

Joy in Learning: When Children Feel Good and Realize They Learn

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Both in research and in the Swedish curricula, positive emotions such as joy, pleasure and desire are said to stimulate learning. However, it is not clear what the meaning of joy is in relation to learning. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to gain knowledge about the essential meanings of the phenomenon joy in learning for children aged 9 and 12 years in compulsory school. The questions are as follows: What meanings constitute the phenomenon joy in learning in the current context? What implications do the findings have for teaching? The study is phenomenological and is based on interviews with or written stories by the participating children. The findings indicate how joy stimulates learning and emerges when children understand and ‘own’ their learning process. Teachers are important as ‘facilitators’ for joy in learning through being supportive and inspiring. Joy in learning during lessons is related to joy and friendship during school breaks. Teachers’ decisive importance for joy is discussed in relation to various modalities of pedagogical contact. Conclusions can be drawn that school breaks need attention from a learning perspective and that children need teacher support to understand their learning process.

Keywords: Compulsory school, emotions, joy in learning, life world, phenomenology

1. Introduction

Joy and related concepts – such as pleasure, desire, interest and motivation – have been used frequently in Swedish curricula for compulsory school since the 1960s. Describing teaching and learning, these concepts have sometimes been used in conjunction with words such as work, creativity and growing. In addition, there is research in many areas (sociology, psychology, educational science) where joy is referred to as stimulating learning. As a result, joy seems to be important in teaching; however, it is still not obvious what joy in learning through school teaching means.

Thoughts that are spontaneously raised concern taking part in easy and entertaining teaching, getting involved in a topic or project, or feeling contentment and self-assurance when you learn something. Impetus and willingness to acquire knowledge are linked to several factors. And according to research, joy is one of them (see, for example, Rantala & Määttä, 2012). Thus a study on what constitutes joyful learning in school is justified. Based on the children's own experiences, this knowledge contributes not only an understanding of but also a promotion of joy in planning and implementation of lessons in the school.

In the current curriculum – Curriculum for Compulsory School, Preschool Class and Leisure Home (Lgr 11) (2019, p. 9) – the terms "desire to learn" and "the joy of growing" are found. The terms have a clear link to the concept of education in the sense of lifelong learning. According to the curriculum, the purpose of learning in the school is not only to gather knowledge that can be useful for the rest of life but also to understand how learning happens and how continued, lifelong learning is stimulated. This can be referred to as a meta-learning: learning how to learn. Such a future perspective that suggests the importance of school for the individual's continued learning reinforces the importance of, through research, gaining knowledge of what it means to feel joy in learning.

2. Previous research about joy in learning

The research area that deals with joy related to learning is very extensive, with links to several subject areas, such as psychology, sociology and ethics. Joy can be understood in relation to desire and interest (Williams & Bauer, 2006), socio-emotional aspects (Sriprakash, 2009) and to entertainment (Kazanci & Okan, 2009). Concepts such as motivation, grit, emotion, well-being, enjoyment and justice are relevant. The area addresses how children are influenced by their will, ability, feelings and morals. Central to this study are socio-emotional aspects, creativity and motivation. A tension within the area is joy as motivation to work harder and joy that makes learning feel effortless (Kazanci & Okan, 2009). Emanating from the American psychologist Angela Duckworth's research, the concept of grit is a kind of motivation that can be explained as a fighting spirit and the ability to set long-term goals. In research on emotions, many differentiate between positive and negative emotions. Emotions affect motivation. However, the connection is complicated in that both positive emotions (such as joy) and negative emotions (such as fear of punishment) are said to increase

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motivation. In a study describing emotions in relation to homework in math (Else-Quest, Hyde & Hejmadi, 2008), examples of positive emotions are joy and pride, while frustration and stress are regarded as negative. In this study, the positive feeling of joy is in focus. Joy is not limited to certain understandings. Rather, the participants' own interpretations of joy form the basis of their stories.

A large part of the research deals with emotions overall and how different emotions can affect child motivation, self-esteem and learning (Meyer & Turner, 2002; Schutz & DeCuir, 2002; Schutz & Lanehart, 2002; Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007). The researchers outline how emotions, cognition and motivation need to work together in learning. Immordino-Yang and Damasio (2007) observe how brain-damaged individuals, despite their injury, have the ability to reason logically, while the impact of the injury on the emotional sphere leads to an impaired ability to make decisions in different situations. The study shows that cognition is not enough for knowledge to be useful. Meyer and Turner (2002) report results from surveys in classrooms where several methods are used and where both child and teacher perspectives are included. Having examined the interaction between teacher and child, they show how the teacher's behaviour indicates values and perceptions, which in turn regulate the interaction between emotion, cognition and motivation.

