ROMANCING CHILDREN INTO DELIGHT: PROMOTING CHILDREN’S HAPPINESS IN THE EARLY PRIMARY GRADES

by

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Abstract

Happiness should be a fundamental aim of education. This philosophical assertion raises the practical question of how teachers generate happiness in their classroom programs while operating under the current paradigm of educational accountability. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the perspectives of early primary teachers, students, and parents on what makes a happy classroom. Data were collected through interviews of 12 teachers from public, independent, Waldorf, Froebel, and Montessori schools; over 72 hours of observation in eight early primary classrooms; interviews with 23 students (ages 3 to 8), drawing and photography with 64 students (ages 3 to 8); 66 parent surveys, and eight teacher exit interviews. Four cycles of analysis, including descriptive and conceptual approaches, resulted in the identification of five core conditions of happy classrooms: (a) relational pedagogy, (b) embodied learning, (c) pedagogical thoughtfulness (d) an ethos of happiness, and (e) an ethos of possibility. These five conditions were supported by 17 facets, which describe practical and conceptual ways to support pedagogical thinking and decision-making about children’s happiness in the complex worlds of busy classrooms. Five of the facets are spotlighted: (a) kids need to play, (b) stepping in stepping out, (c) sounds shape feelings and experience, (d) rhythms and routines, and (e) romancing children into delight. In addition, student and parent participants identified that play, positive friendships, time outdoors, experiences involving the arts, and experiences of positive feelings make children happy at school and when they are learning. The discussion centers on the role of teachers in establishing the tone of happy classrooms, considers the notion of strong pedagogy, discusses the generation of happiness in early primary classrooms in the form of lessons
to be learned from different pedagogical traditions, and argues that, above all, children’s interests, needs, and development should be a teacher’s first point of consideration for all decisions about instruction and learning in the classroom. The discussion concludes with implications for teaching professionals and offers suggestions for future research.
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Statement of Originality

I hereby certify that all of the work described within this thesis is the original work of the author. Any published (or unpublished) ideas and/or techniques from the work of others are fully acknowledged in accordance with the standard referencing practices.

Scott Frederick Hughes

August, 2013
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Happiness and education are, properly, intimately connected: Happiness should be an aim of education, and a good education should contribute significantly to personal and collective happiness. (Noddings, 2003, p. 1)

In this single, elegant sentence, Noddings describes how children should experience school and learning and what they need in order to live fully in the 21st century. In setting forth happiness as the primary outcome of the education of children, she clears away the clutter of curriculum, learning objectives, success criteria, anchor charts, and the compulsive need for evidence that collectively complicate classroom work. And, in doing so, she provides teachers with the most basic of questions to guide their decisions about children when they greet the hopeful faces of their students every morning: What will we do to be happy, today, in these moments of learning?

I read Nodding’s book Happiness in Education during my first term of doctoral studies at Queen’s University, Kingston, Ontario. Prior to graduate work, I was a classroom teacher. While my teaching was filled with numerous happy days, ones where my students and I delighted in each other’s company, it was also filled with difficult and
unhappy days. There were evenings when I would arrive home and, over a silent dinner, chastise myself for my utter lack of patience, for the tense pit that knotted inside my gut as I tried in vain to get my Grade 1 students to work quietly so as not to annoy the teacher next door, or for the pall of boredom that would descend upon my classroom like a dank cloud as we chanted—for the 100th time, all sitting crisscross applesauce on the hard carpet— *Today is Monday, yesterday was Sunday, tomorrow will be Tuesday; Today is Tuesday, yesterday was Monday, tomorrow will be Wednesday; Today is Wednesday, yesterday was Tuesday, tomorrow will be Thursday.*

The longer I taught the more I began to recognize a growing gap between the experiences and activities that brought my students and me to life in the classroom, and what we actually did. I found myself slipping easily into staffroom griping with colleagues. At my school, staffroom griping ran one of two ways: the assignment of blame to the government/board/parents/kids for our collective disillusionment with public education and our inability to do our jobs, or tales of victory in which we triumphed in a battle of wills over a student, or a parent, who threatened our authority. As a result I began to lose sight of children—the very reason why I became a teacher. I stopped seeing the things that I needed to see about my students in order to teach them well. As Fowler (2006) confesses in *A Curriculum of Difficulty*, “I was becoming like the teachers I used to criticize” (p. 13). Thus, I made the decision to step out of the classroom in order to reflect upon not only those forces that cause us to lose sight of children in busy classrooms, but to consider new ways of seeing children.
Reading Noddings for the first time was a relief. Here was an answer to the tensions that unsettled me as a classroom teacher: happiness. I felt a little like what a small crocus might feel as it pushes its way up through the hard ground of an early spring day: hopeful and filled with the promise, but needing the comfort of the warm sun—and a heck of a lot of other crocuses—to transform the post-winter ground from being something hard and brown to being something beautiful. Reading Noddings caused a lifting of weight from my shoulders and the loosening of a spring coiled tight within me, a result of working for many years within a system where accountability to ministry mandates often comes before kids. “Imagine that,” I thought to myself, “imagine if the first filter for all of our decisions about instruction was the happiness of our students. Imagine how differently we might talk about and see our children/parents/ourselves?”

The next thought was, “How do I do this? How does one do happiness as an aim in the early primary classroom?”

This dissertation is a direct response to that question: “How does one do happiness?” It is a direct response to Noddings’ assertion that happiness should be a fundamental aim of education. And, it reflects my aim to see children in a new light in order to imagine new ways of being in the classroom. In this way, this dissertation documents my transformation from being the teacher who I used to criticize, to becoming the teacher that I am meant to be.

In being a response to these personal and professional aims, this dissertation is also a reflection of a shift in my thinking that has occurred as I have strode and stumbled
my way through this graduate degree. I yearn for the comfort of finding ten simple steps to doing happiness; I am learning to recognize that doing happiness is much more about being happiness. And being is an infinitely more rich, varied, and complex thing than a recipe card of ten easy steps to personal bliss.

In recognizing this shift in my thinking, I also consider this dissertation to be a debut gesture as a teacher/scholar—an identity that will continue to emerge and take shape as I work through and into the post-Ph.D. phase of my career, always and ever as an educator. Classroom teaching and academic scholarship each carry their own unique bodies of knowledge and ways of knowing; it is not uncommon that these are viewed as being mutually exclusive. It is my aim to find ways to gather and share the knowledge and knowing of both, and to do so in a way that is mindful of the challenges and open to the possibilities unique to each.

The main question that guided this study was, “What makes a happy classroom?” It is important to point out, right from the beginning, that this study is not about defining, measuring, evaluating, or answering the questions of happiness that have perplexed and troubled humans for time immemorial. Indeed, stretching back in time, many, many people have written, sung, painted, and danced about happiness, in ways more wonderful and thoughtful than I could ever hope to articulate. During my data collection, I did not go into classrooms and evaluate whether they were happy classrooms, or whether the students were or were not happy. I did not employ any standard tests to determine the
happiness and well-being\(^1\) of the participants; I did not employ any form of standardized tests in any way.

You might well ask here: if this study was not about defining or measuring happiness, then what was it about?

This study was about pedagogy. This study was about how teachers and school communities from different pedagogical traditions do their work of teaching to promote student happiness at school and in learning. And this study was about finding ways to articulate a framework of thinking for teachers—especially those who work in pedagogically dull systems of education—who are seeking new ways to imagine their practice and new sources of inspiration from ways of being pedagogical to which they might not have previously been exposed. And finally, this study was about children and the fundamental experiences they need in their early primary days in order to live fully into their future.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to describe the pedagogical conditions that promote children’s happiness at school and in learning in the early primary grades. In addition, the purpose of this study was to seek a broad, cross-context perspective on the research questions by exploring different pedagogical traditions and contexts. Accordingly, I

\(^1\) In the literature addressed throughout this dissertation, well-being is spelled both with and without the hyphen. I will use the hyphen throughout this dissertation, with the exception of Gibbons and Silva (2011), who use the non-hyphenated spelling.
collected data from teachers, children, and parents in Waldorf, Froebel, Montessori, public, and independent schools in south-central and southeastern Ontario.

**Research Questions**

One main research question guided this study supported by two secondary research questions.

1. What makes a happy early primary classroom?

   - How do teachers promote children’s happiness in their early primary classrooms?

   - What makes children happy at school and in learning in the early primary grades?

**Definition of Terms**

The classroom and early primary education are two terms central to this study. A class *room [sic]* itself can neither be happy nor unhappy, but the children who learn in it can. What I mean, then, by a *classroom* is the space within which there is an intersection of physical features (i.e., design, furniture, and room arrangement), learning activities, curricular programming, organizational structures, daily rhythms and routines, personal values, and relationships, all resulting from the teacher’s pedagogical actions and decisions and nested within a specific schooling context. I also include the school building and grounds, both indoors and outdoors, as part of the larger space within which children learn. These spaces influence children’s experience of school, and their resulting feelings. Children’s feelings—made visible through their energies, laughter, anxieties, smiles, or frowns—in turn create the energy and tone that infuses a classroom space.
What I mean by a happy classroom, then, is the way in which the physical, curricular, and pedagogical conditions, as set in place by the adults who work within it, interplay with children’s experiences and feelings and, as a result, generate a tonal ethos of happiness (or unhappiness).

This study focuses on the early years of schooling in formal settings. Terminology to describe the early years of schooling is varied and includes the terms primary, early primary, and early childhood education. The age at which children start formal and compulsory schooling varies from country to country. For example, children start compulsory schooling in the United Kingdom at age five, in the majority of European countries at age six, and in the Scandinavian countries at age seven (Sharp, 2002). In most public school systems in Canada, children begin Kindergarten in the year they turn five, so long as they turn five by late December of their Kindergarten year. In Ontario, children may also attend Junior Kindergarten, which means children as young as three years and nine months can start formal schooling.

Central to the rationale for this study are two parallel arguments. First, that the cultivation of positive emotions and experiences at school promote the development of healthy, happy children; inversely, experiences of negative emotions, such as stress, anxiety, and unhappiness, have long-lasting and detrimental consequences to children, their development, and their learning. Second, that the complex interplay of standards, academic initiatives and external pressures—such as the call for increased accountability of teachers—is trickling down from upper to lower grades to shape children’s early
experiences of school in such a way that is arguably misaligned with their age, interests, and development. Accordingly, this study was located in early primary classrooms. For the purpose of this study, I defined this to mean Junior Kindergarten (JK), Senior Kindergarten (SK), Grade 1, and Grade 2 classrooms. I use the terms *early years, early primary education,* and *early years of schooling* interchangeably throughout this dissertation.

**Rationale**

The first argument for the importance of research examining the conditions that promote children’s happiness at school and in learning is built on the growing body of scientific research informing us about the role of emotions in learning. Emotional development begins very early in life, is a critical component in the development of brain architecture, and the quality of emotional experiences in the early years has consequences over the course of life (The National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004). Further, research indicates that the cultivation of positive emotions at school is a condition for learning that is effective and lasting (Barnes, 2005). Neuroscientific research about emotions, learning, and brain development is being recognized for its implications in the classroom (e.g., Aamodt & Wang, 2011; Posner & Rothbart, 2007; Sousa, 2010). The term *educational neuroscience* has been coined by Sousa (2010) to describe this literature. Educational neuroscience encompasses three fields: neuroscience, which is the study of the brain’s development, architecture, and function; psychology, which is the study of the human processes of thinking, feeling, emotion, and behavior;
and pedagogy, which is the study of the philosophy, theory, values, and relationships that inform practical decisions about children, instruction, and learning.

