### **CHAPTER 6.**

# HAPPINESS IN SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN<sup>11</sup>



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- 11 This project is based on the research entitled "Happiness in school-age children" in the cities of Bogota, Pasto and Neiva, approved by UNAD with SIGI ECSAH code 002-27; its researchers were Zeneida Ceballos V, Constanza Abadía García, Nancy Flechas, Mabel Chalá and Jhon Bustos.
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#### **ABSTRACT**

This chapter aims to understand the meanings of happiness built by school-age children between the ages of 9 and 11, who are enrolled in public educational institutions in the cities of Bogota, Neiva and Pasto, Colombia. These meanings of happiness were studied based on:

- a. Self-referential experiences.
- b. Scenarios and practices.
- c. Criteria and arguments to assess happiness.

The study was framed within a qualitative paradigm perspective, with a life stories design and using interviews and focus groups as data collection techniques. Among the most significant findings is that concepts and expressions of happiness specifically arise from self-referential experiences, revealing the complexity with which happiness is understood. Scenarios where happiness is experienced include primarily the home, school, city, open spaces and virtual environments. Happiness practices can occur both alone and in the company of others. Finally, explanations and attributions related to happiness are divided between arguments that show



the reasons for being happy, as well as criteria and symbols that allow for the assessment of happiness. This reflects a complex structure of children's understandings of happiness, uncovering relationships between experiences, emotional bonds and providing a nuanced view from the children's perspective.

**Keywords:** meanings, happiness, emotional development, self-referential experiences.





#### **RESUMEN**

En el presente capítulo busca comprender los significados que sobre felicidad construyen los niños escolarizados en edades entre 9 y 11 años, matriculados en instituciones educativas públicas, en las ciudades de Bogotá, Neiva y Pasto Colombia. Dichos significados de felicidad se estudiaron a partir de:

- a. Experiencias autorreferenciales.
- b. Escenarios y prácticas.
- c. Criterios y argumentos para evaluar la felicidad.

Se trabajó en el marco de la perspectiva paradigmática cualitativa, con un diseño de relatos de vida, utilizando como técnicas de recolección de información las entrevistas y grupos focales. Entre los resultados más relevantes se encuentra que las ideas de felicidad y las expresiones de felicidad tienen lugar específicamente de las experiencias autorreferenciales en las que se identifica la complejidad desde la que se comprende la felicidad. Los escenarios en los que se experimenta felicidad están principalmente el



hogar, el colegio, la ciudad, los espacios abiertos y virtuales y prácticas de felicidad se pueden dar entre las actividades solo y en compañía, y finalmente explicaciones y atribuciones en relación con la felicidad se dividen entre los argumentos que muestran las razones por las que se es feliz, además de los criterios y los símbolos que permiten valorar la felicidad dando cuenta de una estructura compleja de las comprensiones que los niños tienen acerca de la felicidad, develando relaciones entre las experiencias, los vínculos afectivos y que permite comprensiones complejas desde la mirada de los niños.

**Palabras clave:** significados, felicidad, desarrollo emocional, experiencias autorreferenciales.



### INTRODUCTION

Questions about what happiness is and how to achieve it have always been present in academic interest. It is not difficult to find various approaches to the topic of happiness in both general and scientific literature. Covey (2003. p. 29) points out that "happiness can be defined, at least in part, as the result of the desire and ability to sacrifice what we want now for what we ultimately want." Dyer (1980, p. 8) argues that happiness is a natural condition of a person, which he supports with the experiences of young children. Even Aristotle addressed the topic of happiness, equating it with becoming blissed, and he proposed practicing virtue as the path to achieving it. (p. 13)

Despite these insights, never before has happiness been such an important and necessary object of research for psychology and pedagogy as it is today. For reasons that are still not fully clarified, the existence of "being happy" is not a constant in today's societies.

In a more specific context, it is important to recognize that the discussion of happiness in Colombia has a unique complexity. On one hand, there are the psychosocial realities of the country marked by a history of armed social conflict, inequality and violence. On the other hand, reports from the World Database of Happiness show indicators of subjective well-being and happiness worldwide, with Colombia ranking among the top in the last decade. These contrasts invite deeper exploration into academic understandings of happiness, particularly in children, using their perspectives to guide reflections and processes aimed at emotional development.