Rantala and Määttä (2012) specifically examined the joy of learning through an ethnographic study in which schoolchildren (7 to 8 years) were observed for two years. Data consisted of video recordings, photographs from the teaching and interviews with children. Through the analysis, ten meanings of the joy of learning emerged. According to the study, one of the factors that promotes joy is success. Consequently, teachers should divide the learning into different steps where it becomes concrete that the child has learned something and can feel satisfied. Other factors that give joy are having adequate time for tasks, having the freedom to make certain choices, being able to be active and being stimulated by play. The children need adequate challenges that they can manage with support, and they should not be compared to each other academically. Because joy is created in the specific context, different strategies are needed to achieve it. Finally, the relationships in the class and the individual children's status in the group affect the joy of learning. Thus social interaction and individual stimulus and performance are the basis for the joy. The importance of relationships is an aspect alluded to by several studies.

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The studies that highlight the importance of relationships for the joy in learning (Meyer & Turner, 2002; Seifert, 2004; Tobin, Ritchie, Oakley, Mergard & Hudson, 2013) have slightly different orientations and motivations for the importance of relationships. Meyer and Turner (2002) outline the emotions intertwine with the interaction in the classroom. The teachers' way of interacting with the children when giving instructions and the children's attitude and behaviour were understood as important for the motivation to learn. Teachers showing their feelings and beliefs when giving instructions can also enhance children's motivation. The relationship between emotions, motivation and cognition is clearly expressed in the text. In addition, beliefs and attitudes seem to contribute to the interaction. Seifert (2004) has a theoretical point of view and places the emphasis on the teacher's function of being supportive and helpful in the interaction with the child. In this way, the teacher can contribute to the child's self-confidence, and thereby stimulate motivation and learning. Tobin et al. (2013) draw attention to the dialogic relationship in the teacher-child interaction by studying what is said in conversations. Learning is stimulated when conversations flow through the involvement of both children and teachers and when characterized by humour. Moreover, the study shows that children or teachers exercising power through making other actors passive spectators can counteract learning. The use of drama is cited as a means to elicit humour and laughter in teaching. However, the researchers emphasize that it is not the activity itself but the presence of laughter and joy that contributes to learning and a high quality of teaching.

Meyer and Turner (2002) highlight that teachers' values have an impact on relationships, feelings and learning. In some studies, justice is presented as the basis for joy in learning (Ehrhardt-Madapathi, Pretsch & Schmitt, 2018; Peter & Dalbert, 2010). In a longitudinal study of systematic observations, Erhardt-Madapathi et al. (2018) problematize the concept of justice, which can be understood in many different ways. Their findings about fairness in pedagogy and in the interaction between child and teacher indicate that the experience of justice is subjective. Educational aspects of justice such as encouraging learning through appropriate tasks and relevant support can entail that the teacher must give more attention to children with a lower level of joy of learning. Thus children who are sensitive to justice aspects can feel unfairly treated, which affects their joy of learning. Based on a survey study with children, Peter and Dalbert (2010) highlight the importance of the subjective experience of justice, arguing that general criteria and principles cannot be applied without regard to the individual child's experience. Another longitudinal study, by Pretsch et al.

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(2016), conducted with an experimental group shows how justice aspects affect learning. Both those who receive and those who do not have privileges, in the end, experience negative emotions that counteract learning.

In research not only fairness but also values emerge as significant for joy in learning. Two studies on the subject of mathematics exemplify this: Else-Quest et al. (2008) and Noack (2004). Both studies examine the values that children express in relation to the values expressed in the home, with a correlation shown in both studies. Else-Quest et al. (2008) investigate how homework in mathematics gives rise to different emotions, and both positive and negative emotions are linked to how the children perform on tests. Children's attitudes and conceptions about different subjects and their own abilities are thus developed in harmony with the home. However, Noack (2004) emphasizes that despite the correlation, the school has opportunities to influence. Another aspect that emerges in this study is that it is the behaviour of the mothers, rather than the values they express verbally, that influence the children. The teacher's significance as a role model is problematised by, for example, Sanderse (2013).

Different kinds of activities underlie joy in a number of studies. Often these are aesthetic and laboratory activities, but they can also be linked to specific subjects, such as Swedish and mathematics. Technology and digitalisation are also elements that are expressed in research as motivation enhancement. For example, photovoice is used in connection with language learning (Graziano, 2011). The basic idea is that someone who does not have power should take photos and tell what they show from their point of view. In this way, the communication becomes urgent and can contribute to language learning. In the study, student teachers were co-researchers when they completed language teaching in primary school. The material analysed consisted of children's photos and notes. The result shows that the work with photovoice promoted emotions such as meaningfulness, joy and pride. Another example is a study on programming in mathematics education for deaf children, where comparisons of tests before and after teaching showed that children's joy and self-esteem were promoted (Deveci Topal, Coban Budak & Kolburan Gecer, 2017). Another study of interviews and children's diary notes from lessons in science demonstrates that exciting laboratory exercises can provide feelings of joy that enhance learning (King, Ritchie, Sandhu & Henderson, 2015). In a study with a teacher's perspectives, Williams and Bauer (2006) reveal that the choice

of literature can give children motivation, joy and self-assurance. There are also studies on how aesthetic inputs such as dance, music and drama can bring joy (Greene-Gilbert, 2006; Zitomer, 2016). In most of the studies addressing specific activities, there are different expressions that the choice of activity can provide: self-esteem, belonging and security. Thus there is a connection between creativity, joy and security.