The human brain is a marvelous and complex organ comprised of billions of neurons; its circuitry is wired through an extensive network of synapses, and its communication is carried through electrical and hormonal signals within itself and to other parts of the body (LeDoux, 2000). Neuroscientific research has revealed that both thinking and feeling take place in interdependent and interconnected areas of the brain, which are called hubs (Pessoa, 2008). Hubs are critical for regulating the flow of information between brain regions. Research on brain connectivity, thanks to technological advances in brain imaging, have identified that, neurologically, brain pathways are short, and that any given brain region and hub is only a few synapses away from every other brain region and hub (Pessoa, 2008).

The amygdala is an important, centralized hub in the brain. It is located in the prefrontal cortex and is associated with emotional regulation. In an imaging analysis of brain connectivity, Young, Scannell, Burns, and Blakemore (1994) found that the amygdala is one of the most highly connected regions of the brain. Of the 70 cortical areas that they included in their analysis, 62 are connected to the amygdala. Because of this, the amygdala is hypothesized to be a strong candidate for the integration of cognitive and emotional functioning (Pessoa, 2008). In other words, a rational thought cannot occur without being filtered through an emotional centre and *vice versa*. 
The prefrontal cortex—to which the amygdala is connected—is both the most evolved region of the brain and is also the most sensitive to the negative effects of stress exposure (Arnsten, 2009). Further, the prefrontal cortex serves as a repository for both short- and long-term memory—known as working memory—and serves to regulate behaviour, thought, and emotion (Goldman-Rakic, 1996). During experiences of stress, the amygdala produces an elevated hormonal cocktail of noradrenaline and dopamine; these hormones impair the cognitive functioning of the prefrontal cortex and simultaneously strengthen the emotional functioning of the amygdala. Intense and sustained stress creates a negative, looping cycle of heightened emotions and diminished cognition which can, in turn, have long-lasting negative impacts on the architecture and development of the prefrontal cortex (Arnsten, 2009). Further, the negative loop of heightened emotions and diminished cognition, fueled by the flood of neurochemicals in the brain, impairs the working memory and recall functioning of the prefrontal cortex (Goldman-Rakic, 1996; LeDoux, 2000).

This research takes on a particular resonance when considered in relation to the education of young children. Much of contemporary school-based curriculums in mainstream school systems call upon children’s cognition: their ability to activate their working memory, the need for focused attention, the need for skill development, and the need for quick decision-making (Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007). Developmentally, and because schooling is new to the lived experience of young children, children are in the process of learning and acquiring these skills. And learning, regardless of what is
being learned, is challenging. In schools everywhere, children are challenged to try something new; they are challenged to work together in social groups; and they are asked to play nicely and get along with large numbers of other children on the tarmac and sports field during recess. Through many years of teaching young children, I have observed that learning something new is a highly charged—even dangerous—act, which requires regulation, risk-taking, and resilience on the part of the learner; this is also true of learning to work well and get along with others. For young children, learning something new, or being asked to engage socially, can trigger feelings of fear and uncertainty. A child who is afraid or uncertain at school—for whatever reason—will be compromised in his or her learning. In fact, because the young brain is particularly malleable in its development, the impact of frequent and sustained activation of the hormones resulting from stress, such as fear and anxiety, can alter the function of neural systems and “even change the architecture of regions in the brain that are essential for learning and memory” (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2005, p. 3).

Anxiety is one of the most prevalent mental health disorders in children (Cartwright-Hatton, McNicol, & Doubleday, 2006; Rockhill, et al., 2010). Anxiety is an emotion that impairs learning, undermines children’s ability to pay attention, leads to feelings of helplessness, and is associated with a threat to self-esteem (Jalongo & Hirsh, 2010). For example, in the early primary grades, it is not uncommon for children to experience anxiety when learning to read (Jalongo & Hirsh, 2010). Children can experience anxiety when learning to read for a variety of reasons; for example, if the
chosen text is too difficult for them, if they experience a fear of failure in comparison to the ‘star’ readers in the class, or if they fear being laughed at by other children. In the same way that classical conditioning operates, a child who has a negative experience (e.g., being laughed at by peers) while trying to read a difficult text forms an association between these two experiences, which activates the amygdala and results in feelings of dread and fear (Jalongo & Hirsh, 2010). An American study of 153 children who had been identified at the beginning of Grade 1 as being at-risk for reading difficulties, found that the relationship between reading and anxiety is bi-directional: anxiety leads to reading difficulty and reading difficulty leads to anxiety (Grills-Taquechel, Fletcher, Vaughn, & Stuebing, 2012). The impact of negative emotions on children’s learning is further confounded by research on the relationship between misbehavior and academic achievement. In another example, an America longitudinal study examined the relationship between children’s behavior disturbances in the early years and academic success in high school. This study followed 823 children between the ages of 6 through 17 and found that children whose earliest experiences of learning and school were habitually difficult (e.g., chronic behaviour problems), were at an increased risk for diminished academic success in high school, and that these problems plagued them throughout their schooling career (Breslau et al., 2009).

Just as negative emotions can impact children’s learning—and brain development—in detrimental ways, positive emotions serve as a powerful means to connect children to their learning. Immordino-Yang and Faeth (2010) state, “effective
learning does not involve removing emotion; rather, it involves skillfully cultivating an emotional state that is relevant and informative to the task at hand” (p. 76). Cultivating children’s positive emotions relevant to the learning task means that children might experience positive sensations in their body, which can influence how children think about what it is they are learning and how they think about themselves as learners. Immordino-Yang and Faeth explain that this interrelation between emotion, cognition, and body-response means that over time, children begin to recognize the subtle emotional signals and bodily sensory signals that promote a strong connection to the experience of learning.

To promote the optimal function of the interdependent emotional and rational functioning of the brain, children need to be learning in spaces that promote positive feelings and an abiding interest in learning. One way that humans communicate and recognize emotion is through the voice; vocal communication is of particular importance in the classroom. Teachers use their voices to read stories, to give instruction, to get and hold the attention of large numbers of children in crowded spaces, and to communicate a wide range feelings and thoughts. An American study of 40 healthy adults, ranging in age from 18–50, used Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (FMRI) to examine brain responses to vocal expressions of anger and happiness. Two salient findings from this study were identified. First, happy voices elicited significantly more brain activation than angry voices. And second, brain activation in response to happy voices was further enhanced in certain brain regions when paired with happy faces (Johnstone, van
Reekman, Oakes, & Davidson, 2006). In another FMRI study examining the relationship between a pleasant experience (i.e. listening to music) and its neurological effect found an increased connectivity amongst brain regions, and increased activation of the insula, an area of the cerebral cortex that is associated with emotion (Menon & Levitin, 2005).

Together, the two aforementioned FMRI studies have profound educational implications. To me, they suggest that the teacher who strives to create a happy classroom environment through positive manners, a pleasant tone of voice, kind ways of being, and positive learning experiences is creating optimal conditions for the healthy brain development and learning of children. Further, the conceptualization of the brain as a network of interconnected and interdependent pathways and cortical hubs, which process both emotion and cognition, pushes teachers to consider instructional strategies that promote an emotional connection to the topic, learning experiences that are positive and engaging, and that challenge and engage lively cognition.

It is important to note that, while neuroscience has many lessons to offer educators, researchers caution educators to be critical of the many neuromyths pervasive in educational literature, which tend to over simplify matters of neuroscience and education (Ansari, 2010; Upitis, 2010). Examples of neuromyths include the notion that the brain is comprised of a separate left and a right hemisphere, each with its own independent, specialized function. In this conceptualization, the right brain is commonly thought to be the centre for logical, rational thought, and the left brain is the centre for intuitive, emotional thought. Making instructional decisions through this heuristic of left
and right brain hemispherity has the potential to place a child’s capacity for expansive and connected learning into a restrictive box: a child is right brain or left brain; a thinker or a feeler; a mathematician or an artist. Such narrow pedagogical thinking, based on a thin interpretation of brain research, does not support the healthy and holistic development of children at school and in learning.

What research tells us that does promote children’s healthy development is emotional well-being. The National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2007), a Harvard-based multi-disciplinary research collaborative body that aims to bring the science of early childhood and early brain development to light in public decision making about children, states unequivocally that “emotional well-being and social competence provide a strong foundation for emerging cognitive abilities, and together they are the bricks and mortar that comprise the foundation of human development” (p. 8). This statement is supported by a recent bloom in research which examines not just emotion and learning, in general, but happiness and learning, in particular (e.g. Denham, Bassett & Zinsser, 2012; Gibbons & Silva, 2011; Scoffham & Barnes, 2011; Wright, 2004). The combination of research presented above leads me to make the following straightforward assertion: happy children learn; unhappy children face an increased cycle of challenges that can impact negatively on their social, emotional, physical, spiritual, intellectual, and neurological development.

The second argument for the importance of research examining the conditions that promote children’s happiness at school and in learning is that the complex interplay
of contemporary academic curricula, ministry expectations, and accountability measures is shaping instructional decisions and classroom programming that is misaligned with the developmental, cognitive, emotional, and spiritual needs of children (Cooper, 2009; Christie & Roskos, 2006; Jeynes, 2006).

Accountability measures leading to standardized curricula and academic pressures are a considerable departure from Friedrich Froebel’s (1782–1852) original concept of Kindergarten and the education of young children. The Froebel Kindergarten was grounded on three essential pedagogical principles: unity, respect, and play (Manning, 2005). The principle of *unity* is the spiritual foundation governing Froebel’s philosophy and pedagogical approach to the education of young children. Unity calls to our attention the interconnectedness of the natural, social, and spiritual worlds. In addition, Froebel recognized the unity of each individual child’s intellectual, physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions (Brosterman, 1997). The principle of *respect* called teachers to nurture the individuality of each child: their interests, natural curiosity, and development. Brosterman (1997) asserts that the principle of respect shifted the teacher-student relationship from a more traditionally didactic interaction to one of increased co-creation in which the child’s interests and natural “impulse to action” (p. 33) served as a guide to the teacher supporting the child’s learning—a radical approach in mid-nineteenth-century Germany. Lastly, the principle of *play* was the method through which the principles of unity and respect were realized. All of the songs, games, dancing, storytelling, and gardening developed by Froebel were considered play. To Froebel, the inclination
towards play is a natural impulse in children, producing “joy, freedom, satisfaction, repose within and without, [and] peace with the world” (as cited in Brosterman, 1997, p. 33).

Froebel formally established these three principles of Kindergarten, along with a clearly articulated curriculum of gifts (a series of manipulative objects through which children learned academic skills and concepts) and daily activities, after having observed and worked with children for over 30 years. The strength of these pedagogical principles lies in the fact that these principles grew out of his intimate knowledge of and orientation to children in the context in which they lived. Froebel’s Kindergarten—its philosophy, pedagogy, and activity—was fundamentally about children. Most clearly, Froebel’s Kindergarten was not about satisfying government expectations of what children should do or how they ought to learn.

Froebel worked in a time when the world was much smaller and the pressure of accountability was scant, if at all. We live in a different time, where the pressure to provide children with functional skills to survive in a globalized society is high. And we live in a time where governments are held accountable for how they spend our tax dollars. While the argument for a system of accountability is based on a positive goal—to ensure that the public tax dollar is well spent on good education for all children—the result of a system of accountability often has an indirect negative impact on classroom practices. Jeynes (2006) argues that the pressure of accountability causes a filter-down effect of curriculum, pushing academic expectations of higher grades down to the
younger grades. I argue that this filter-down effect changes not only what and how teachers teach, but also what young children do during the day. Unlike the children in Froebel’s Kindergarten who spent their day engaged in learning experiences appropriate to their development, such as gardening, singing, and playful exploration, young children today are more likely to be engaged in explicit academic instruction and seat work, and for extended periods of time.

