions and not necessarily a broader perspective considering well-being as also having a life with character, purpose and the like. In addition, it should be noted that of these 47 studies, only 7 analyzed adolescents and/or young people, a finding which demonstrates the need to carry out more studies with Brazilian adolescents and/or young people to better define and understand their perspectives on well-being.

Concerning the eudaimonic approach to well-being, which can be studied in the light of human flourishing because, just as eudaimonia is the ultimate good to be sought and an end in itself, flourishing can be understood as a process that occurs throughout life (and, in turn, is an ultimate good to be sought) and is intrinsically valuable, i.e. flourishing becomes an end in itself [15]. Human flourishing is a process that can be understood from the perspective of VanderWeele (2017) [16] as optimal functioning in dimensions of life that will promote general well-being, including at least the following facets: (1) happiness and life satisfaction, (2) character, (3) purpose and meaning, (4) meaningful relationships, (5) and physical and mental health. In other words, developing these dimensions is fundamental to promoting human flourishing or eudaimonic well-being.

The pursuit of each of these necessary facets of human flourishing is an indicator of thriving. However, there is still limited research examining these issues, particularly when considering the educational setting [17-18]. Thus, more work is needed to analyze how such dimensions relate to the well-being of individuals who belong to the school environment, such as mental health [19-20] or meaningful relationships [21-22]. One study that illuminates this issue using a sample from the Global South was conducted by van Schalkwyk and Wissing (2010) [23] who, when analyzing the psychological well-being of 665 adolescents based on questionnaires and interviews, showed how adolescents conceptualized a flourishing life as a life with purpose and meaning, with positive relationships and positive emotions.

Although the debate on happiness through the lenses of eudaimonia has its roots in ancient times, this remains a relevant point to be investigated in contemporary debates in education to promote a healthier and more positive context for schooling, as well as one of the possibilities in which current researchers seek to operationalize this concept.

1.2 Happiness from the perspective of positive psychology - a scientific view

From ancient Greece to modern times, Myers and Diener (1997) [24] argue that despite the many perceptions of happiness from a philosophical perspective, "to discover the truth about happiness, we have to ask ourselves how these ideas relate to reality. In short, we must study happiness scientifically". In this sense, scientific reflections on happiness made their way into humanistic psychology with special emphasis from the 1960s onwards, gaining strength in the perspectives on positive psychology.

The debate on the need for positive psychology received a special impetus through the work of Martin Seligman who, in 1999, as President of the American Psychological Association, wrote about the need for a new look at psychological science, where the power and positive aspects of human experience became the focus of studies and research. Since then, a series of studies have been carried out, including the publication of the book “Character Strengths and Virtues: a handbook and classification” by Martin Seligman and Cristopher Peterson (2004) [25].

Seligman proposes a theory that deals with happiness considering five dimensions that would be the foundation of human flourishing: Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment, the PERMA model. These facets of flourishing are supported in their development by 24 personal strengths, which can be used deliberately by the individual to positively influence their level of well-being [26].

In Brazil, a study on resilience and vulnerability among at risk children (Hutz, Koller & Bandeira, 1996)[27], is considered to be a pioneer work for the debate on positive psychology in the country. Since then, there has been an increase in academic production, including in studies examining the implications of this approach to educational issues [28].

But why would such a conversation on well-being and happiness be relevant to schools? What are school environments like today? What challenges are part of educators' routines?

1.3 Debating happiness and well-being in schools

In recent decades, the debate on happiness has gained ground in school contexts which, in the face of a complex world, brings the need to reframe the institution's existence in the face of a crisis of meaning and mental health aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Petry (2017) [29], "It is not strange that school today tends to be a space of boredom, stress, and unhappiness, because, after all, it has become a place where participants work", diverging

from the concept of the Hellenic school, which translates the specificity of school as "[...] an institution of 'free time' that enables the establishment of 'present time' in which students are introduced to the world (skholé)". Barroso (2008, p.37) [30] makes us reflect on a school in which young people are surrounded by discourses of schooling as a gateway to social rewards, and which is therefore being questioned in an increasingly incisive and sometimes violent way. In such an institution, parents become disillusioned when they realize that schools won't be able to transform their children's lives. Teachers are searching for a meaning, a purpose for working every day in an institution that is experiencing a crisis of meaning. In this context, we echo Barroso's (2008) [30] question: where did we lose the meaning of schools? At what point did relationships become so technical that we only see the goals of results, to the detriment of the goals of discovery, learning and coexistence? What impacts has the school community suffered because of this labor-intensive form of organization?

Data from the World Health Organization [31] has already shown that Brazil is a country with high rates of anxiety and depression. This data is reflected in the school environment and has already been the subject of research through the traditional examination in a number of international studies. The 2015 edition of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) [32] included assessments of the well-being of students, with results showing high levels of anxiety expressed by young Brazilians concerning school activities, with "80% of Brazilians aged 15 feeling very anxious when taking a test, even when preparing for the test, and 56% feeling very tense when studying" [33]. When comparing these statistics with the average from other countries in the PISA 2015, which express 55% and 36%, respectively, the difference is remarkable and shows that further investment into understanding the well-being of Brazilian students is needed.