3. Aim and research questions

Previous research indicates the importance of emotions for learning, but only one study focuses specifically on the meanings of the joy of learning. Joy is connected to different aspects of children's well-being and motivation to learn. However, the meanings of joy in relation to learning are unclear, which motivates this study.

The purpose of this study is to gain knowledge about the essential meanings of the phenomenon joy in learning for children aged 9 and 12 years in compulsory school.

The questions are as follows: What meanings constitute the phenomenon joy in learning in the current context? What implications do the findings have for teaching?

4. Methodology

The study is phenomenological and inspired by the approach of reflective lifeworld research (RLR) (Dahlberg, Dahlberg & Nyström, 2008). The phenomenon joy in learning is studied from the lifeworlds of children: how they experience joy. In RLR, the phenomenon's essential meanings are sought, which means those that are understood by the variations in different contexts in the material appear relatively stable. By expressing the essential meanings, the phenomenon studied can be distinguished from other related phenomena, and the relationship between different themes of meaning is made visible. One ambition in this approach is to provide clarity about the phenomenon at both an abstract and a concrete level by explaining the meanings and exemplifying them with the help of the data. RLR is most common in caring science, but it can also be advantageously used in educational science. The methodology offers epistemological justifications for a reflective attitude in research.

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In phenomenological research, attention is focused on the phenomenon of joy in learning by way of e.g. interviews or narratives. Knowledge of the phenomenon is obtained through the participants' experience of it in specific contexts (van Manen, 2016). It is the participants' way of relating to the environment and how the phenomenon appears to them that allows the researcher to take part through interviews and narratives. The phenomenon is its essences, which can be revealed through the research process between the researcher and the phenomenon (Dahlberg et al., 2008). The intentionality – that consciousness is always directed towards something – is a concept that has significance in phenomenological research (van Manen, 2016). The direction is towards something (object, person or other), and this something means something.

A working strategy for addressing the phenomenon was that participants were asked to relate or write about situations in which they had felt joy. In my study, it was relevant to see if, for example, it was the teacher, other children, a school subject or activity mentioned in connection with joy.

Another concept that has significance for the study is intersubjectivity: that the individual shares his or her existence in the world with other people (van Manen, 2016). On the one hand, intersubjectivity can impact how children experience joy, because their own experience is based on how they are treated by others in the environment. On the other hand, intersubjectivity is important for the research process in the researcher's quest to understand the participant's lifeworld. Our experiences are based in a common world; but at the same time, each person has his or her unique understanding of it. In the research process, the researcher must be open to the participants' experiences (Dahlberg et al., 2008; van Manen, 2016).

4.1 Participants and data

Initially, the plan was to use children's written stories. However, it was decided to interview the younger children (9 years) and allow the older ones (12 years) to write texts. The choice was made so that the writing ability would not limit the result. The younger the participating children are, the more difficult it is to understand their experiences and to access their perspectives. Not only the children's linguistic ability, but also the researcher's ability to communicate with them will be of significance. A problem with interviewing children is the short time span before they lose focus.

Moreover, it is important to often ask for clarifications and examples because children can have quite different perspectives than adults. Ethical research guidelines have been followed, and informed consent from parents or legally authorized representatives for all participating children were collected.

The empirical material consists of 12 essays from children aged 12 years and 7 interviews with children aged 9 years. There is an even distribution between the sexes; and the children are from two schools in two locations, one smaller and one larger. The selection was made to get as rich a variety of contexts as possible. In the search for the essence, it is important to obtain a great variety and many nuances in the data (Dahlberg et al., 2008). The concept joy is defined by the children's narratives of their experiences of joy in learning. It is not the joy in school in general that is demanded, but the joy that is experienced in learning situations during lessons. The children have been asked to describe situations when they feel joy in school work. They have also answered questions about how they express joy to others (if it is visible), and whether they think joy is important and why. The opposite of joy, feeling sad, was included in the assignment formulation for the essay that the older children wrote. Thus it might be relevant to gain an understanding of what it is that makes them sad in order to understand what joy in learning means. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed. In reviewing meanings with concrete examples from the empirical data, children are indicated by R (voice) for those interviewed and numbers based on the order in which they were transcribed, and S (writing) for those who wrote texts followed by a number based on the order they were read in.