In summary, it is essential for institutional efforts to include children's own discourse on their happiness: how they understand it, the meanings they construct, how they explain and value it and their actual experiences of happiness within the cultural richness. This research is precisely directed towards that aim.

Thus, the proposed work is relevant and pertinent for both academia and educational institutions, as well as for participating children and their parents generates reflections and materials, such as booklets, that contribute to creating opportunities

for emotional development and increased happiness, based on the socio-cultural contexts of these children.

The research provides significant theoretical value, particularly in the field of positive psychology. The topic of happiness is relevant to psychology as it is part of a somewhat new area of research that diverges from the historical focus on illness, pathology or abnormality. According to Ardila (2010), "topics such as quality of life, subjective well-being, happiness and optimism are among the most important in early 21st-century psychology." Historically, interest in children has focused on psychological disorders, learning disabilities, pathological aggression, antisocial behaviors and developmental deficits. This implies that this research represents a contemporary challenge, aiming to explore and analyze the positive aspects of children's worlds. In this context, the research aims to understand the meanings of happiness constructed by school-aged children between 9 and 11 years old in the cities of Bogotá, Neiva, and Pasto, focusing on self-referential experiences, scenarios, practices, and symbols that children construct around happiness.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The research was framed within a qualitative paradigm perspective. This means that the object of study—namely, the meanings of happiness constructed by school-age children in the cities of Bogotá, Neiva and Pasto—was made understandable through the construction and intersubjective analysis of the practices, imaginaries and discourses of these children.

Regarding the methodological design, this study adopts a life stories approach, defined here as "the study of how a phenomenon is biographically constituted in the form of the individual" (Cornejo et al., 2008, p. 33).

The study sample consisted of 60 school-age children, aged 9 to 11, enrolled in public educational institutions in Bogotá, Neiva and Pasto. Data collection techniques were chosen for their relevance to the study and included qualitative interviews, incomplete stories and drawing. These methods aimed to deepen the understanding of self-referential experiences, practices, scenarios and arguments regarding happiness. Data analysis employed matrix analysis, which seeks to start from a deductive process to generate a proper inductive process, as required for qualitative research.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The inductive categories resulting from the research to understand happiness in school-age children were:

- a. Self-referential experiences.
- **b.** Scenarios and practices of happiness.
- c. Explanations and attributions related to happiness.
- **d.** These categories provide the basis for presenting the research findings.

## SELF-REFERENTIAL EXPERIENCES

When referring to self-referential experiences, the aim is to present the fundamental ideas and ways in which children express happiness based on their own life experiences.

Therefore, priority is given to how children have experienced happiness.



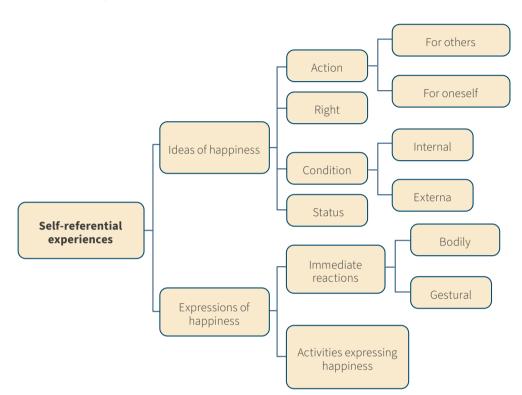


Figure 1. Categorical Map of Self-Referential Experiences.

**Source:** Result of the research.

### **IDEAS OF HAPPINESS**

Regarding children's concepts of happiness, several aspects influence how they understand it. One of the most significant is their association of happiness as an internal experience, often described as a feeling linked to positive emotion and expressed through phrases like "it feels in the heart and soul", "it is a very nice thing you feel..." and "feeling good".