The impact of the educational paradigm of accountability on instruction is that, in order to address curriculum-driven learning expectations, teachers are compelled to plan a school day that emphasizes teacher-driven instruction over child-centered learning. The impact on children is that they are spending an increasing amount of time engaged in academic, pencil-and-paper tasks and less time engaged in more active, child-oriented and child-driven activities (Cooper, 2009; Sax, 2007; Singer, Michnick-Golinkoff & Hirsh-Pasek, 2006).

The problem is not, in and of itself, academic instruction, or the expectation that children will learn to read, write, and add their numbers. Children need to become literate in a variety of ways, such as mathematical and technological literacy. My experience has taught me that children truly want to succeed at school, are keen to learn to read and write, and take great pleasure in spending time practicing printing or number facts. Teaching age appropriate foundational skills and embracing academic initiatives to support literacy or numeracy in the early primary classroom is important and necessary. As a teacher of young children, I would be not doing my job if I did not support
children’s academic skill development. I would be, in truth, grossly negligent if I did not find thoughtful and effective ways to support a six-year-old struggling with reading. Moreover, I have found that teaching reading and writing (and all academic subjects) demand some of my most creative pedagogical thinking and are amongst my most satisfying experiences with children. The problem lies in the disproportionate time that teachers feel compelled to spend on academic skills in order to meet the expectations of the standards movement with its “persistent press for accountability” (Christie & Roskos, 2006, p. 57).

Deborah Meier, Founding Principal of the Mission Hill School, a public school in Boston, makes the following stark observation about the contradictions inherent between large-scale policy and children’s immediate experience of school:

[These are the] painful contradictions that we force on our children and their families in order to avoid asking what truly matters as we confront children in their daily eagerness to find both happiness and meaning—in schools carefully designed not to answer to either. (Meier, as cited in Noddings, 2003, book jacket)

Examples of such contradictions include school buildings and classrooms devoid of attention to aesthetic or pedagogical quality (Upitis, 2010); the erosion of play in the primary grades—a significant source of children’s happiness and learning—in order to surmount pressures of standardized testing and academic accountability (Christie & Roskos, 2006; Elkind, 2007); student disengagement resulting from boring, unmotivating instructional practices (Sax, 2007); bullying and other forms of school violence that profoundly impact children’s sense of comfort and security at school (Beran & Tutty, 2002; Craig, 1998); and the link between elementary school anxiety and high-school
drop-out rates (Duchesne, Vitaro, Larose & Tremblay, 2007). Though I have found very few, if any, studies about school unhappiness per se, the previous examples serve to remind us that ugliness, boredom, bullying, and anxiety are conditions that contribute to a child’s unhappiness at schools and in life.

Deborah Meier’s observation about the contradictory impact of large-scale policy on children’s sense of security and well-being at school reminds us that children’s experience of school is lived in the present. During the school day, children do not react with conscious intent to large-scale policy, nor do they draw parallels between their anxious behaviour now and the possibility that they might drop out of school in the future. Rather, they respond to the immediacy of their relationships with their teacher and their friends, how they feel in their classroom environment, and whether or not they are interested in what is going on in the day. My experience in the classroom taught me the immediate consequences of poor planning and lackluster instruction. Children who are bored, tired, and anxious will often misbehave. Misbehaviour is part of childhood, and the wise teacher learns how to transform children’s poor behaviour into productive activity with compassion, humour, and firmness. One parent once said to me, after observing how I dealt with a particularly energetic group of five-year-olds: “You have a rod of iron running down your back tempered by a great big smile.” Teachers worth their salt have also learned, through trial and error, that poor planning and dull lessons contribute to children’s poor behaviour and so learn the valuable lesson of good planning, whiz-bang activities that truly work with kids, and flexibility. But when educational
policy and curricular expectations shape teachers’ decisions about instruction and daily planning that create conditions for misbehavior, boredom, and anxiety—as opposed to lively and engaged learning—something is surely amiss.

In a review of European policy and research into school starting age, Sharp (2002) points out that though there may be short-term advantages in giving three- to five-year-olds formal academic instruction, such as higher scores on literacy and numeracy tests, these advantages are not sustained over a long period of time. Citing an international study on reading achievement (Elley, 1992) of 32 educational systems with formal school starting ages ranging from five to seven, Sharp asserts that “children in ‘later starting’ countries had largely caught up by the time they reached the age of nine” (p. 9). While the debate about school starting age and early academic instruction is relevant to considering how we create school conditions that promote student well being, a thorough discussion of the debate is outside the scope of this study. What is valuable to this argument is the critical filter that Sharp raises about early academic initiatives. She raises the question about what important experiences children miss out on in early primary classrooms and school systems that emphasize an unbalanced approach to academic achievement over more appropriate, child oriented practices.

Smithrim, Garbati, and Upitis (2008) bring to our attention the metaphor of “breathing-in and breathing-out” (p. 2) to illuminate the importance of creating a day of balanced learning experiences for children in the early grades, and the problem that an over-emphasis on academics can cause young children. They explain that “breathing-in
and breathing-out refers to the ongoing alternation between the taking in of experience, through listening, observing or working on a problem for example, and the breathing-out of experience through artistic and other forms of expression” (p. 2). While the idea of breathing-in and breathing-out is a pedagogical concept basic to the rhythms and routines of Waldorf education, this idea provides a framework for thinking about how to create a balanced school day that is applicable to all classroom work with young children.

In the modern public primary classroom, examples of in-breath activities include academic seatwork, sitting at the carpet listening to the teacher talk, or phonics drills. Examples of out-breath activities include play, painting, or building with blocks. Just as humans need the equal flow of breath, children need an equal balance of activities and learning experiences in the course of a school day. The impact on the human body of an unbalance of breath—of holding a breath in or forcing a breath out—is tightness and discomfort. So too it is with children and their learning in the classroom. If there are too many in-breath activities in one day, and not enough opportunities to exhale and express, children become tight and constricted (K. Smithrim, personal communication, July, 2007). To argue this point most simply, and as I have asserted above, activities that lead to children experiencing tightness and constriction do not lend themselves to happy experiences at school or to learning.

Empirical research has demonstrated that relational pedagogies aimed at promoting happiness enhance children’s experiences of schooling and support their development and learning (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). There is a growing body of literature
calling for educational reform that focuses not just on curriculum and policy but on pedagogies that promote the affective well-being of children (Alexander, 2010; Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004; Ikeda, 2010; Palmer, 2007; Robinson, 2009). Palmer (2000) makes the key assertion that teachers—and all who work with children—hold significant responsibility for creating the conditions that support children’s happiness, that they instill in children habits of mind and self-awareness, and that those personal qualities contribute to happiness.

In order to develop a pedagogical framework that supports teachers in making decisions and to develop policy and programs that promote children’s happiness, research in these areas is needed. Such research needs to draw upon a complex conception of both happiness and pedagogy. Happiness should be examined through psychological, philosophical, and spiritual frameworks. Pedagogy should be conceptualized as a dynamic interaction of practices, beliefs, and interactions between the teacher and the child.

In the following chapter, I will discuss a broad ethos of the pursuit of happiness, both for ourselves and for others, and how this ethos might help positively shape children’s experiences in their early years of learning. I will consider perspectives of scholars whose work is concerned directly with schooling and those whose work is not. Categorizing literature as being outside of education in that it is concerned, broadly, with human growth and learning, such as Kingwell (1998) and Moore (1992), and being inside education in that it is concerned, specifically, with matters of schooling, such as
Noddings (2003) and Palmer (2007), serves as a way to organize and structure my review of the literature. However, such categories are, ultimately, restrictive. Common to all the literature discussed in this review is a concern for happiness and the conditions that support it. My aim in drawing upon literature across multiple fields is to deepen and broaden an understanding of pedagogy and happiness in the education of young children. Accordingly, I intentionally selected texts that provide perspective-based arguments from multiple domains (i.e., philosophy, sociology, psychology, spirituality, education, and fiction) on the themes of happiness and pedagogy.

I have structured the review as follows. First, I explore theoretical conceptions of happiness from the perspectives of philosophy, psychology, spirituality, and pedagogy. Second, I discuss the literature-based themes of habits of mind and habits of self-awareness that foster our personal sense of happiness. Third, I will argue that adults who work with children have a pedagogical responsibility to foster happiness in both themselves and in children. Finally, based on the review of literature from inside and outside of education, I will discuss four foundational experiences of early schooling critical to creating a happy learning experience for young children.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

Conceptions of Happiness

Happiness is something that most of us seek, each in our own way and according to our own understanding of what happiness is. Articulating a concise definition of happiness is difficult. Accordingly, I will not attempt to provide a comprehensive definition of happiness, but rather, focus on the conditions that might lead to an overall sustained state of well-being.

Most of us have no trouble describing the conditions that make us happy. Whether it is sitting with friends on a sunny ocean-side patio enjoying a Friday afternoon toast to the end of a work week; a reflective walk in the woods; or an evening curled up on the couch, eating pizza and watching reruns of the television show *Glee*, we are able to identify those experiences of life that make us happy. With equal conviction, we are able to identify those experiences of life that make us unhappy. If happiness is so difficult to define, yet is something we recognize so strongly, how do we make sense of the pursuit of it? What is happiness? I am curious about this pursuit both personally (I want to be happy) and professionally (I want to help children be happy). I am curious about happiness as an aim of education, and how we go about promoting children’s happiness in their early years of schooling. I will begin by looking at philosophical, psychological, and spiritual conceptions of happiness.
Philosophical

In contemporary philosophical literature, happiness is frequently conceived of as a journey, a pursuit that draws us both forward through and deeply into our lives (Kingwell, 1998; Major, 1998; Moore, 1992; Palmer, 2000; Vanier, 1998). Major (1998) specifically conceptualizes the pursuit of happiness in terms of being *journey work*.

Major (1998) describes journey work this way:

> Journey work is exploration, in all its senses. Journey work can be the actual physical movement from one place to another, but journey work can also imply things spiritual: the searching for personal meaning. That searching is the journey of which I speak. Journey is life. The living of a life. With meaning. (p. 3)

To Major (1998), journey work is—at once—an externally and internally dynamic process. It is the tension between these two processes that engages us in the pursuit of living a meaningful and happy life. Couzyn (1978) further explores this tension between the externally and internally dynamic process of journey work. In her children’s book *The Happiness Bird*, she describes the life of the main character of the story, who pursues happiness by traveling on a long and arduous journey, across peaks and through valleys. As he journeys, the beautiful blue bird of happiness watches him protectively.

The man finally returns home, exhausted and dejected at his apparent lack of success of discovering the meaning and experience of happiness. It is in the act of returning home, of reaching stillness, that he finds happiness. The blue bird is there to remind him that happiness can be found without taking a step from home. The blue bird teaches that the secrets to happiness lie within ourselves, if only we allow ourselves to pause and listen for them.
Kingwell (1998) conceptualizes the pursuit of happiness in terms of self-development. He constructs a theory of happiness he calls the “virtue theory of happiness” (p. xv). Drawing upon Aristotle’s teaching that the good life (a life of pleasure) is synonymous with the virtuous life (a life dedicated to goodness), Kingwell asserts that happiness is “the possession of virtuous character and the performance of virtuous action” (p. 306). The virtue theory of happiness aims to unhinge contemporary ideas of happiness from attachment to material possession and self-indulgence and re-center happiness in relation to the development of the virtue of goodness towards ourselves and goodness towards others. Kingwell’s central argument is that happiness is found in the congruence between our internal and external worlds. Who we are, our habits of mind, and treating others with the best of intentions make for a good life. Accordingly, Kingwell states that happiness is “nothing less than the fulfillment of our nature” (p. 336).