4.2 Analysis

The analysis has been made on the basis of lifeworld theory, but otherwise no specific theories are used in the analysis of the empirical data, which is allowed to speak for itself. The goal of the analysis is to express the phenomenon's essential meanings, which, despite different contexts, do not vary but are relatively stable as a characteristic of "joy in learning". Dahlberg (2006) describes the essential meanings as the phenomenon's "style of being" (p. 18). To access the essentials, openness and reflection in the analysis process are required. The researcher has his or her own preunderstanding of the phenomenon, more or less clearly, but such understanding must be restrained and combined with openness to the participants' experiences. One sign of restraining is when the

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results surprise. For example, when the children communicated about justice, it was a surprising association with joy. A way to restrain one's own bias is to discuss one's results with colleagues. This has been done in the present study. In addition, the analysis has been conducted over a long period to ensure there were opportunities to reflect thoroughly on the emerging meanings.

Reflection is central in the analysis process in the RLR approach. However, the empirical data must be read several times to present a picture of the whole and, at the same time, absorb different parts of the material. Subsequently, meaning-bearing units are highlighted; and, finally, based on the patterns that the units form, the essence is formulated. The meaning-carrying units can be single words, sentences or entire paragraphs, depending on what emerges in the participants' stories. For example, different subjects that the children mention related to joy can be collected, but also explanations of how someone finds it joyful to use the knowledge. Parts of the data can be brought together to test different patterns. For example, one pattern can be when children are engaged in something and joy emerges. Often the boundaries between different patterns are fluid, and they need to be tested repeatedly in order for an essential meaning structure to eventually be formulated. Contradictions in data, such as challenges that are devastating for some but bring joy to others, must be carefully reflected upon.

In the presentation of the results, the essential meanings of the phenomenon of joy in learning are presented first. The essence is formulated at an abstract, overall level and indicates how different meanings relate to each other. Through this description, the phenomenon gets a structure and can be distinguished from nearby phenomena, such as motivation or interest. The result is further concretized by the meaning elements, describing and exemplifying the phenomenon through abstracts or quotations from the material. The quality of the research is based on a time-consuming and very careful analysis where the formulation of the essence on the abstract and the examples on the concrete level add important knowledge about the phenomenon.

According to Dahlberg et al. (2008), the empirical results can be interpreted in a way that further illuminates the meanings. In this study, the empirical findings are interpreted by previous research and in relation to different modalities of pedagogical contact (van Manen, 2012). The interpretation is motivated due to the vital role that the teacher has as a facilitator of joy in learning, which is an

essential meaning in the findings. Relating the meanings to pedagogical contact offers the possibility to understand and work with the meanings in teaching practice. The five different modalities of pedagogical contact are termed familial, deferential, valuing, responsive and devotional, and they will be explained continuously when they are referred to. The modalities are described as characteristic of the teacher's pedagogical sensitivity and provide ways to touch the children, not physically, but with being and mind.

5. Findings

Though joy in learning is essentially a feeling within the children, it can also be visible to others. The joy is needed in learning because it makes children's work easier, and thus stimulates continued learning.

It is joyful to learn. It appears when children *understand*, "*own*" and get *support* in their learning process. Either they gain insight into and understand their learning through their own discoveries of having learned something or by someone else advocating progress or praise. Collaborating with others, being able to create, fantasize, think independently, or make different choices bring joy and are different ways to "own" the learning process. Children feel joy when learning is easy, but also when challenging tasks are manageable. When children are challenged, it is important that they have access to support and assistance, not least to keep a joyful attitude towards learning. An interest in topics, content or activities in teaching gives joy and supports learning. Either the child already has an interest, or it arises in teaching. The working methods need to be exciting, varied or different to support joy in learning.

Joy in learning is related to the learning context and is experienced when friends and community make children feel safe, valuable and respected. School breaks not only meet children's basic needs for fellowships with friends but also for food, exercise and fresh air. The home must support basic needs such as sleep but also contribute to motivation and interest. If there are problems during school breaks or in the home, the joy in learning is disturbed.

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The teacher is a main facilitator of joy in learning since several (not all) of the meanings can be stimulated through the teaching. It is about showing commitment to creating interest, being encouraging, supportive, fair and stimulating relationship, as well as offering forms of work that vary, challenge and provide room for creativity and choice.

The essential meaning of joy in learning is constituted by the following meaning elements:

- Joy can be visible but is usually inside and makes work easier.
- The child understands, “owns” and receives support in the learning process.
- The child has and discovers interests, can be creative and independent.
- The child is part of a community.
- The teacher provides several of the conditions for the joy in learning.
- The child develops good living habits with support at home and at school.

5.1 Joy can be visible but is usually inside and makes work easier

Children relate that laughing together and doing fun things can bring joy. However, joy in learning does not need to be visible. It can be within the children: “...Then I will be happy, even though I do not show outwards so that the others will notice something. I have it inside instead” (R4).