Happiness is also understood as a concept referring to joy, peace and affection. It is recognized that everyone should have happiness, and it is also seen as freedom—understood as the ability to do, be and decide. This leads to the inference that happiness is not a simple matter but one with significant complexity. This is why it is found in children, as they recognize the difficulty in fully describing happiness.

Happiness is related to action, which can be for others or oneself; thus, it is neither selfish nor individualistic. For others, happiness is "being kind," "sharing" and "expressing affection." These are generally prosocial behaviors intended for others. When these actions are for oneself, they are expressions synonymous with happiness, such as laughing, smiling, jumping, playing, dancing and hugging.

Is happiness also presented as a right for everyone? And it is worth asking: Whose right is it? Whether it is a right for all, a right to what? For children, it means having a school, a family, a home and a life. What implications does assuming happiness as a right have? Firstly, recognizing an inclusive principle, and secondly, legitimizing the need for happiness and promoting conditions to experience it.

Happiness is also seen as a condition and, thus, a possibility. One can be happy or not, depending on certain conditions being met. The most important condition that enables happiness in children is being with those they love the most. These individuals are those with whom a significant emotional bond has been formed. Consequently, determining who a child loves the most depends on each child's personal experience. For many, parents and siblings hold an important place, while for others, it may be grandparents, cousins or even friends and pets (like dogs). This highlights that happiness is not only generated by human companionship but also by pets.

Another important aspect of happiness is that, beyond companionship, happiness could also mean seeing others happy. This suggests that empathy processes are fundamental to being happy. Conversely, there are conditions that do not enable happiness, which can be internal or external. Internal conditions include the consequences of using illegal substances, the inability to process the grief of someone who has died or being worried about negative feelings like hatred or anger. External conditions include conflicts among people who interact with the child, such as fights between parents, other family members or community members.

Another external condition that can hinder happiness is the presence of war, which challenges adults to contribute to building a society that promotes well-being.

Finally, regarding ideas of happiness, there is the recognition of its temporality. Happiness is considered a state that occurs when one is not sad, thus being joyful, feeling good, feeling pleasant, having fun or experiencing beauty—whether appreciating beauty or feeling beautiful oneself, such as having a hairstyle, a type of clothing or being perceived as beautiful by others. This aspect involves both the aesthetic and soial dimensions

## EXPRESSIONS OF HAPPINESS

Expressions can manifest as either emotions or thoughts, representing the ways children display happiness. These expressions can be categorized into two types:

- a. Immediate reactions.
- **b.** Activities through which they express happiness.

Immediate reactions, which occur simultaneously with the experience of happiness, can be physical. These can be internal, meaning they are felt in various parts of the body and coincide with emotional excitement. For example, some children report that their heart beats fast, they feel "like something is moving in their stomach" or experience "tingling sensations" or "butterflies." They might also experience changes in thermal sensations, feeling either warm or cold. On the other hand, immediate physical reactions can be external, where others can observe the expression of happiness. For instance, activities like dancing, participating in different events, moving their body, singing or exhibiting states like enthusiasm, energy or activity can be visible signs of happiness.

Immediate reactions can also be gestural. Gestures are a common way to express emotions or feelings, and children recognize this well. Laughing, laughing out loud and smiling are identified as different expressions related to happiness. Other signs

include having bright eyes or blushing, which are also ways of expressing happiness, provided they are distinguished from other associated signs.

Happiness can also be expressed through activities. The most prominent activity for expressing happiness is play, with soccer being a standout game mentioned by children. Another activity associated with expressing happiness is talking about personal experiences and emotions. Other activities include "dressing fashionably," "telling jokes," "inventing games" and "sharing religious experiences."

## SCENARIOS AND PRACTICES OF HAPPINESS

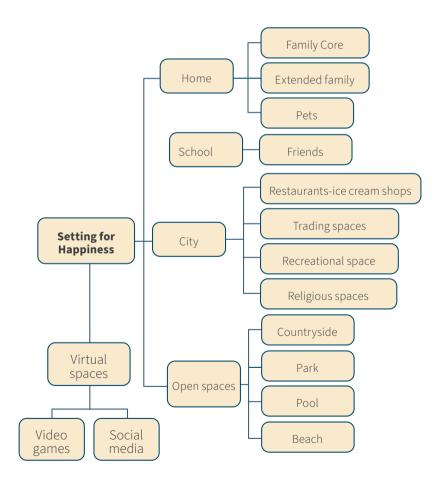
While the first inductive category focused on how happiness is experienced, the second inductive category aims to reveal where and what actions contribute to children's happiness. Here are the findings related to scenarios and practices associated with happiness.