Psychological

Happiness is one of the central topics of concern to the field of positive psychology (Seligman, 2003). The terms happiness and well-being are often used interchangeably, and are used to describe a psychological state in which we experience more positive emotions than negative emotions (Seligman, 2003). Happiness can arise from the experience of positive thoughts and feelings, such as comfort (Seligman, 2003), from positive experiences, such as engagement in a favourite activity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), and from the fulfillment experienced by developing and expressing one’s unique
talents and personal strengths (Seligman, 2002). The three pillars of the study of positive psychology are: (a) positive emotions, (b) positive traits, and (c) positive institutions (Seligman, 2002). Positive emotions include confidence and hope, positive traits include personal strengths and virtues, and positive institutions include democracy and strong families. Seligman (2002) explains that our emotions are experienced in response to our thoughts about our past, the present, and the future. Emotions about the present are divided into the categories of *pleasures* and *gratifications*. Pleasurable emotions are short-lived, and can be sensory based, such as enjoying the flavours of a tasty meal or the comfort of a warm bath, or higher, such as feelings of glee, joy, or relaxation. Like a personal and intuitive response to artwork or sofa fabric, pleasures are subjective feelings that are unique to each person. Emotional gratification, on the other hand, comes from our engagement in the activities we enjoy, that challenge us, and that we are good at (Seligman, 2002).

In one four-month study examining the factors that influence happiness, 222 undergraduates at the University of Illinois were screened for their level of happiness using four measures, including a scale measuring their life satisfaction, a self-report on how often they experience a specific set of positive and negative emotions, and a daily report on their mood for the duration of the study. Findings from this study indicated a range of responses, from very unhappy to very happy people. The very unhappy group reported equal amounts of negative and positive affect on a daily basis, whereas the very happy group reported more positive than negative affect on a daily basis, and could recall
more positive events in their life than negative ones. In this study, the very happy people were more social, had stronger romantic and other relationships, and were considered to be more agreeable than the less happy people. In addition, the very happy people indicated that they experienced unhappy and neutral moods on occasion (Diener & Seligman, 2002). These findings suggest that, while positive social relationships do not guarantee happiness, they are a condition that supports happiness. Further, unhappy experiences are a normal course of life, and that people who are, for the most part, happy, are able to manage their unhappy experiences. In other words, happiness is experienced through an abundance of happy feelings and experiences over unhappy ones; it is this abundance that helps people regulate their emotions and deal with difficulty.

To Seligman (2002), one important component that contributes to feelings of happiness is comfort. Comfort includes the satisfaction of pleasures and the feelings of gratification, which arise from participation in enjoyable activities. While the satisfaction of pleasures is unquestionably human and important, the experience of happiness is more complex than simply eating tasty food. Seligman further argues that happiness is situated deeper than living a pleasant life. It is also found through living a good and meaningful life. A good life involves the discovery of one’s unique strengths and the consideration of how one might use these strengths in service to others. A meaningful life is one that seeks to be connected to a greater whole, whether that be the greater whole of community, or the greater whole of the mystery of life. It is the conscious combination of all three—pleasure, goodness, and meaningfulness—that comprises a full life, in which we
“experience positive emotions about the past and future, savor positive feelings from the pleasures, derive abundant gratification from [our] signature strengths, and use these strengths in the service of something larger to obtain meaning” (Seligman, 2002, p. 263).

Like Seligman, Haidt (2006) calls our attention to the human need to develop spiritual depth and to connect to ‘something larger’ that goes beyond our physical desires and daily social interactions. Resonant of Kingwell (1998) and Major (1998), who argue that the conditions for happiness are found both internally and externally, Haidt locates happiness in the liminal space between our internal and external lived experiences. Haidt argues that, within the context of first world society, happiness is not found in factors outside of ourselves, such as material possessions, nor entirely by letting go of our material, physical, or emotional attachments in order to dwell solely within ourselves. In this way, he asserts that happiness is found neither internally nor externally but that “happiness comes from between” (p. 223). This liminal “between” means that happiness and fulfillment in life can be found in a balanced congruence between our internal conditions (i.e., our thoughts and feelings) and external conditions (e.g., our relationships and home life). To Haidt, living a happy and good life comes from nurturing a healthy relationship with ourselves, with others, with the natural world, and through a spiritual depth that allows us to connect to “something larger” (p. 239) than ourselves.

Spiritual

Cultivating spiritual depth is a recurring characteristic of happiness across the literature. Spirituality is discussed in terms of adding rich dimension to positive life
experience (Emmons, 2006), as spiritual practice (Moore, 1992), as a dimension of children’s happiness (Holder, Coleman, & Wallace, 2010), and as a dimension of pedagogy (O’Reilley, 1998; Palmer, 2000). Emmons (2006) defines spirituality as a deep sense of belonging and connection to the infinite. He distinguishes spirituality from religion, which he defines as a faith-based community aimed at promoting morality and sacred connection. Emmons asserts that spirituality adds depth and dimension to experiences of life by compelling us to reflect upon who we are, by raising the significance and meaning of personal goals, and by opening us to spiritual emotions (e.g., gratitude, awe, reverence, and wonder). Emmons argues that openness to developing spiritual emotions enhances our quality of life, our relationships with others, and our sense of happiness and well-being.

Moore (1992) locates spiritual practice in a conscious attention to internal landscape. “By caring for the soul,” he shares, “we can find relief from our distress and discover deep satisfaction and pleasure” (p. xi). Spiritual practice includes paying mindful attention to everyday matters, to developing our sense of beauty, and to nurturing connectedness with others and with the world at large. Moore’s notion of happiness is situated in an increased level of consciousness and an intensified human experience that caring for soul creates. In Moore’s view, the soul is the core essence of who we are. He states:

We know we are well on the way toward soul when we feel attachment to the world and the people around us, and when we live as much from the heart as from the head. We know soul is being cared for when our pleasures feel deeper than
usual, when we can let go of the need to be free of complexity and confusion and when compassion takes place of distrust and fear. (p. 304)

Holder, Coleman and Wallace (2008) conducted a quantitative study on the relationship between spirituality and happiness in children aged 8 to 12. Their study responded to the call that while the constructs of spirituality and religiousness are well researched in adults, they are not well researched in children. This study was conducted in four Canadian public schools and two faith-based schools, with a sample of 320 children and their parents. Children completed six questionnaires to assess their happiness, spirituality, and temperament; parents completed the happiness and temperament questionnaires. Holder, Coleman and Wallace theorized that spirituality and religiousness may promote happiness in both adults and children by increasing social integration through connection to a religious community, may enhance healthier lifestyle choices, and may provide meaning and purpose through connection to the divine.

Findings from this study demonstrated that a child’s spiritual beliefs were positively linked to their sense of happiness, whereas children’s religious practice (such as praying or attending church) were only weakly associated with their happiness. Further, children’s sense of meaning and value in their life, plus the quality and depth of their relationships were positively linked to their happiness. Holder, Coleman and Wallace assert that the results are similar to studies of adult spirituality and happiness. They make the pedagogical link by suggesting that children’s happiness may be bolstered in the classroom by activities that enhance children’s self development and meaning-making.
Spirituality is an important dimension of pedagogical practice that has, at its heart, a concern for children’s self-development (O’Reilley, 1998; Palmer, 2000). Spiritual self-development is a non-linear process that involves an ongoing and deepening awareness of self in relation to other (Smeyers, Smith & Standish, 2007). Speaking broadly, pedagogy takes into account the question of who we are as teachers and who our students are (Palmer, 2007; Smithrim, 2000) and is oriented to the best interests of students (van Manen, 1991). Pedagogy as a spiritual practice means attending to our own internal worlds in company with attending to the internal worlds of our students (O’Reilley, 1998; Palmer, 2000, 2007). To both O’Reilley (1998) and Palmer (2000), questions of good teaching are intertwined with questions of spirituality and good living. Echoing Seligman’s (2002) notion that happiness comes from discovery and responsible use of our unique strengths, Palmer (2000) identifies the deepest of these pedagogical questions as being “the elemental and demanding ‘who am I? What is my nature?’” (p. 15). The pedagogical questions of who we are and who it is we teach point to the view that the pursuit of happiness is as much part of schooling as it is of life (Palmer, 2007; Smithrim, 2000; van Manen, 1991).

**Themes across Perspectives**

Thus far, I have discussed various theoretical conceptions of happiness. These conceptions include the pursuit of happiness as journey work, as the balance of virtuous action with virtuous character, as the meaningful use of our signature strengths in service of something greater than ourselves, as a balanced congruence between our internal and
external worlds, and as the careful nurturing of our spirituality. While each perspective (i.e., philosophical, psychological, and spiritual) contributes a nuanced way of thinking about happiness, each one addresses the theme of happiness as a relational experience: with ourselves, with others, and with the natural and spiritual world. In addition, there is an energetic directionality of happiness that is both outward and inward. We journey to distant lands and we journey into ourselves; we extend virtuous action to others by developing virtuous personal qualities; we create external conditions in order to attend, with grace, to our internal landscapes. Palmer (2000) succinctly sums up the duality inherent in the pursuit of happiness by stating, “if you can’t get out of it, get into it!” (p. 84). His point is not that we are trying to get out of happiness, rather, that the way into happiness requires an active, conscious, and intentional pursuit, and that this pursuit is relational.

My reading across the various fields of literature reveals three themes common in the pursuit of happiness. These are the habits of mind we develop that shape our perceptions of whether we are happy or not, the habits of self-awareness that we develop to foster our personal sense of happiness, and our strengths of character through which we extend positive actions towards ourselves and others. Next, I will touch upon the key ideas of each.

**Habits of Mind**

Our perception and experience of happiness is directly linked to our habits of mind (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Kingwell, 1998; Seligman, 2002). The term habits of
mind is clearly identified in the literature as those thought patterns that loop through our brains (Cranton, 2006; Smithrim, 2000). They are the conscious narratives through which we make sense of our life experiences and contribute most directly to whether we feel happy or unhappy (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Haidt, 2006; Holden, 2007; Kingwell, 1998; Seligman, 2002). Consistent across the literature on happiness is the recognition that how we think about life circumstances and experiences shapes how we feel (Kingwell, 1998; Moore, 1992). While there is agreement that individuals can learn the positive habits of mind that contribute to happiness (Moore, 1992; Seligman, 2002; Vanier, 1998) there is also acknowledgement that this is not an easy task. Kingwell (1998) states that “happiness requires thought, and, as anyone who has tried it knows, thinking is hard work” (p. 30).

Habits of Self-Awareness

Habits of self-awareness is a term I have coined from my review of the literature; it means those kinds of personal practices that deepen our self-awareness. Habits of self-awareness include the skills of deep listening, personal reflection, the ability to tolerate and live with paradox, and the nurturing of spiritual dimensions of learning, such as wonder and curiosity. First, deep listening requires an intense commitment to be present and fully in the moment. We listen deeply to develop healthy relationship with our self and also with those that we care about (Kingwell, 1998; Noddings, 2003; O’Reilley, 1998; Palmer, 2000). Second, self-reflection is a form of personal listening focused on our desires and dreams, and the experiences of life that make up who we are.
(Lyubomirsky, Schkade & Kennon, 2005). Kingwell (1998) asserts that self-reflection stretches us beyond happiness as mere satisfaction of desires to happiness as a state of self-awareness. Specifically, he states that “happiness is too often understood as mere pleasure, a satisfaction of pre-existing, and usually, banal desires, when it should be seen as a deeper kind of reflective contentment, a project of examining desires as well as satisfying them” (p. xvii). Third, happiness comes from developing the capacity to live with, and learn from, paradox (Kingwell, 1998; Moore, 1992; O’Reilley, 1998; Palmer, 2000; Smithrim, 2000). Being receptive to paradox allows us to see beyond polarized thinking and opens us to new possible ways of experiencing the world, or new solutions to problems. Finally, a spiritual dimension of happiness, such as developing the capacity for curiosity and wonder, opens us to greater mysteries of life and heightens our sense of connectedness (Gopnik, 2009; Moore, 1992; Smithrim, 2000).