The joy facilitates the work and creates the desire to continue: “A little laugh is good in school as well. [...] Because if you do not have fun at the lessons, there is not much feeling to learn something” (S4). The inner joy is most emphasized and can be likened to satisfaction, harmony and a willingness to learn more:

...then I just thought it was fun. And so when I have counted and it becomes that you just feel this I like, and this I just want to do, do, do all the time; and then it becomes like you learn that. (R10)

Regardless of whether the joy is visible or found within the children, they declare it is needed. In different ways, the children express that joy makes work easier for a variety of reasons. It is about feeling good, concentrating or realizing that they have learned and want to learn more.

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The joy that exists within the children can be problematic since it is difficult to know if it expresses itself differently than from laughter and if it has to be discovered in other ways. Perhaps the joy is visible even if the children do not smile. This is something the teacher must ascertain, and a strategy may simply be to ask the children questions.

Student teachers participating in a phenomenological study of professional ethics (Cronqvist, 2015) reveal how supervisors during internship function as role models. One of the meanings of being a role model that emerges is the ability to "read" the children. It is reasonable for experienced teachers to be able to notice in children's body language how they feel, but the strategy to ask can give the child an opportunity to explain why. In the study by Rantala and Määttä (2012), children's verbal statements, body movements, facial expressions and gestures are examined. Thus the joy can be captured in many different ways. However, they problematize the expressions and assert that, for example, a laugh does not have to mean that a child feels joy. This further reinforces the need to actually ask children and create relationships with them so that interpretations of their expressions become reliable.

It is not obvious how this kind of competence to "read" children can be understood in relation to a modality of contact (van Manen, 2012). Perhaps, all modalities of contact are relevant to the competence. Familial contact is the basic contact characterized by care and trust. Van Manen (2012) compares the contact to the safety children need to feel both at home and at school. The teacher's efforts to build relationships with the children are probably the most expedient in the endeavor to learn to "read" the children. Even devotional contact (van Manen, 2012) about seeing the child's specialness can be relevant to the competence of "reading" the children. This mode of contact is about the teacher's understanding that every child is unique and expresses itself in different ways. Van Manen (2012) exemplifies this mode of contact with stories about children who though capable are still indifferent to achievement in assignments. The contact is characterized by showing pedagogical love to especially vulnerable children, which can be questioned as love is a strong feeling. Expressing love to some vulnerable children can be problematic in the teacher profession, even if it is pedagogical love. Consequences of caring more for some of the children can, for ex-

ample, create feelings of envy or unfairness amongst others. Henriksen and Vetlesen (2013) advocate a balance between proximity and distance to ensure professionalism, which is relevant, not least, in contact with vulnerable children.

5.2 The child understands, “owns” and receives support in the learning process

Children relate how they feel joy when learning is easy, and joy comes with success or praise. At times, the children themselves discover that they have learned something through, for example, comparing themselves to younger siblings:

The math is also good, because then you feel joy because now I can do this. If you have siblings, younger siblings, then maybe they cannot do this; and then you feel joy because now I have learned something new. (R12)

In addition to joy arising through uncomplicated learning and success, it emanates from receiving support for more challenging modes of learning: “I love the English lessons, so we can choose what we want to do and then we get extra help and that's good” (S1).

As learning can be a rather arduous process, children face challenges. In such instances, they need help and support; and any progress must be made visible in order to bring joy (Rantala & Määttä, 2012). Children express many opportunities to gain insight into their learning. Sometimes they discover their learning themselves by comparing, for example, with what they knew before. Praise can make the learning visible or the teacher can help point out the knowledge. In learning, children need to be challenged, but on a suitable level, which is difficult for the teacher to find. The joy lies mainly in the children coping with the challenge and not developing negative feelings such as frustration or stress (Else-Quest, Hyde & Hejmadi, 2008). Here, valuing contact that emphasizes children's achievements and success is relevant (van Manen, 2012). Even when the children are not especially successful, the teacher needs to show interest in their work. Giving children attention can ultimately affect their self-esteem. Of course, it can be difficult to feel successful when others are constantly more successful. Rantala and Määttä (2012) underline the importance of children feeling success, of making different choices in their learning and not being compared academically to others. In order to use valuing contact in a way that supports children, the teacher needs to have strategies to avoid comparing children. Rantala and Määttä (2012) also allude to the importance of

children needing time to complete their tasks. Many aspects of "owning" the learning also emerge in the various writings in curricula where the idea of a lifelong learning is expressed. For example, Lgr11 (2019) affirms that the purpose of the school is that every child:

- Develops an increasing responsibility for their studies, and
- Develops the ability to self-assess their results and to put their own and others' assessments in relation to their own work performance and conditions.

The result shows that meta-learning, learning about your own learning, is important.