## SCENARIOS WHERE CHILDREN FEEL HAPPY

The scenarios in this subcategory are not directly linked to physical locations but refer to contexts. The most relevant scenario is the house or home, where children distinguish between the family nucleus and the extended family. Despite changing family dynamics and roles, the conventional family model of parents and children remains relevant in children's perceptions. Consequently, scenarios involving both parents are highly significant, with happiness associated with activities such as playing, traveling, watching TV or simply sharing everyday life. For children of separated parents, one of the happiest scenarios is spending time and playing with the non-residential parent, often reflecting a desire for a family where both parents are present. In this context, the family nucleus—parents, siblings, grandparents and pets—plays a central role, ideally in playful situations.

Within the house/home subcategory, the extended family also holds an important place. Visiting grandparents, cousins, aunts and uncles are scenarios where children feel very happy. As expected, school is a place where children feel happy, particularly when they are with friends. There is no significant reference to happiness in relationships with teachers, but satisfaction from academic achievements is noted. Other important scenarios include various city spaces, such as shopping malls, ice cream shops and restaurants. Dining in company is recognized as a happy situation. Other city scenarios that contribute to happiness include soccer schools, movie theaters, churches and simply walking the streets.

Figure 2. Categorical Map of Happiness Scenarios.



**Source:** Result of the research.

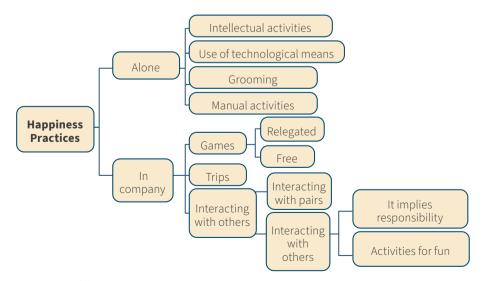
Other notable scenarios include open spaces, such as the countryside, where nature plays a central role. Streams or rivers, vegetation and animals are sources of tranquility and freedom. It's worth questioning what children might understand about being in a natural setting. Similarly, parks are significant, with green areas being essential, although playgrounds and amusement parks are also valued. Additionally, water-related scenarios such as swimming pools and beaches are recognized by children as happy experiences.

Among the identified scenarios—home, school, city and open spaces—virtual environments also emerge, although more subtly. These include Xbox games and internet use, particularly searching for videos and browsing or posting on Facebook.

## HAPPINESS PRACTICES

Regarding the question, "What practices make children happier from their perspective?" we can identify activities done alone and those done with others. Among solo activities, intellectual activities stand out. These might involve seeking information, solving problems in games or dilemmas or imagining scenarios.

Figure 3. Categorical Map of Happiness Practices.



Source: Result of the research.

Children can also engage in solo activities that make them happy, including the use of technology. This can involve playing video games, visiting websites, browsing and posting on Facebook or chatting with friends. Personal grooming activities, such as dressing fashionably and painting nails, also contribute to their happiness.

Other solo activities that bring joy to children include manual activities like coloring, drawing, and painting, as well as passive activities such as listening to music, watching television, and sleeping. While solo activities can certainly contribute to happiness, it is evident that opportunities for happiness expand significantly when children engage in activities with others. Among practices that make children happier, interacting with peers and adults stands out as particularly significant. To understand this, let's explore play as a fundamental practice related to happiness.

Children's games with others can be structured or unstructured. Structured games include competitive ones, such as soccer, skating or basketball championships, and non-competitive structured games, such as video games, chess, board games and casual soccer. Competitive sports are especially valued by children due to the excitement and the opportunity to win. Non-competitive structured games, on the other hand, are appreciated for their entertainment value and informality.