**Strengths of Character**

In addition to our habits of mind and self-awareness, our strengths of character and actions towards others are associated with our happiness (McCullough & Snyder, 2000). For example, in an international study involving a sample of 12,439 American adults and 445 Swiss adults, participants completed both online and hardcopy surveys measuring their character strengths, orientations to happiness, and life satisfaction. Findings from this study indicated that character strengths most highly linked to life satisfaction include love, curiosity, zest, perseverance, and gratitude (Peterson, Ruch, Beerman, Park & Seligman, 2007). Research has also demonstrated that cultivating in
oneself the character strength of kindness makes people happier; further, simply by keeping track of one’s own acts of kindness in the course of a week can raise one’s sense of gratitude and positive actions towards others (Otake, Shimai, Tanaka-Matsumi, Otsui & Fredrickson, 2006). Findings from both of these studies point out that these particular strengths of character—such as kindness, love, and a zest for life—reflect an individual’s orientation to and an engagement in positive actions towards others and, in doing so, contribute to living a meaningful life.

The research reported, above, is largely based on studies involving youth and adults. This raises the question of the relevance of the findings of this research to young children, the development of their character strengths, and their happiness. In response, it is my opinion that human characteristics, such as kindness or curiosity, are not age dependent. They are facets of being human that contribute to our own well-being and the well-being of others. While age, development, and maturity do contribute to our depth of ability to express and extend positive actions and strengths to others, humans of all ages can express love, compassion, and thoughtfulness. Of this, Paley (1999) states simply: “I have been watching young children most of my life and they are more often kind to each other than unkind. The early instinct to help someone is powerful” (p. 129). This observation is echoed by an American study in which parents wrote a description of their child’s character strengths and qualities in relation to their happiness. A total of 680 descriptions of children ages 3 to 9 were obtained. Through content analysis, the researchers found 24 character strengths identified in the parental descriptions of their
child, including kindness, creativity, humour, a love of learning, and perseverance. The children’s strengths of character that were most significantly associated with their happiness were love, hope, and zest (Park & Peterson, 2006). These findings parallel the adult data; further, the character strengths that are associated with happiness are strengths of the heart.

This literature and research on happiness has important implications for teachers of young children. Placing many children, and a number of adults, in one room on a daily basis means that everyone needs to learn to get along, to treat each other with kindness and respect, and to learn to manage the ups and downs of positive and negative feelings and experiences that most assuredly will arise each day. Happiness is carried through our positive actions towards others and through the positive characteristics, traits, thoughts, and feelings we nurture within our students and ourselves; further, happiness is found in the comforts of our physical experiences of life, such as the appreciation of beauty or pleasure experienced from eating a healthy and tasty snack at recess. Classrooms are filled with all of these characteristics of happiness: relationships, feelings, helpful (and unhelpful) behaviours that contribute to (or detract from) the class community, a sense of wonder and delight in learning, and the physical features of the room that shapes children’s feelings and experiences. While teachers of all grades and levels of education are responsible for the well-being of their students, teachers of young children hold a heightened level of responsibility for the development, well-being, and happiness of their students. I now discuss the nature of this responsibility as being a pedagogical
responsibility that teachers of young children have towards their students and themselves to promote feelings and experiences of happiness in the classroom and in learning.

**Theoretical Frame: Happiness as a Pedagogical Responsibility**

Noddings (2003) asserts happiness as the primary aim of education. To Noddings, happiness as an aim of education does not preclude academic aims; rather, happiness enhances children’s overall experience of schooling. This aim is a responsibility shared by all who are concerned about and work with children. van Manen (1991) calls this “in loco parentis” (p. 5), the pedagogical responsibility that teachers are charged with to educate, care for, and support children’s happiness in all domains of their learning. In other words, the theoretical frame is a pedagogical responsibility to children. It follows that teachers also have a pedagogical responsibility to themselves to nurture their own sense of well-being in order to nurture their students. Palmer (2007) states,

> Teaching, like any truly human activity, emerges from one’s inwardness, for better or worse. As I teach, I project the condition of my soul onto my students, my subject, and our way of being together...Whatever self-knowledge we attain as teachers will serve our students well. (p. 2)

Research shows that the internal affective states of adults have an impact on children (Gopnik, 2009). Children who are raised in positive atmospheres tend to assume positive attributes and characteristics themselves (Carter, 2010; Gopnik, 2009). Furthermore, research also demonstrates a direct link between depressed mothers and the potential for their children to be at-risk for behavioural problems, social adjustment difficulty, and depression (Campbell, Matestic, von Stauffenberg, Mohan, & Kirchner, 2007). Considering the relationship between adults and children’s well-being, Carter
(2010) reminds us of the in-flight instruction that we hear upon takeoff: in case of emergency, put your oxygen mask on first before assisting someone else. As adults, we are no good to the children in our care if we are blacking out from lack of oxygen. The simple point is that attending to our own happiness as adults is vital when fostering the happiness of children in our care.

Holden (2007) echoes this notion. He states, “your relationship with your Self sets the tone for every other relationship you have” (p. 72). While this is not a particularly profound or groundbreaking observation—more of the bumper sticker variety—it serves as a very important reminder that how we feel about ourselves affects how we feel about and relate to others. Developing a happy, healthy relationship with self and with others occurs in the practice of developing healthy habits of mind, emotions, and spiritual depth. Vanier (1998) deepens our understanding of how human interconnectedness and happiness are intrinsically linked. He argues that it is through relational living with families, schools, and communities that we become human. Vanier asserts that, “to be human is to be bonded together, each with our weakness and strengths, because we need each other” (p. 40). To Vanier, becoming human is a continuous, life-long process, suggesting an unfolding and infinite number of possibilities of who we are now and who we might become. Vanier states that, “of course, all this takes time. But are we not all called to take this journey if we want to become fully human, to conquer divisions and oppressions, and to work for peace?” (p. 163). Linking Holden and Vanier, I observe that children too are on their own path of becoming.
The filters through which educators understand and make decisions about children and their emotional and spiritual landscapes are important because school-age children spend a significant portion of their lives at school (Vogler, Crivello & Woodhead, 2008). The quality and nature of school experiences for children have a direct influence on their sense of happiness (Michalos, 2007; Suldo, Riley & Shaffer, 2006). A quantitative study examining school satisfaction of 1090 children between the ages of 10 and 12 in Holland found that positive academic and social classroom environments are strongly correlated with school satisfaction (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002). This finding is echoed by Meyer and Turner (2006) who assert that children’s positive emotional experiences at school create conditions of positive classroom climates, positive teacher-student relations, and a motivation to learn. In another quantitative study examining school satisfaction amongst 331 children, aged 6–13 in Holland and Finland, researchers found that teacher likeability was a strong predictor of school satisfaction (Randolph, Kangas & Ruokamo, 2010).

A Canadian quantitative study assessed the relationship between temperament and happiness of 311 children aged 9–12 (Holder & Klassen, 2010). This study responded to the need for empirical research into the correlations of children’s happiness and strategies that promote children’s happiness. Holder and Klassen (2010) conceptualized happiness as being an affective trait that contributes to life satisfaction and subjective well-being. Parents rated their children’s temperament and happiness using one survey tool while children rated their temperament and happiness using four different survey tools. Findings from this study parallel similar studies about adult’s temperament and
happiness, indicating that children who are social and active, and less shy, emotional, and anxious, are also happier. Holder and Klassen assert that the significance of these findings is the strong correlation between activity and happiness. This finding is particularly salient when considered in a school context. Creating conditions that promote active learning, active play, and positive social interactions amongst children is a meaningful way to address and foster children’s happiness in their experiences of school.

Gopnik (2009) points out an essential reason in support of the view that happiness should be an aim of early schooling. She states:

We can control one very important aspect of our children’s adult lives. We can determine whether they grow up to be adults who remember leafy playgrounds and picnics and affectionate parents. We can’t ensure that our children will have a happy future—there, all we can do is move the odds around. But we can at least try to ensure that they will have a happy past. (p. 200)

In Gopnik’s view, the memories that we tell as adults about our childhood are told through our narratives. She argues that a happy childhood lays the foundation for a happy life. Similarly, happy experiences in the early years of schooling lay the foundation for future happy relationship with learning and with school.

Happiness is within our grasp as adults (Chödrön, 2001; Haidt, 2006; Kingwell, 1998; Moore, 1992; Seligman, 2002). We can actively work on those internal and external conditions that create happiness: we can see a therapist to help develop positive habits of mind, we can do volunteer work with people less fortunate than ourselves, we can join a faith community, we can choose how we deal with conflict, and we can smile freely at strangers as we pass by on the street. Young children do not have the same
degree of control over their lives. Here, Gopnik (2009) asserts that adults hold a profound responsibility for children’s happiness. We are responsible for creating those conditions that promote children’s happiness, and to instill in them qualities and habits that contribute to their own creation of happiness. Gopnik points out that while a happy childhood does not guarantee a happy adulthood—life throws curve balls at all ages—as adults who are concerned with children and with childhood, we can endeavour to create classrooms and experiences that foster happy children.

Considering this notion that adults who teach young children hold the pedagogical responsibility to cultivate happiness, raises questions: how do we do this, and what experiences, fundamentally, should children have at school in order that they may flourish as happy individuals?

The Cambridge Primary Review (CPR) was a comprehensive seven-year inquiry into the state of primary education in Britain (Alexander, 2010). The central question guiding the review was “what is truly basic to the education of young children growing up in [today’s] world?” (p. 2). The goal of the CPR was to rethink the aims of primary education in contemporary British society and consider new policies, curriculum, and pedagogical practices that best support these aims. Data were collected through a nation-wide public call for written submissions from individuals and organizations (over 1000 submissions were submitted), 92 community and national soundings, 146 consultations with government leaders and organizations, and an extensive document analysis. The CPR looked at conceptions of children and childhood, parenting, historical foundations
and experiences of the early years, curriculum, pedagogy, and various aspects of the British educational system including schools, local authorities and other agencies.

Relevant to this study is the first aim of primary education as recommended by the CPR, which places an emphasis on children’s happiness as promoted through a pedagogy of relation that attends to the affective needs of children. Specifically, the aim reads as follows:

To attend to children’s capabilities, needs, hopes and anxieties here and now, and promote their mental, emotional and physical well-being and welfare. Happiness, a strong sense of self and a positive outlook on life are not only desirable in themselves: they are also conducive to engagement and learning…Caring for children’s well-being is about attending to their physical and emotional welfare. It is about inducting them into a life where they will be wholeheartedly engaged in all kinds of worthwhile activities and relationships, defined generously rather than narrowly…Fostering children’s well-being requires us to attend to their future fulfillment as well as their present needs and capabilities. Well-being thus defined is both a precondition and an outcome of successful primary education. (p. 197)

The phrase “to attend to children…here and now” recalls van Manen’s (1991) notion of pedagogical responsibility as being the practical response to children’s needs within the lived moments of teaching. Drawing upon the aim of the CPR, as articulated above, I re-state the question: how should young children experience their early years of schooling in order that they may flourish as happy individuals?

It is my observation that, resonating across the philosophical, psychological, and spiritual literature reviewed, experiences that best promote children’s happiness are characterized through pedagogies of relationships. To conclude this review, I describe a theoretical frame outlining four fundamental experiences for the early years of schooling.
that promote children’s happiness: (a) experiences of happy classrooms, (b) experiences of positive relationships, (c) experiences of care, and (d) experiences of possibility.