5.3 The child has and discovers interests, can be creative and independent

Sometimes, the children can have previous interests in and motivation for topics, content or activities. However, they can also receive new interests and discoveries through the teaching. By not communicating exactly what will happen during the day, the teacher can create a general feeling of anticipation and excitement. Examples of the opposite, that teachers are boring and that teaching becomes tedious, are also expressed. R7 declares that geography is fun and specifically mentions the discovery of maps: "Because, this thing that you learn to follow a map, you learn to follow something." Different topics can bring joy, and sometimes certain activities, work methods or specific content are specified both in relation to topics but also without links. It is not always clear if the joy is already present or if the teaching has been inspiring. But there are examples of how interests are strengthened through the home:

Yes, you can practice at home all the time like I usually do when mum writes some things on paper and then I figure them out as fast as I can and so. And then I get to make mathematical calculations and things like that. (R10)

The material provides many examples of how children are given the opportunity to be creative and use their imagination, for example within the subject of art, in laboratory exercises and by writing their own stories. Being given the opportunity to think independently brings joy.

The children's understanding plays a role in what is deemed interesting and what they are thus motivated for, even if the teacher does not make it interesting. Understanding what creates joy

entails, among other things, that the homes are involved in stimulating children's different interests (Else-Quest et al., 2008; Noack, 2004). Despite the importance of the home, Noack (2004) emphasizes the influence of the school; and there are many statements in the empirical study that show that interests are constantly being renewed and that the school is important.

In this context, both valuing contact and responsive contact is relevant (van Manen 2012). The aim of valuing contact is to make the child feel valuable and capable. Giving them tasks that challenge their need to be creative and think independently is a way to show trust in their capability. Responsive contact (van Manen 2012) means to see the uniqueness of the children, to encourage them and to be responsible for them. Efforts to make learning interesting and joyful to children depend on a contact that is responsive to their needs as individuals, and it serves to encourage them to develop even when learning concerns something not to their taste. Aesthetic and laboratory elements are emphasized as inspiring in several studies (Deveci Topal et al., 2017; Greene-Gilbert, 2006; Zitomer, 2016). The study of photovoice (Graziano, 2011) provides examples of elements of teaching that can stimulate both by being different and giving room for creativity. Overall, it seems to be the variation and activities that happen on a single occasion that can contribute to the joy in general because the children have something to look forward to and can then be united around as a common memory. The children refer to activities such as class trips and study visits; but the focus is on activities in the classroom.

This study and previous research show a considerable array of what can arouse interest and joy in children. Though teachers may find it difficult to constantly have to offer interesting teaching with creative elements, the study's results show that such teaching is not only achieved through larger projects but also with small means in everyday life.

5.4 The child is part of a community

Being part of a community, having friends, is noticed in the context of school breaks, but is expressed as something necessary also in learning: "Discussing within groups has also made me happy. Because then I get to know how others think and then I can tell myself how I think. So talking and telling and learning make me happy" (S5). The children not only relate joy but also

explain, as in the following quote, the realities of not having friends and when there are conflicts, or something else that disturbs the joy:

Mm, you get happy having friends. So, when you have been on break then you know like this, no, I have been alone, it is boring. I am not happy about it. And then when you have friends on break, so yes, yes, I am very happy to have friends who can play with me. And then you get excited and just want to work. (R10)

The joy of having someone to be with during school breaks and to feel connected with others in school is fundamental to well-being and learning. The joy that is created on the breaks with friends becomes important for how the work progresses in the classroom. When the children feel valuable and respected, learning becomes easier. They can discuss with each other and cooperate better in the lessons.

The research that brings together relationships and joy in learning is mostly about how the teacher interacts with children in the classroom through, for example, instructions (Meyer & Turner, 2002), dialogue (Tobin et al., 2013) or support (Seifert, 2004). In studies on how relationships are created during school breaks (Alerby, 2003; Brez & Sheets, 2017; Clarke, 2018) the connection between relationships during breaks and joy in learning is not clear, but it can be discerned. In Alerby's (2003) phenomenological study, children's experiences are articulated in drawings and comments on the drawings. The study shows that the school breaks and the relationships that are developed and maintained there are of great importance to the children's experiences of school. Consequently, the question arises how teachers are able to benefit from the positive experiences from the breaks in the classroom.

The familial contact (van Manen, 2012) is important during both breaks and lessons. To be part of a community is something the children need to feel the whole day, not only during lessons. Van Manen (2012) characterizes the contact as a unity of living together. The feeling of trust is needed for children to dare to challenge themselves. The study by Rantala and Määttä (2012) refers to the importance of play for learning. Perhaps, the play can work on both lessons and breaks to develop relationships, and thus stimulate the joy of learning. Play is very central to the preschool's operations, but is not as obvious in the school's activities.