If in a scenario before the pandemic Brazil already had enough reason to be concerned about the well-being of its children in the school environment, an assessment carried out by the São Paulo Department of Education and the Airton Senna Institute (2022) [34] revealed that 70% of students report symptoms of depression and anxiety. Considering these indicators in a post-social isolation scenario, which marks the return of students to school, the debate about well-being in that space becomes ever more urgent.

The fact is that the educational environment is highly permeable to the development of interventions aimed at "promoting well-being and learning that makes sense in the student's life" [35]. By aligning the two objectives, well-being and learning, we enable the full development of the student within Seligman's proposal of positive education, which brings to schools the ideal of an environment "that values well- being and academic performance in equal proportions." [36].

Positive education is defined as the scientific application of more effective approaches to education, combined with the principles of positive psychology. Its main purpose is to promote the well-being of both students and the school community in general. This approach seeks to strengthen the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral skills of students and teachers to increase motivation for learning and, consequently, improve academic performance and the school environment [37].

1.4 Children's conceptualizations of happiness

Following this philosophical and scientific appraisal on happiness children's perception of happiness are examined. According to Giacomoni, Souza and Hutz (2014, p. 149) [38], "Assessing happiness, subjective well-being and life satisfaction in children requires knowing how they understand what a happy person means and how a happy person presents themselves to others". Three studies on the issue are highlighted [38-40]. The first, carried out by Giacomoni, Souza and Hutz (2014)[38], asked the guiding questions "what does it mean to be happy?" and "what does a happy person look like?". Considering valid responses, authors offered nine categories synthesizing children's conceptualizations of happiness: positive feelings and states (laughter, happiness and joy), positive self and altruism (being nice, sharing, helping and loving), leisure (physical and fun activities, playing), satisfaction of basic needs and desires (having a home, food, getting presents), family (references to family), friendship (references to relationships with peers), non-violence (not being an actor or spectator of violence), school (references to school), other answers. Among these categories, positive feelings and positive self were the most frequent categories, followed by leisure. For children, expressing positive traits and attitudes, such as altruism, ethics, empathy, love, and forgiveness makes happiness possible through the expression of a positive self. Happy people, in turn, are identified as having positive subjective characteristics such as positive feelings, moods and traits [38].

Subsequently, Giacomoni, Souza, and Hutz (2014a) [39] published a study further examining children's conceptualizations of happiness through the following questions: "What comes to mind when you think of happiness?" and "What is happiness?". Children's responses to this second study were distributed across eight categories: positive feelings, leisure, family, friendship, satisfaction of basic needs/desires, school, non-violence, and moral actions. In the first question, when children considered the word happiness, the most cited categories were feelings, leisure, family, and friends. In the second question, even when given the chance to elaborate on the answer, the categories of feelings, family and leisure were still the most frequent, with the difference that non-violence was the second most cited, to the detriment of friendship, which was in sixth place. According to Giacomoni, Souza and Hutz (2014a) [39]: "The answers about 'non-violence' link happiness to living in a harmonious environment, without fights and arguments."

Finally, Giacomoni, Souza and Hutz (2016) [40], when approaching happiness from the children's self-perception, used a script whose guiding questions, this time, using the following set of questions: (1) Do you think you are happy? Why?; (2) Can you be happy? Why?; (3) Do you think being happy depends on you?; and (4) Where does happiness come from? For the first question, the categories used in the analysis were: family, positive self, leisure, satisfaction of basic needs and desires, friendship, full life satisfaction, school, and non-violence. The results presented by the age groups established by the researchers were as follows (highlighting the three most present categories per group): 5-6 years (leisure; positive self; friendship), 7-8 years (family; leisure; needs and desires); 9- 10 years (family; positive self; needs and desires); and 11-12 years (family; positive self; friendship).

These results [40] also show that younger children reported a higher level of happiness compared to their older counterparts, and boys were more likely than girls to link leisure activities with their sense of happiness. Central to the children's understanding of happiness was the concept that it originates from within, rooted in personal emotions and affections, highlighting an intrinsic connection between the self and emotional well-being. These findings add to our understanding of the complex and subjective nature of happiness, and provide a foundation for the study proposed in the present paper, which aims to examine the points of view of early adolescents on happiness.

2. METHODOLOGY

A qualitative analysis was carried out based on the publication of an anthology entitled "The Art of Happiness" [41]. Through a variety of textual genres, this work addresses the theme of happiness for primary and secondary school students at a federal public school. Of the works presented in the book, the productions of 15 6th-grade students were analyzed, which dealt with the textual genre "Recipe", a genre characterized by its title, ingredients, and method of preparation. According to the presentation of the book, these recipes were developed by students over the course of the 2021 school year.