**Experiences of Happy Classrooms**

As a primary condition of happiness in the early school years, children should, first and foremost, experience classrooms and schools as happy places (Noddings, 2003). This is not intended to be a blithe statement. Rather, it acknowledges that happy environments are associated with happy learning experiences and happy children. Noddings argues that the conditions of happy classrooms are linked to the pedagogical choices of teachers. These conditions include attending to children’s physical needs, creating healthy and beautiful school spaces, supporting children’s desire for pleasure, and privileging play as a significant mode of learning for children. Most important, happy classrooms result from pedagogical practices that are respectful, inclusive, and non-coercive. Noddings states that, “the atmosphere of classrooms should reflect the universal desire for happiness” (p. 246).

An Austrian study of 215 adolescent students examined the relationship between positive school experience and happiness (Stiglbauer, Gnambs, Gamsjäger, Batinic, 2013). Positive school experiences were measured five times over a school year using a 13-item scale; happiness was assessed using the World Health Organization Well-being Index. Findings from this study show that positive school experiences promoted happiness over time and, in turn, happiness facilitated positive school experience. The authors argue that the longitudinal nature of the study demonstrate that positive school
experiences have positive effects over time, which they call an “upward spiral of happiness” (p. 239). This upward spiral is both iterative and generative, in that students who are happy are more likely to take opportunities as they arise, are more social and approachable, and experience school more positively; in turn, these positive experiences contribute to future happiness over time. This study lends empirical grounding to Noddings’ (2003) argument that children should experience happy schools and classrooms as a fundamental precursor in the cultivation of happy lives.

**Experiences of Positive Relationships**

Relational pedagogy rests on the assumption that humans are inherently social beings, that knowledge is socially constructed, and that the construction of knowledge is contextual to our cultural and social environments (Thayer-Bacon, 2004). Bingham and Sidorkin (2004) argue that relational pedagogy is complex and multifaceted, that it exists in shared practice, that it acknowledges the Self at the centre of all relational dynamic, that it is unique from any other relation, and that it is imbedded in the larger context of relations outside of the school. Relational values are carried through our actions and character—who we are—as teachers.

Emphasizing the importance of relationships in teaching and learning is an idea that is well grounded historically. In the mid 19th century, Froebel believed that children should learn to live in society through active participation in the Kindergarten community (Brosterman, 1997). At the turn of the 20th century, Dewey argued that schools are primarily social institutions aimed at developing children as moral members of society.
(Dewey, 1897). Steiner developed pedagogies central to the Waldorf school system based on wondering how children might experience school so that they may develop the habits and practices of living peacefully with others (Steiner, 1919/2003). Makiguchi, the Japanese educational philosopher and a contemporary of Dewey and Steiner, asserted the importance of promoting harmonious social relations in supporting the development of students who are happy, well adjusted, and who contribute positively to their community (Goulah, 2010). This historical ground serves as the foundation for the concept of relational pedagogy that is emerging in contemporary educational discourse (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004; Liston & Garrison, 2004).

Recently, Bingham and Sidorkin (2004) have examined human relational pedagogy in the experience of schooling rather than processes of education, such as methods, curriculum, and behaviour. They ask the startling question: Why do schools remain, when we can teach ourselves most all factual knowledge through the Internet, TV, books, and libraries? This question was startling to me when I first read it, simply because I had not heard it asked before. And it was startling to me because it is such a simple, and even obvious, question. Such simple questions are often the ones that truly cause us to pause and reflect on our basic notions and assumptions about education. Bingham and Sidorkin answer that “schools remain because education is not mainly about the facts that students stuff into their heads…schools remain because education is primarily about human beings who need to meet together, as a group of people, if learning is to take place” (p. 5). Bingham and Sidorkin further argue that if public
schooling is to remain a relevant institution in future society, then schools must consider pedagogies of human relations in company with curricular and policy-based reforms. Further, schools must consider how those pedagogies might be directed in order to best support happiness in education. In the following sections, I further examine the tenets of relational pedagogy to delineate the educational experiences in early childhood schooling that promote happiness.

An ethos of relational pedagogy bolsters student attachment at school and positively influences children’s experience of schooling. Attachment is a deep and abiding connection between people, such as between a child and a parent. Children can exhibit secure or insecure attachment, with insecure attachment being further categorized as being avoidant, resistant, or disorganized (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). In this way, how a child experiences love and care from his or her parents influences their sense of attachment and is the foundation of their experiences of happiness in life (Gopnik, 2009). Bergin and Bergin (2009) reviewed a large number of psychological studies on the effects of positive teacher-student relationships and school bonding. Across the studies, they consistently found that healthy attachment in schools allows children to explore their environment freely, to take risks in their learning, and to respond with resilience to failure and challenge. They also found that due to the highly social nature of schools, prosocial behaviours and secure attachment are associated with academic success. Some children will arrive at school with a sense of relational security in place, whereas other children will not be so fortunate. Bergin and Bergin assert that while teachers cannot change
children’s relational experiences at home, they can behave in positive, caring ways that have the potential to shift children’s views of relationships. Bergin and Bergin call for the promotion of relational qualities amongst teachers and students such as kindness, helpfulness, warmth, and sensitivity to the needs of others. They draw to our attention the economic “low cost” of relational pedagogy in improving student achievement and that fundamentally “school bonding should be given priority because it promotes children’s well-being” (p. 163).

Experiences of Care

Children should experience care at school (Noddings, 1984, 2003, 2005). They should have the experience of being cared for by their teacher in such a way that they flourish as individuals. The foundation of Noddings’ philosophy of education is an ethic of care. An ethic of care is the philosophical argument that caring should inform all ethical decision-making (Smith, 2004). Teaching is a profession where teachers are called upon to make multiple ethical decisions every day. According to Noddings (2005), caring is not an individual virtue but rather a relational one, as caring involves others. She explains that for caring to occur, the person who cares must behave in a caring manner to another person; the second person, in turn, must experience being cared for. If they do not, then it is not a caring encounter. Noddings further argues that caring relations between adults and children are unequal and bring up protective and tender feelings in adults. Protective feelings engender a sense of relational safety for children. Noddings
states, “as young people learn how to discern and accept care, they can gradually learn also to care for others” (p. 103).

Noddings (2005) argues that schools run by traditional approaches to curriculum design, achievement standards, and instructional practices are “intellectually and morally inadequate for contemporary society” (p. 173). She further argues that academic goals are not to be divorced from human endeavors, such as the promotion of positive relationships and cultivating an ethos of care in school; one cannot be achieved without the other. Accordingly, Noddings asserts that the main aim of education transcends academic goals and should unabashedly promote “the growth of competent, caring, loving, and lovable people” (p. xxvi). Learning to be a thoughtful human being who is morally and ethically responsive to others is not simply taught and learned through a series of prescribed behaviours—*first smile, then shake hand*—but rather by living through the joys and hard-knocks of a full life, with a thoughtful intention to self-development.

For children to experience care at schools, Noddings (2005) offers the vision of creating schools as centers of care, in which an ethos of care is integrated into the curriculum, activities, social relations, and school culture. In schools as centers of care, children first learn to care for their physical and spiritual selves and for occupations that interest them. Noddings speaks of occupations both in terms of the kinds of activities children are engaged in at school and also the kind of work that children might choose to do. Her conversation about occupation recalls one of Froebel’s central principles, namely that young children learn naturally when engaged in meaningful occupations.
(Brosterman, 1997). In schools as centres of care, children will develop as caring, moral, and compassionate people by caring for others, both close and distant. I am reminded of a program at my elementary school that built relationships between the Grade 3 students and seniors at a local extended care home. The anecdotal response from teachers was that this was a deeply transformative learning experience for the students. The students learned about the lives and interests of their senior partners and, in doing so, shifted their view of the seniors as being a group of old people shuttered up in a scary institution, to being real people with stories and wisdom to share. In schools as centres of care, an ethos of care will also extend to include caring for ideas, plants and animals, and the planet at large.

How might children experience school as a centre of care? van Manen (2002) discusses this questions in terms of how children sense and experience the predominant tone of the school. Tone is carried through the prevailing atmosphere and mood of the classrooms, hallways, office, and other learning spaces. Tone is something that humans intuitively respond to. Tone is created by how people act and behave towards each other. It is also created by the kinds of posters, artwork, spaces, cleanliness, newsletters, parent involvement, and activities that infuse a school. van Manen says, “the sense of mood or atmosphere is a profound part of our existence. Through it we know the character of the world around us. Atmosphere or mood is a way of knowing and being in the world” (p. 69). He goes on to say that “for a young child the school can have the feel of an alien and threatening place, or it can create an atmosphere that shelters the child and inspires him
or her with security and confidence (p. 69). Adults have responsibility in setting a happy, caring tone by who and how they are as people in the school so that children may have the experience of school in which the predominant tone is a happy and caring one.

**Experiences of Possibility**

Schools are dynamic spaces and places; they abound with a complex network of social relationships, ideas, emotions, activities, physical and natural features, and interactions. This network is shared amongst and carried by the people who learn and live together in schools. According to Davis and Sumara (2006), it is through the interactions of these collective, shared experiences—what they describe as being a “bumping up” of neighboring interactions (p. 142)—that unforeseen ideas and ways of being emerge. Davis and Sumara describe conditions that lay a foundation for the possibility of emergence, including a diversity and repetition of interactions, shared control that resists dichotomies (e.g., play vs. academics), and finding a balance between being bound by rules and being open to the unplanned for. By ‘the unplanned for’ I mean those unexpected moments that pop up frequently in classrooms, ones that have the potential to lead to new and remarkable learning: a conflict between two children in the block center over who gets the biggest block, an unexpected fire drill, or the delicious moment when a class discovers for the first time the resonant feeling of vibrations and harmony created by singing a familiar song as a round. In this way, the classroom as a site of complex interactions, one that allows for the emergence of new ways of thinking and being, is a
classroom where children can experience new possibilities in their learning and in who they might become.

In addition to the social interactions of dynamic classroom spaces that contribute to experiences of possibility, considering the human capacity for imagination lends insight into what it might mean for children to fundamentally experience school as a space of possibility. Imagination can be thought of in terms of artistic creativity and experience (Greene, 1995; Smithrim, 2000), a vehicle through which to develop an empathic sense of being (Falkenberg, 2003; Gopnik, 2009), a bridge to connect experience and knowledge (Liston & Garrison, 2004; Smithrim, 2000) and a means through which to build children’s foundational capacity for innovative problem-solving in their future (Robinson, 2009). These rich conceptions of imaginative possibilities have strong implications for pedagogical practice and the transformation of schooling to a place where students “want to learn and where they can naturally discover their true passions” (Robinson, 2009, p. 238). The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines possibility as being “the state or fact of being possible; the capability of being” (Sykes, 1982, p. 800). Here, the words the capability of being speak to an ethos of learning in which children feel free to be—and become—themselves. O’Reilley (1998) calls this “creating space” (p. 1) for becoming. I would like to discuss the conception of possibility as being a foundational space for becoming.

Creating space for possibility in a classroom means children are encouraged to pursue interests of personal relevance, and to express themselves in their own unique
way. Such a classroom acknowledges that there can be multiple ways of being in the world, and multiple ways of making meaning from experiences of learning (Greene, 2009). According to Greene, schools as sites of possibility are schools where children are fully conscious to themselves and their learning. Greene calls this a “wide-awakeness” (p. 158) in learning. Experiencing school as a site of possibility to be and become one’s authentic self shifts notions of curriculum as being document-based and top-down—the content and skills to be achieved—to notions of curriculum woven through life. This opens up the possibility that children may continue to grow and become their most authentic selves as they progress through school and life.