5.5 The teacher provides several of the conditions for the joy in learning

Based on the children's narratives, it is difficult to describe exactly what the teacher's role is in terms of the joy in learning. This is because most of what emerges about the learning process, about content and working methods, and about the community, really falls back on whether the teacher provides opportunities for or becomes an obstacle to the joy of learning: "There was a time when everyone was allowed to sit in group rooms except me, and I had to sit alone" (S9). When the child asks why she has to sit alone, the teacher says that it is tempting to talk in a group room. The child replies that it may happen to the others as well; but the teacher asks the child to continue working, and the child concludes the story about the situation as follows: "Then she goes away and she makes me feel bad" (S9). This situation shows how the teacher's approach to the child takes away the joy. The child cannot be part of the community, feels diminished, and the focus is on negative emotions that counteract the learning that could have taken place. The children convey that the teacher needs to be, for example, kind, patient and fair.

The importance of the teacher being fair is revealed in several studies (Ehrhardt-Madapathi et al., 2018; Peter & Dalbert, 2010; Pretsch et al., 2016). In this study, it emerged clearly in the data from the older participants, but not from the younger ones. For example, one of the older children communicates how a friend is downgraded and offended by it. This example is consistent with the results of the study conducted by Pretsch et al. (2016), where even those who receive privileges are negatively affected in their learning. The teacher's ability to be fair has an impact on the learning of the whole class.

It is not clear why the fairness of the teacher is most evident among the older children. Perhaps feeling discontent with the teacher makes the teacher's role visible, as it is more difficult to discover the importance of various factors in a context where everything works well. It may also be that older children with longer schooling experience develop an awareness of the teacher's importance. The children not only refer to many qualities that the teacher needs to have, but also underline the teacher's attitude and actions as important for the joy in learning. Long lists of desirable traits of teachers can be difficult to relate to. They give the feeling that the teacher should be perfect and angelic, which is strange because teachers are ordinary people with bad days. Nevertheless, it is fair that the teacher acts as a role model for the children.

There is a lot of research regarding teachers as role models and the teachers' self-awareness of their attitude to the children, indicating different views on what it means to be a role model (see, for example, Carr, 2006; Osguthorpe, 2008; Sanderse, 2013). In a study on professional ethics with student teachers as participants (Cronqvist, 2015), some supervisors during internship are described as role models. The students highlight their ability to create relationships with the children. One of the students asserts that the supervisor asks the children how they are doing, in school or during leisure time, is genuinely interested in the answers, and asks questions that could have been asked to a colleague (p.108). The student teacher's comparison with colleagues is seen as a sign that the teacher shows the children respect. Deferential contact means to show respect and that the children are aware of their right to be treated fairly and equally (van Manen, 2012). The contact is not always especially visible but is more like a supportive atmosphere.

5.6 The child develops good living habits with support in home and school

School breaks are a significant part of the school's activities, both when it comes to creating joy that "spills over" onto learning and to satisfy basic needs of food, movement, fresh air and friendship. These contribute to well-being and joy, which in turn stimulates learning: "Another important thing is that you get a break, because then you get fresh air and do not get hungry and tired" (S10).

Sleep is also mentioned as an important factor for feeling joy in school. Several of the basic needs can be partially satisfied during breaks, but the importance of the home is evident in the material. The children's expressions show that their life situation as a whole is important for whether they experience joy in learning. After one of the interviews, when the recording was turned off, a girl talked about how the anxiety in the home of a younger sibling made her feel anxious during the school day; thus she did not feel joy.

Collaboration between the home and school becomes very important in this perspective. Though the school cannot change the children's home situation, knowledge of it can be important. Even in this essential meaning, the teacher is a facilitator, as there can be significant differences in how contact with the children's homes works.

During school breaks, the children's teachers are usually not present. Consequently, the communication between adults that are present at these times and the children's teachers needs to be highlighted as the breaks are very important to the children's joy in learning.

6. Discussion and conclusions

The relationship between cognition, emotion and motivation is central to the study. The children's descriptions of their experiences illuminate that when the joy emerges in the learning situation, they want to work and to learn. Joy becomes a driving force for them; therefore, joy is needed. The stories are mainly about the inner joy, even if the external joy of being able to laugh together also exists. Inner joy can be problematic to recognize, but it makes a pedagogical contact with children valuable in teaching practice (van Manen, 2012).

