

ECER 2020 and 2021 Joy in learning – when children feel good and realize that they learn

Swedish curricula and research state that joy is important to motivate children and create interest in learning, not only in education, but also to maintain a lifelong learning. However, there is a lack of knowledge about what joy in learning means for students. This needs to be further studied and the purpose of this phenomenological study is to gain knowledge about what meanings the phenomenon joy in learning has for children aged 9 and 12 years in compulsory school. The questions are: What meanings constitute the phenomenon joy in learning? What implications do the findings have for teaching?

The importance of joy for motivation in education and lifelong learning according to previous research makes further knowledge about meanings of joy in learning and implications for teaching important in an international perspective.

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; Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007). The researchers describe how emotions, cognition and motivation need to work together in learning. One previous ethnographic study (Rantala & Määttä, 2012) specifically studies children's (7 to 8 years) joy of learning. Through the analysis ten meanings of the joy of learning emerged. One of the factors that according to the study, promotes joy is success. Teachers should therefore divide the learning into different steps where it becomes concrete that the child has learned something and can feel satisfied. Social interaction as well as individual stimulus and performance are the basis for the joy. The importance of relationships is an aspect that several studies point to (Meyer & Turner, 2002; Seifert, 2004; and Tobin, Ritchie, Oakley, Mergard, & Hudson, 2013). Tobin et al. (2013) draws attention to the dialogic relationship in the teacher-child interaction by studying what is said in the conversations. When the conversations flow so that both children and teachers are involved and when the conversation is characterized by humor, the learning is stimulated. The study also shows how learning can be counteracted by children or teachers exercising power and trying to make some of the participants, passive spectators not participating in the dialogue.

Meyer and Turner (2002) emphasize that teachers' values have an impact on relationships, feelings and learning and in some studies justice is presented as the basis for joy in learning (Ehrhardt-Madapathi, Pretsch & Schmitt, 2018 and Peter & Dalbert, 2010). Educational aspects of justice as encouraging learning through appropriate tasks and relevant support can mean that the teacher must give more attention to children with lower joy of learning. Thus, children who are sensitive to justice aspects can feel unfairly treated which affects their joy of learning. In some studies, it is different kinds of activities that underlie joy. Often these are aesthetic (Greene-Gilbert, 2006) and laboratory (King, Ritchie, Sandhu, & Henderson, 2015) activities in general, but they can also be linked to specific subjects such as Swedish (Williams and Bauer, 2006) and mathematics (Deveci Topal, Coban Budak & Kolburan Gecer, 2017). Technology and digitalisation are also elements that are expressed in research as motivation enhancement (Graziano, 2011). In most of the studies mentioned on specific activities, there are different expressions that the choice of activity can give self-esteem, belonging and security. Thus, there is a connection between creativity, joy and security.

Methodology, Methods, Research Instruments or Sources Used

The study is phenomenological and inspired by the approach of reflective life world research

(RLR) (Dahlberg, Dahlberg and Nyström, 2008). The phenomenon, joy in learning, is studied from the life worlds of children, how they experience joy. In RLR, the phenomenon's essential meanings are sought, which means those which, understood by the variations in different contexts in the material, appear relatively stable. 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, which the researcher is allowed to take part of through interviews and narratives. In my study, the empirical material consists of 12 essays from the older children (12 years) and seven interviews with the younger children (9 years). The choice was made so that the writing ability would not limit the result. 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.

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. Reflection is central in the analysis process in the RLR approach but the empirical data must be read through 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. According to Dahlberg et al. (2008), the empirical results can be interpreted in a way that further illuminates the meanings, which in this study have been made 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 a 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.

#### Conclusions, Expected Outcomes or Findings

The study confirms that joy is needed in learning since it makes children's work easier and thus stimulates continued learning.

Joy appears when children understand, "own" and get support in their learning process. The study shows the importance of discovering one's learning, either by oneself or with help, especially from the teacher who can show progress or just confirm the student by using different modalities of pedagogical contact. The teacher also needs to promote collaboration as well as ability to create, fantasize, to think independently or to make different choices as ways to "own" the learning process. Children feel joy when learning is easy but also tasks that are challenging can bring joy when they manage them. Therefore, when the students are challenged, the teacher must adapt the level based on the student's needs and provide support for the student. The study shows that not only lessons but the learning context as a whole, such as belonging to a community and feeling good in general, affect the joy of learning. This means that teachers and other adults in school must pay attention to the student's entire school day and cooperate with the home to support basic needs such as sleep. If there are problems during the breaks or in the home, the joy in learning is disturbed.

As we already know, the teacher is a main facilitator of joy in learning. The study shows the meanings of joy in learning on an overall abstract level, which in combination with concrete

examples from the data and application of various pedagogical contacts can provide guidance on what teachers need to promote in teaching to stimulate joy.

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