Ayers (2002) speaks to the role of the teacher in creating such a space of possibility. He states that “teaching as an ethical enterprise goes beyond presenting what already is; it is teaching toward what ought to be” (p. 50). He furthers the notion of “what ought to be” by stating that:

The fundamental message of the teacher is this: You can change your life. Whoever you are, wherever you’ve been, whatever you’ve done, the teacher invites you to a second chance, another round, perhaps a different conclusion. The teacher posits possibility, openness, and alternative; the teacher points to what could be, but is not yet. (p. 51)

Experiences of possibility call upon the teacher to create learning spaces and experiences aimed at heightening the consciousness of their students (Greene, 1995). This aim pushes teaching and learning beyond the by-rote curriculum that often results from the standards movements. Greene asserts that

[W]e teachers must make an intensified effort to break through the frames of custom and to touch the consciousness of those we teach. It is an argument
stemming from a consciousness and helplessness. It has to do as well with our need to empower the young to deal with the threat and fear of holocaust, to know and understand enough to make significant choices as they grow. Surely, education today must be conceived as a mode of opening the world to critical judgments by the young and to their imaginative projections and, in time, to their transformative actions. (p. 56)

Greene considers what it is we are preparing children for. Without question, children need skills, such as literacy and technology, to live successfully into their future. And children also need the depth of character necessary to deal with the very real threats that they face in the future, threats even more pressing than when Greene published *Releasing the Imagination* in 1995. Children today face not only the threats of war and violence, but also a profoundly threatened biosphere, dwindling natural resources, the ever-present doom and gloom about shrinking jobs and the economy, and a daily barrage of popular entertainment culture that has pushed the visual telling of violence to unprecedented levels. Teachers have a moral obligation to gift children with the inner resources to deal with these realities of contemporary life. Most positively, children need the experience of possibility that allows the future to be possible. To this end teachers have a moral obligation to touch the consciousness of those we teach, as Maxine Greene said above, and to do so in such a way that children may develop a level of imagination and depth of personhood in order to become themselves, to live in healthy relationships with others, and to live into their future with confidence.
Chapter 3

Methodology

In order to explore the lived experience of happiness in the classroom, the philosophical, orientational, and interpretive frame of Hermeneutic Phenomenology\(^2\) guides this study. Below, I describe the ways in which hermeneutic phenomenology as a historic and philosophical framework guided, informed, and shaped my data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

**Methodological Orientation: Hermeneutic Phenomenology**

Gadamer (1976) considers the role of curiosity and a thirst for knowledge in the life of a researcher, one who is engaged in understanding human phenomenon and lived experience. He asserts that, in the generation of social scientific knowledge—such as developing new knowledge about what makes children happy at schools today—the aim of the researcher is to engage in a circle of asking questions and generating knowledge, which leads to the asking of new questions, which, in turn, generates new knowledge. To Gadamer, what drives the social science scholar is not methods, such as a natural scientist who is engaged in a step-by-step scientific process in order to discover the microscopic workings of a human cell, but imagination. To Gadamer, having imagination is what serves the researcher in his or her ability “to expose real, productive questions” (p. 12); further, he asserts that the ability to imagine and the ability to question are deeply

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\(^2\) For the remainder of this dissertation, hermeneutic phenomenology will consistently be written with a lower-case /h/ and /p/.
interwined: “the real power of hermeneutical consciousness is our ability to see what is questionable” (p. 13). Like Appelbaum’s (1995) notion of The Stop—those moments in life when we are confronted with resistance and our onrushing momentum is stopped, and, in this instant, new choices or ways of seeing the world are revealed—Gadamer considers the cyclical nature of coming to knowledge and knowing. In the ever-circling-round process, we begin with what is familiar, cycling in and around and back to our knowing and, in doing so, pushing and testing the boundaries of our understandings of our life experiences with each pass. Such circling-round allows us to “venture into the alien, the lifting up of something out of the alien” (p. 15). What is lifted up is, of course, the generation of a new understanding of the world. To Gadamer, this is the fundamental dimension of hermeneutics: to generate new understandings by finding something genuine and worthwhile to say, and saying something that is genuine and worthwhile.

Considering the task of seeking to find and say something genuine and worthwhile raises the question of recognition: how does one recognize what one is seeing in order to scribe it with importance? Gadamer (1976) acknowledges that it is the inter-subjective relationship between one’s life experience and one’s reflective insight that supports the hermeneutic endeavor. In this way, the hermeneutic endeavor is like the gathering together of a gap in order to bring something distant close. He states, “it seems to be generally characteristic of the emergence of the hermeneutical problem that something distant has to be brought close, a certain strangeness overcome, a bridge built between the once and the now” (p. 22). Hermeneutics teaches us, then, to see beyond any
impossibility of objective separation from ourselves so that we might recognize our historical experience as being a contribution to our present, which informs the future. In this way, we bring close our past and present in order to recognize those questions that will allow us to live, in new ways, into the future.

van Manen (1997) points out that “hermeneutic phenomenology tries to be attentive to both terms of its methodology” (p. 180). Here, “both terms” refer to the descriptive nature of phenomenology and the interpretive nature of hermeneutics. It was my aim in this study to be attentive to both terms through my intent to describe the conditions that promote children’s happiness in the early years of schooling, to interpret what it means for children to experience and be happy at school and as they learn, and to imagine new possibilities for how we might educate children into their future in ways that are human, caring, and attentive to their multi-dimensional being.

A central aim of the present study was to describe children’s direct experiences of happiness in the classroom; a second was to understand the meaning of their experiences of happiness and the pedagogical conditions that promote happiness. The interpretive dimension of hermeneutic phenomenology makes it more suitable as the methodological orientation for a study on happiness than a strictly phenomenological approach, as “the main focus of phenomenology is with pre-reflective experiences and feelings” (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007, p. 616). Accordingly, orienting this study as a hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry provided me with a lens for insight into children’s experiences of the phenomenon of happiness in their early years of schooling; the lens of hermeneutic
phenomenology filtered these insights from within the present moments which I observed in the school and classroom settings of the child, and from past insights based on my personal and professional life experiences (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007; Gadamer, 1976; van Manen, 1997). It is this added dimension of contextualized interpretation that moves hermeneutic phenomenology beyond simple description of and reporting on a phenomenon to the explication and creation of meaning (Smith, 1999).

Investigating lived experience begins with the gathering together of life experiences relevant to the phenomenon being studied. The source of data to represent life experience is found within the phenomenon itself (van Manen, 1997). Attunement to the phenomenon comes from being consciously and reflectively aware of one’s own experience in relation to the phenomenon—what van Manen calls having the lived experience “on one’s mind” (1997, p. 57). Such attunement orients the researcher to the phenomenon and in doing so opens the possibility to the researcher’s consciousness that one’s personal experience may also be the experience of others (van Manen, 1997). My experience as a classroom teacher provided me with the awareness of and sensitivity to the ebb and flow of the rhythms and routines of an early primary classroom. In my conversations with teachers, children, and parents; in my observations of classrooms; in my attunement to the tones and energies of the different schools I visited, my awareness of and sensitivity to classroom life—gained through the hours, days, and years I spent working with children within a busy, vibrant, and dynamic public school—gave me the ability to see what needed to be seen in order to say something genuine and worthwhile.
Smith (1999) argues that, philosophically, hermeneutic phenomenology sees life itself as a text to be interpreted and understood. Just as written text contains signs and symbols (e.g., letters, words, and visual graphics), lived experience is rich with observable signs and symbols (e.g., conversation, hand gestures, and street signs). In order to orient myself, hermeneutically, to the phenomenon of happy classrooms as I studied it in the field, I maintained a practice of reflexivity throughout my research process from the beginning days of my doctoral studies through to the writing of this dissertation. This process of reflection was composed sitting at my laptop, in hardbound journals, on Post-it™ notes stuck around my apartment, and in conversations with friends, colleagues, participants, and academics. During the data collection phase of this study, I implemented a practice of free writing for 45 minutes after each interview and classroom observation. This act of free writing allowed for the at-once emergence and quickening of key ideas that were brought to the forefront of my consciousness during data collection.

In order to help focus my attention on what needed to be seen during the actual field-based classroom observations, I drew upon a series of creative, observational, and interpretive activities as articulated by Smith (1999) in his book *Pedagon: Interdisciplinary essays in the human sciences, pedagogy and culture*. These activities—which I call *Hermeneutic Activities*, for their method in bringing to light the multiple lived texts within the classroom—were *Icon Studies, Sounds Studies, Conversation*
Windows, and Time Studies. These activities will be described in detail in the Phase 2 section of data collection, below.

In reading about hermeneutic phenomenology as a methodological orientation that informed my practical decisions about data collection, one tension that emerged for me was the fact that the predominant format of hermeneutic phenomenological data is written text, such as through reflective writing, iterative re-writing, and transcribed interview conversations (van Manen, 1997); processes which requires the study participant to access higher-order metacognitive thinking and executive functioning skills. As such, methods to produce written text are adult-oriented and require the kind of development, commitment, and discipline that can take years of one’s life to develop. These are not the activities of a five-year-old. While no less meaningful or rich with interpretive possibility, a five-year-old tends toward much simpler observations of their experience. Therefore, as this research involved eliciting the perspectives of young children, it was necessary for me to choose methods that were appropriate to their age and development (Freeman & Mathison, 2009). Young children need thoughtfully planned prompts and cues in order to help them describe their experience (Freeman & Mathison, 2009); knowing what a thoughtfully planned prompt might look and sound like requires the researcher to be pedagogically oriented to the sensibilities of children (van Manen, 1991, 1997). Another way of putting this is, in order to elicit children’s descriptions of their lived experience, the researcher needs to meet children at their level. *At their level* can mean physically, developmentally, socially, and in terms of interests.
Examples can include physically sitting on the ground or children’s chairs so as to be at their height; following children into their play and work spaces; playing and engaging with children; providing visual modes for children to best represent their ideas, such as through drawing and photography; and by allowing children to be the experts of their classroom, their favourite activities, and their experience (Castle, 2012; Freeman & Mathison, 2009; van Manen, 1997). In many ways, these research practices are akin to the practices of a teacher who is oriented to the sensibilities of a child.

The overview and specific details of this study are now described, below.

**Design Overview**

The primary objectives for this study were to illuminate teachers’ conceptions of happiness, to determine what teachers do to create happy classroom spaces, and to determine how teachers promote children’s happiness in the early primary grades. In order to answer the research questions and meet the research objectives, and keeping in line with a hermeneutic phenomenological orientation, the data collection strategies for this study focused on the generation of text as a means to describe and understand the phenomenon in question. This meant that I collected data through interviews, classroom observations, anecdotal questionnaires, drawing, and photography by engaging with teachers, students, and parents as research participants because they are the players most closely involved in classroom life and therefore in the best position to shed light on the phenomenon of happiness in the classroom. While parents are not as intensely involved in teaching and learning within the classroom as teachers and students are, they do have a
vested interest in the education of their children. It is well recognized in research and practical literature that building strong home/school relationships is vital to the success of children at school (Rosenthal & Sawyer, 1996). Many schools and teachers in Canada make explicit their aim to create strong home/school connections by having an inclusive ‘open door’ policy to parents who wish to visit and participate in their child’s classroom and school experience.

The primary research question is broad, asking, “What makes a happy classroom?” As the supporting questions address two areas of focus (i.e., conceptions of happiness and classroom-based practices), this study was designed to respond to these questions in two phases: a teacher interview phase and a classroom observation phase. In the next section, I offer an overview of the two phases of data collection; this is followed by a detailed description of each data collection strategy (see Appendix A for a table outlining the grade levels, school type, data types, and participant count of this study).