The findings in this study clearly show how important the teacher is in facilitating the children's possibilities to experience joy in their learning. The teacher's role is most explicit in the empirical data from the older children, but it is also expressed by the other participants. Generally, the teachers' competence to "read" and stimulate the children's joy is crucial to support their learning. This competence can partly be developed in teaching practice through five modalities of contact with the children, as distinguished by van Manen (2012). The five modalities can be difficult to separate. But even if they are similar, they can inspire the teacher to select appropriate contact based on purpose. The most basic contact, the familial, creates trust and wellbeing. This contact and the devotional contact, paying attention to especially vulnerable children, support the essential meaning that children need to be part of a community in school, which can be used by the teachers in their task to promote relationships. In relationships, the teacher also needs to maintain justice, which is not so easy. Justice is problematized in several studies (Ehrhardt-Madapathi, Pretsch & Schmitt, 2018; Peter & Dalbert, 2010) indicating that it is perceived subjectively and that some children are more sensitive than others to injustice. Here, the teacher needs to develop the deferential contact, thereby emphasizing the children's right to be treated fairly and equally. Based on the findings, we can conclude that the familial contact needs to be stimulated throughout the whole day and not only during lessons. Therefore, cooperation between different staff groups and activities during the day must be further developed.

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The teacher's function is also to support the children in their learning process, that is, to help them to see that they have learned and develop a meta-learning. Studies on the interaction between teacher and child (Meyer & Turner, 2002; Seifert, 2004; Tobin et al., 2013) contribute in this regard, together with the concrete findings on how the teacher can support the learning process that emerges in the study by Rantala and Määttä (2012). Different strategies can be supplemented with the valuing contact (van Manen, 2012). Even when the child does not succeed very well with a task, the teacher "touches" the child by being supportive, encouraging and establishing self-confidence. The child's feeling of being capable is crucial to the life-long learning.

Another function the teacher has is to inspire and to engage the children. This can be done by presenting the content in an exciting way, by offering children creative ways of working, or by providing the opportunity to make choices. In combination with the valuing contact, the teacher can use deferential and responsive contact to inspire and to engage the children (van Manen, 2012). A supporting atmosphere combined with a respectful view of the children as capable is helpful in developing self-confidence when the children need to be challenged in their learning, try new things and have the courage to make independent choices. The research presents a great many suggestions for different activities. However, as Tobin et al. (2013) emphasize, it is not the individual activity that is important for the joy to appear. In the data, children reveal how joy emerges when they do not know everything in advance or when they have to make different choices and figure out things on their own. Collectively, the five modalities of contact contribute to the child's self-confidence, which is related to opportunities to gain insight into its own learning process and to how the child is treated.

The study by Rantala and Määttä (2012) shares not only similarities with this study but also significant differences. They have observed what has emerged in the classroom environment. When the children in this study were asked to relate the joy in their learning, connections between different activities during the day emerged. According to the stories, relationships that were created and maintained during school breaks had significance for the joy in learning. Opportunities for movement, fresh air and other things that the breaks offered contributed to the children's well-being and joy during the lessons. The study has opened up to the children's experiences of their school day as a whole. Thus children's perspectives become valuable for breaking given patterns and must

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have consequences for how the work is conducted in schools. Although there are different staff groups with the children during their breaks and in the teaching, the results call for close cooperation between these groups to ensure that the emotions that are aroused during the break can be turned into something positive and bring joy in learning.

The findings show that the child's joy in learning is also affected by what happens outside school, for example, at home. This applies not only to their basic needs but also to the home's influence on interests and values (Else-Quest et al., 2008; Noack, 2004). Therefore, collaboration is needed between teaching, breaks and leisure-time centre (after-school recreational centre) within school, and between the home and the school.

Further research is needed to investigate how the different elements of the school day can strengthen each other. The teacher's ability to influence the breaks as a way of stimulating learning needs to be studied more closely. The leisure-time centre is not mentioned at all in the empirical study, probably depending on how the questions were asked. However, since the results show that the breaks have a great influence on joy in learning, both in terms of basic needs as well as relationships, then both the relation break – lesson and lesson – leisure-time centre need to be examined more closely.

As this study has but a few participants, it is not possible to understand why the teacher's significance becomes clearer to the older children. The study is limited by the fact that there is only one class each at the different stages. More schools or teaching groups of different ages would have been needed to ensure that the results were not governed by conditions in the individual classes. All essential meanings are consistently assured in the material; thus there is reliability. However, follow-up studies are needed to investigate whether the differences regarding the teacher's role are related to the age of the children or how the teacher works. Furthermore, the children's expressions of an ideal image of the teacher, combined with the fact that earlier research is unclear about what it means for teachers to be role models, entails that research is needed, as it is clear that the teacher's attitude makes a difference and affects the children's joy. Further exploration is needed to ascertain whether the driving force that children collectively use to describe joy can help them set long-term goals and develop the fighting spirit referred to as grit. The difficulties to understand a child's

expressions of joy that Rantala and Määttä (2012) allude to make it important to further study teacher's possibilities to "read" children's emotions.

In summary, the study provides knowledge about what joy in learning means for children aged 7 to 12 years. This results in several implications for the teaching practice (Cronqvist, 2021). The five modalities of pedagogical contact can contribute to the teacher's ability to get in touch with the children and create joy in learning. However, the findings raise a number of new questions that need to be explored in further research.

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