Free play, focused on enjoyment and gratification, is also highly valued. These activities are directly linked to the experience of engaging in them, such as playing with dogs, tickling, running around, playing in water, jumping or riding a bicycle.

Interactions with peers and adults also significantly contribute to children's happiness. Although the activities may vary, the key element is the contact with others. Among peers, activities that induce laughter and allow children to express themselves and feel accepted are key. This includes "teasing" or "joking around," which involve language games where children mock people or situations, as well as telling jokes. However, sharing personal stories is also becoming increasingly important. Children may seek a listening ear and approval. This includes telling adventures, venting worries or sharing their feelings and secrets with ease. This is often preferred with close friends or partners. It seems that the stage of preadolescence, along with the forthcoming changes of adolescence, significantly influences how children interpret their experiences and preferences. Lastly, helping peers is another reason for children to feel happy.

On the other hand, interactions with adults have their own characteristics but are equally important for happiness. That is why activities that involve fun, such as watching movies, eating out, having ice cream or exchanging gifts, are very rewarding. Moreover, participating in activities that require a certain level of responsibility with parents, such as doing school homework, helping with chores or assisting with household tasks or with teachers, such as learning, studying and researching, also contributes to children's happiness.

## EXPLANATIONS AND ATTRIBUTIONS CHILDREN MAKE ABOUT HAPPINESS

Based on information gathered in the study, the following is presented.

### ARGUMENTS CONSTRUCTED IN RELATION TO HAPPINESS

To understand the arguments children construct about happiness, it is necessary to start with contrasts; that is, arguments are developed to explain both happy and unhappy situations.

In exploring the arguments that explain happiness, several dimensions emerge. On one hand, there is happiness for the sake of happiness itself. In this context, it is explained that one can be happy because "we are always happy" or because "people can be happy." However, it is also noted that discussing happiness "brings back happy moments and makes you feel happy" or simply encourages "us to be happier." Thus, incorporating happiness into conversations allows individuals to experience or relive happy moments.



Talking about happiness Happiness for happiness's Being happy sake Entertainment Reasons for Fun happiness Games Family Achievement Social Community Trust Arguments Contact Expressions Receiving of affection Giving Aesthetics An accident Conflicts The result of Punishments Inappropriate behavior Reasons for Death unhappiness **Explanations and** Disease **Attributions** External Conflictos situations Unemployment Well-being (of parents) Emotional bonds Academic Possibilities Health Power Criteria Economic Gestures Physicality Behaviors Children They´re happier Age Experiences Adults Conditions Contexts Felicidad Actions Qualities Symbols Situations No felicidad Feelings

Figure 4. Categorical Map of Explanations and Attributions about Happiness.

Fuente: Producto de la investigación.

Happiness is also argued in terms of fun. Something enjoyable makes you happy because it provides entertainment, leading to laughter and "good times." Play, especially when shared with friends or family, is inherently fun and contributes to happiness. Another significant argument is the achievement of goals as a source of happiness. Achievements can be personal in the sense that they hold fundamental value for the individual. For children, academic achievements are particularly noteworthy, such as learning, getting good grades, passing a school year or receiving a badge (known as "izar bandera" in Spanish). In addition, personal achievements in sports, such as winning championships or earning medals, also play a crucial role.

Family-related achievements can also explain why someone feels happy. For example, the joy of a parent getting a good job after a period of unemployment is a significant source of happiness. Social achievements, which involve recognition from peers and adults, also contribute to feelings of happiness.

Trust is another important factor in happiness. Trust means being able to share objects, situations and time with others, having no fears, or being able to confide secrets and know the other's secrets. Happiness can also be explained through expressions of affection, which are determined by mutual contact, such as hugs, kisses, and caresses, as well as by receiving compliments, protection, and care. Additionally, giving—whether it's expressing thanks, feeling grateful, or offering gifts and help—can also lead to happiness.

Aesthetic experiences provide another explanation for happiness. Feeling a sense of harmony and beauty, whether in a situation, with objects, people, or within oneself, can be a reason for happiness.