2.1 Analysis Plan

A content analysis of the 15 texts published in the document under analysis [41] was carried out by associating the themes categories used by Giacomoni, Souza and Hutz (2014) [38] in their analysis of children's conceptualizations of happiness. Content analysis can be used to deepen reflections on children's conceptualizations of happiness, and its importance in the school environment, subsidizing the educational debate on the matter given the challenge of providing adequate levels of well-being and learning for school communities.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Asking the students "What is your recipe for happiness?" creates opportunities for developing ideas and structuring thoughts about the ingredients (what makes life happier?) and the method of preparation (how to use these ingredients?). In this context, this activity takes on the status of a self-reflection on the foundations of happiness, as it enabled students to present their perception of happiness through a creative, playful, and enjoyable process. During the analysis, the ingredients were identified and classified by association with the basic categories of an earlier study conducted in Brazil [38].

The results showed that in children's recipes "Positive feelings and states" were related to ingredients such as laughter, lightness, and good humor, among others. Ingredients such as empathy, respect, kindness, and forgiveness were connected to the category "positive self and altruism", while trips, outings, watching tv series and animes, playing games, brought the idea of "leisure".

Activities related to "satisfying basic needs and desires" included eating and sleeping and the ingredient related to "non-violence" was present in the word peace. Positive relations highlighted , focused by the topic of "friendship" had friends and friendship as its main ingredients, while "family" was expressed by the name of the category itself. Figure 1 illustrates the presence of each "ingredient" (theme) across the recipes included in the anthology:

Comment [2]: what if explained in tabular form

Table 1. Percentage (%) of recipes with ingredients related to the category

Category	Percentage (%)

Positive Feelings	86,7
Positive-self and altruism	66,7
Friendship	46,7
Leisure	33,3
Family	26,7
Basic needs satisfaction	20
School	13,3
No violence	13,3

Among the corpus of recipes analyzed in the study, positive feelings were present in 86.7% of the recipes, followed by positive self (66.7%), then friendship (46.7%), and leisure (33.3%), suggesting these as particularly salient themes for the group of young authors. Despite the methodological and contextual differences, when we compare the results with earlier work with Brazilian children [38], we find a similar pattern, especially concerning the salience of feelings and the positive self as key aspects of happiness, which are listed in first and second place respectively.

These results show that children's perceptions of happiness, from a philosophical point of view, express positive feelings through ingredients that correspond to a hedonic model of happiness, connected to sensations and emotions. On the other hand, the eudaimonic model seems to be articulated in children's recipes through ingredients that are connected to doing good, and contributing to others or the community. This connection with the hedonic and eudaimonic perspectives offers a starting point for further conversations with children on well-being and happiness, since "children's understanding of happiness is fertile material for creating interventions" [40]. Imagine the possibilities generated by reflecting on the just measure of pleasure based on Epicurean ethics, in which pleasure or pain must be chosen from a less immediate perspective? How could we work on ethics and community life based on the values reported in the category of positive self and altruism? After discussing questions like these, would we keep our recipe with the same ingredients, proportions, and even the method of preparation? Further pedagogical work with children may be based on rewriting the initial recipes provided by children, offering further opportunities for reflection. It should be noted that this is not a clash between philosophical currents, after all, it is possible to articulate pleasure and meaning in the construction of our wholeness [42]. The right measure is our great challenge as human beings.

Finally, understanding how happiness is perceived by children in schooling contexts, through initiatives such as this short writing project, provides a series of possibilities for articulating the debate on well-being in the school environment, considering the local context and collective demands. This is articulated with the approach to happiness discussed by Reppold et al (2019) [43], which moves away from a project of the individual and becomes, under a critical eye, built for the common well-being. The "happiness recipes" are presented as an example of a pedagogical practice that can be carried out in perfect harmony with the curriculum, and which opens possibilities for pedagogical action, whether through philosophical or psychological lenses.

4. CONCLUSION

This article aimed to help raise well-being and happiness to the status of values necessary for the development of an educational practice that provides learning and quality of life for the entire school community. The set of references presented referred to conceptual issues about happiness, from ancient philosophical approaches to the scientific advances of positive psychology, as well as how these concepts are presented in current debates. We also reflected on the school's crisis of meaning as a result of the challenges faced by the Brazilian education system, which has been impacted by the pandemic. The key goal of examining conceptualizations of happiness is achieved through the analysis of a set of recipes for happiness developed by children.

Despite the limitations of this study, such as the limited corpus of recipes analyzed and the lack of more detailed information on the process through which these recipes were generated, the analysis shows that even through very basic

genres, such as recipes, children can reflect on the nuances of happiness. This shows that such an approach can be a promising pedagogical practice, articulating the debate on well-being in the school context. Further possibilities include examining how the exercise of philosophical thinking can be articulated in the classroom through these processes.

In the hope of finding actions that have a positive impact on the school and bring meaning to the school, we recommend studying interventions that are aligned with pedagogical practice and are carried out across the curriculum, bringing joy and happiness back to school.

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