In contrast, there are reasons for unhappiness, which can be classified into consequences and external situations. Among the consequences, children might cite inappropriate behaviors for which they are responsible, such as failing a subject, disobeying rules, or losing their school supplies. Accidents, such as breaking a family vase, or conflicts with parents, siblings, or friends, as well as punishments like not being allowed to go out or have fun, also contribute to unhappiness. External situations that lead to unhappiness include well-defined issues such as:

**a.** The death of a loved one, illness (whether personal or within the family), conflicts among family members, and unemployment or economic instability within the family.

La muerte de un ser querido, la enfermedad, propia y de la familia. Los conflictos, entre los padres y entre otros miembros de la familia y el desempleo de los padres o la inestabilidad económica de la familia

## CRITERIA CHILDREN USE TO EVALUATE HAPPINESS

Determining whether someone can be happy or not involves specific criteria that allow for judgment and conclusion. For children, these criteria can be categorized into three main areas: the individual's situation, their physical state, and their age.

When referring to the possibilities of feeling happy, children evaluate:

- **b.** Well-being Situation: This includes whether the person is never sad or feels like the happiest person in the world.
- **c.** Social Relationships: Happiness is associated with having friends and family. Sharing time with them, having parents who stay together, or always being with one's father can enhance happiness.
- **d.** Academic Criteria: Being very intelligent and excelling academically, such as passing the school year, is linked to happiness. It is related to having the necessary conditions to overcome academic challenges.
- **e.** Power: The possibility of being happy can also be linked to having power, such as "being the king of the world."
- f. Economic Possibilities: For children, having the financial means to enjoy oneself and "have everything one wants" is a criterion for happiness. This also includes having the means to help others, for example, "helping an aunt get a house."

One of the most relevant criteria for evaluating happiness is physicality. This includes gestures such as laughing, smiling, or even crying from joy, along with visible signs like bright eyes and flushed cheeks. Behavior also plays a role; it should align with

social expectations. For children, behaving well might be an indicator of happiness, but spontaneous reactions such as tickling others, shouting, jumping, running, or hugging are also considered. Additionally, proposals within their social group—ranging from making jokes to being playful with others—are indicators that help assess if someone feels happy.

Another important criterion for children to determine if someone is happy is age. They believe that expressions of happiness differ between children and adults, with the view that "children are happier than adults." For children, being able to do what they want, being more curious, and having fewer problems make it easier to show happiness. In contrast, children perceive that among adults, such criteria are linked to their life experiences and that adults tend to complicate their lives more. They believe adults feel happiness internally but do not always show it. As for conditions, they believe that adults would feel happier when receiving a paycheck or good news.

### SYMBOLS OF HAPPINESS

Symbols are mental representations with specific meanings. Research has explored the symbols of happiness that children have developed, confirming and refining previously presented information. In this context, children's symbols of happiness are initially categorized into contexts such as family, soccer, play, actions like smiling, helping, giving, congratulating, and qualities like love, bright colors, beauty, and noise. These situations suggest that symbols of happiness are associated with activity and celebration.

In contrast, symbols of unhappiness are associated with situations such as abandonment, scolding, punishment, and fighting. Feelings of unhappiness are symbolized by loneliness, guilt, loss (including death and material loss), anger, and both psychological and physical pain.

### DISCUSSION

According to Dyer (1980, p. 8), a significant author in the study of happiness, happiness is a natural condition of a person, supported by the experiences of young children. Although the term is widely used in everyday life with various interpretations,

academic research provides relevant understandings and explanations, placing the topic at the forefront of discussions in different disciplines. The research presented here is based on the assertion that "happiness is a concept encompassing subjective well-being and life satisfaction, thus including both emotional and cognitive dimensions of the individual" (Cuadra & Florenzano, 2003, p. 6). Happiness, therefore, is the result of an evaluative assessment by the individual regarding how they have lived. This framework integrates theories of optimal human development, positive mental functioning, and life cycle theories. Researchers like Vásquez highlight that recent studies have identified some fundamental components intrinsically linked to the concept of psychological well-being:

- a. Affection (positive and negative).
- **b.** Overall life satisfaction.
- c. Specific satisfaction in particular domains or areas (Gómez et al., 2009).

## SELF-REFERENTIAL EXPERIENCES AND SOCIAL EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Popular beliefs suggesting that children are inherently happy or happier than adults are challenged by this study. Children attribute meanings to a broad range of experiences, revealing a complex structure rooted in recognizing their emotions and relationships with others. This contrasts with studies showing that the range of happiness among children, adolescents, and adults is similar (Gómez et al., 2009). Children's ideas about happiness reflect various dimensions, demonstrating the construction of concepts with valuable levels of complexity aligned with a eudaimonic view of happiness. This perspective is intriguing because it extends beyond pleasure to include life satisfaction elements related to cultural and social relationships.

### EUDAIMONIC SCENARIOS AND PRACTICES OF OF HAPPINESS

Positive psychology aims to shift focus from merely repairing life's worst aspects to building positive qualities (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, as cited in Vásquez, 2009). The children in this study illustrate the opportunity and resourcefulness in finding happy contexts through scenarios and practices.

Vásquez and Hervás (2008) highlight children's need to:

- **a.** Maintain a view of the world and social environment as benevolent and safe.
- **b.** Preserve a self-image as good and worthy of respect (acceptance of one-self in both positive and negative aspects, emphasizing the positive).
- **c.** Believe that the world is predictable, controllable, and meaningful.
- **d.** Believe in one's ability to control the world and being motivated, goal-oriented, and continuously growing. This underscores the importance of perceived safe environments that offer opportunities to be, express thoughts and emotions openly, make choices, and build secure emotional bonds.

In this context, besides the relationship with their family, interactions with peers provide another undeniable source of well-being and happiness for children (Gómez et al., 2009). Play and activities in open spaces are enriched by experiences with family, friends, and even acquaintances.



# ARGUMENTS AND CRITERIA FOR HAPPINESS IN THE CONTEXT OF EMOTIONAL BONDS

Current studies identify various arguments and criteria children and adolescents use to understand happiness. For example, Höher et al. (2011) highlight relevant categories such as family, feelings, friendship, self-reference, activities, relationships, material needs satisfaction, and school. These categories align with the results of this study, but with greater detail in explaining happiness, including personal attribution and social perceptions influenced by social realities and contextual characteristics.

Lyubomirsky argues that activities leading to a state of flow are beneficial because they are inherently enjoyable and fulfilling. As such experiences are positive and gratifying, people naturally want to repeat them. Therefore, school experiences should be rewarding enough to make students eager to repeat them.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

The children participating in the study have developed meanings that reveal a complex framework. They interpret happiness through their experiences, identifying reasons for both happiness and unhappiness. They find happiness in the ability to simply be happy, as well as through achievements, self-confidence, and engaging in activities they consider fun according to criteria and symbols. On the other hand, they associate unhappiness with experiences of loss, punishment, or feeling responsible for adults' situations.

#### Criteria for evaluating happiness include:

- a. Well-being.
- **b.** Building emotional bonds.
- c. Academic achievements.
- d. Personal and family health.
- e. Feeling powerful.
- f. Meeting economic needs.

Additionally, bodily manifestations such as gestures and behaviors are considered criteria, as well as age—children believe they are happier than adults due to fewer problems and less boredom.

Symbols of happiness can be classified into contexts, actions, and qualities, while unhappiness is associated with situations and feelings. Consequently, positive emotions related to the past, such as gratitude, forgiveness, and appreciation, are vital to a happy existence, as are positive emotions related to the future, such as optimism, faith, and trust (Carter, 2011).

In school dynamics, children's happiness is linked to daily experiences with peers in academic and recreational activities, supported by a secure family environment. There is no significant correlation between happiness and the relationship with teachers, but with satisfaction with academic achievements. This contrasts with the limited scope of the school curriculum, highlighting the importance of "developing emotional, social, and intellectual skills, as these may be as equally or more important for success in life" (Fernández, O. & Luquez, P., & Leal, E. (2010, p.4).



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