For the teacher interview phase, I interviewed a total of 12 teachers from five different pedagogical traditions: (a) five public school teachers, (b) three independent school teachers, (c) two Waldorf teachers, (d) one Froebel teacher, and (e) one Montessori teacher. For the classroom observation phase, based on the first-phase interviews, I selected one representative school for each school type, and conducted a series of observations, parent questionnaires, student interviews, and student art-making in the classrooms of the teachers from that school that I interviewed. This meant that I conducted observations in (a) two public classrooms, (b) two independent classrooms, (c)
two Waldorf classrooms, (d) one Froebel classroom, and (e) one Montessori classroom. Finally, I ended each observation with an exit interview of the participating teacher (see Appendix B for the timelines of this study).

**Ethical Clearance**

Ethical clearance was sought sequentially at four levels: (a) the Education Research Ethics Board (EREB) at the Faculty of Education level, (b) the General Research Ethics Board (GREB) at the University level, (c) by the Superintendent at the public school board where this study was situated, and finally (d) by administration at each individual participating school. This complete process took place between the months of July and October of 2011. In addition, I completed a Police Record Check for Service with the Vulnerable Sector clearance at the police station local to my University, as this is a legal requirement for any persons who do work, volunteer service, or research in schools and with children. (See Appendix C for the GREB clearance letter.)

**Participant Recruitment**

The underlying criterion for participant selection was the aim to gain as broad a perspective as possible in response to the research questions. This meant I sought out a broad selection of school types, geopolitical locations, and participants. I now describe the steps and decisions I made in the participant recruitment stage of this study.

**School Types**

As mentioned above, in order to develop a broad understanding of what makes a happy classroom and how teachers promote children’s happiness, this study explored
teachers’ perceptions of happiness and practices promoting children’s happiness within five different school types: public, independent, Waldorf, Froebel, and Montessori. By type I mean the underlying context of history, philosophy, theory, and practice within which each school is nested and which guides the pedagogical stance and decision-making of its teachers. While each school type might differ in its fundamental philosophies and approaches to the schooling of young children, what is similar is that each school type aims to educate children to the best of their ability. In striving to best educate children, whether articulated explicitly or implicitly, it would be hard to imagine any school system or teacher arguing against the importance of promoting children’s happiness at school. This study, therefore, seeks to make explicit those conditions and approaches that promote happy classroom spaces and happy learners in the early primary grades, even in contexts where this is a tacit aim. As children are schooled in a variety of ways in Canada, situating a study in five educational contexts, while not representative of the many other educational approaches and contexts available, provided a broader picture of the pedagogical approaches and classroom conditions that promote children’s happiness than would have been obtained had I situated this study in a single school context.

**Geopolitical Locations**

This study was situated in schools located in central and southeastern Ontario. The schools were selected for their range of geographic locations within an accessible three-hour travel radius to me as the Principal Investigator. The public school participants
all taught within one school district. This district covers a wide geographical region. Thus I was able to recruit teachers who worked in urban, suburban, and rural schools, which met the broad perspective criteria. As independent, Waldorf, Froebel, and Montessori schools are not bounded by a singular school district or region, I was able to recruit teacher participation from the full breadth of the geopolitical range of this study.

**Teacher Participants**

I used a purposeful criterion-based procedure (Patton, 2002) to select the 12 teacher participants and 8 classroom observations that comprised this study. Teachers were selected who were (a) teaching JK, SK, Grade 1, or Grade 2 full-time within the study period, (b) explicit in their aim to promote the happiness of their students, and (c) willing to participate in the study within the established timelines. Participants were recruited through professional and personal contacts, as well as cold-calling potential schools that had been recommended to me. For each phone call, I spoke first with the school secretary to inquire as to the best way to approach the Principal. For some schools, this meant I was put directly through to the Principal and I was able to pitch my study immediately. For others, I was instructed to e-mail the Principal or Head of School; it was my experience that I received a prompt response from all administration. The purpose of approaching administration first, before teachers, was to gain this final level of local clearance to conduct my study within their school.
**Classroom Selection**

Upon completion of the first phase of teacher interviews, I selected the classrooms from each school type to observe. My selection was based on the following criteria. First, as there was only one Montessori teacher and one Froebel teacher who agreed to participate within the geographic range of my study, there classrooms were automatically selected for observation. Second, for the public, independent, and Waldorf teachers, I selected classrooms to observe based on the teacher’s explicit discussion of their approaches to supporting the happiness of their students. Third, I selected classrooms for observation in response to a positive feeling of welcome that I received from the teachers and administration. And finally, I selected classrooms to observe with the intent to maintain as broad a perspective as possible amongst the communities, values, and backgrounds of the classrooms and school communities.

This latter criterion was especially important, as my study encompassed both publically funded and parent funded schools. While the Froebel, Montessori, and Waldorf schools were by no means wealthy communities with exorbitant tuition fees, the bottom-line is that parents whose children attend these schools are in a position to be able to pay tuition, regardless of the sacrifices they might need to make in order to do so; having this opportunity is not available to every family. Thus, I decided to situate my public school observations in a school located in a socially and economically disadvantaged community. Further, in each of the public and independent school types, I conducted first
phase interviews of pairs of teachers who taught separate classes but worked collaboratively together in developing their programs. Thus I decided to observe both teachers’ classes in each of those school types as being one representative example for that school type. Finally, I chose to observe both the Kindergarten and the combined Grades 1 and 2 class at the Waldorf school because this provided a wider range of perspective in relation to both grade and age. The base-line criteria for all of my decisions was to gain as broad a perspective as possible on my research questions, to be as balanced as possible across the school types, and to honour the generosity of time and expertise that the participants, administration, and classroom communities shared with me.

**Student and Parent Participants**

Once I had completed all of the first phase teacher interviews in each school type category, and once I had selected the classrooms to observe, I visited the children in each class one week in advance of starting my observations to introduce the study and myself. I described myself as a teacher and a researcher who was really curious about what makes children happy at school, and that I was writing a big book about this topic. I told the children that their teacher had given me permission to visit their classroom to learn about what makes a happy classroom, because both the teacher and I thought that the children would have many wonderful ideas to share. I then explained that I needed permission from their parents and from them in order to write about their ideas in my book. I then gave a package to the teacher to send home with the children at the end of
the day. The package contained the letter of information, consent forms for parents to sign, an assent form for children to sign, and the parent questionnaire. The teachers collected the returned forms and gave them to me when I began my observation visits

**Phase 1: Teacher Interviews**

**Data Collection Strategies**

The purpose of the teacher interviews was to elicit teachers’ perceptions of happiness, pedagogy, and their approaches to supporting the happiness of their students in their classroom program within the context of their school community and school type. Each semi-structured interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and was audio-recorded using Garage Band on my MacBook Pro laptop computer. Garage Band was selected for the recording of each interview as it provides a high quality of sound recording and an efficient way to save, organize, and transcribe each audio file.

At the beginning of each interview, teachers were asked to fill out a consent form and a demographic form. The demographic form asked the teacher to identify their age, contact information, years of teaching, and why they wished to participate in the study. The interview was guided by questions about: (a) the teacher (e.g., “Describe a typical day in your classroom”), (b) pedagogy (e.g., “What does pedagogy mean to you?”), (c) happiness (e.g., “What makes you happy?”), (d) happy classrooms (e.g., “How do you recognize when your students are happy?”), and (e) curriculum (e.g., “What does your curriculum say about supporting the emotional well-being of students?”) Next, the teacher was asked to narrate a story of a particularly happy time in the classroom. Finally,
the teacher was asked to take two photographs of their classroom: one photograph that represented their ideas of happiness from their perspective, and one photograph that they thought represented children’s ideas of happiness. After the interview, I emailed the photographs to the teachers and asked that they respond by describing what the photograph represented, why they took it, and what they thought it meant. These two tasks—narrating a happiness story, and taking a photograph—were described to the teachers in advance of the interview to give them time to think about their response (see Appendix D for a sample of the interview guide).

**Phase 2: Classroom Observations**

**Data Collection Strategies**

One aim of qualitative research is description. In order to generate the best description of the phenomenon in question, the researcher must go “where the action is” (Patton, 2002, p. 48). Different terms are used synonymously for field-based observations, including *participant observation, fieldwork, and direct observation*; yet, each term has in common the researcher’s action of being immersed within the context and setting of the phenomenon in question (Patton, 2002). Further, field-based observations have multiple benefits, including an increased ability to capture the context and happenings of the setting that an interview alone might not reveal, the ability for the researcher to move past prior conceptions that they might hold based on reading documents or having prior conversations about the setting, the ability to see things that the people who are fully engaged in the action might not be aware of or be willing to talk
about in an interview (Patton, 2002). Finally, engaging in fieldwork requires the researcher to use “all of one’s senses and capacities, including the capacity to experience affect no less than cognition” (Patton, 2002, p. 49).

Because the research questions of this study were structured as what and how questions (What make a happy classroom? and How do teachers do this?), this meant that answers were to be found in the classroom. Thus, I conducted a variety of classroom-based observational strategies with a variety of participants in a variety of contexts. The observational strategies were designed in response to Patton’s (2002) above argument for the researcher’s use of their full range of cognitive, emotional, and intuitive capacities, with the aim of developing a rich description of the phenomenon of happiness in education, one that resonates through and across multiple schooling contexts. Further, the classroom observations were conducted with the guiding presence of hermeneutic phenomenology as a descriptive, orientational, and interpretive lens through which to understand and make meaning from the observations. Below, I describe the following data collection strategies used during the classroom observations: (a) advance preparation, (b) initial visit, (c) parent questionnaire, (d) observations, (e) hermeneutic activities, (f) student drawings, (g), student interviews and photographs, (h) teacher exit interviews, and (i) keyword reflections.

**Advance preparation.**

In advance of each classroom observation, I met with each teacher to explain the study, and to discuss my role as a researcher entering his or her classroom. These
discussions took place in the form of an e-mail correspondence, telephone calls, and in-person meetings, all at a mutually agreeable time. As it was important to me that the research experience was a positive one for participants and for myself, the purpose of this meeting was to start building a rapport with the teacher and to ensure clarity of roles and expectations of both the teacher and myself. During this meeting, we also worked out the observation schedule. I then generated a calendar of my visits and sent this to the participants as an e-mail attachment. Finally, I explained that, as an outsider entering into their classroom, I would need to actively build a positive rapport with the children so that they might trust me both as an adult in their room and as an adult whose role was not their teacher.

**Initial visit.**

On the first day of the observation, I used the following three strategies to enter the classroom and begin to build a trusting rapport with the students. First, I read the children an illustrated picture book titled *Little Beaver and the Echo*, by Amy MacDonald and Sarah Fox-Davies. This is a story about a little beaver who is sad because he is all alone; then, through the course of paddling around a large lake in order to find the owner of a voice which he hears echoing across the water, he makes four new friends. As a teacher, I read this book many times to my students, and found that children immensely enjoy the lively patterns of language and the ironic images of a beaver, duck, otter, and turtle floating about in a birch-bark canoe. Second, I asked students to give me a tour of their classroom in order to explain how the room operates, the rules and expectations, and
where classroom materials and various learning centres were found. Third, during all of my observations and interactions with children, I brought myself to the level of children by sitting in their low chairs and on the floor. Finally, I avoided spaces in the classroom that children associate with authority, such as the teacher desk or the front of the line. I did this latter step in order to distinguish myself as a non-teacher or authority figure, but as an adult who was curious about the children, about their classroom, and about their ideas (Freeman & Mathison, 2009).

It is important to note that the above are descriptions of the general process that guided my preparations for and entry into each classroom. Due to the range of school types in this study, I adjusted what I did according to each situation. For example, one of the guiding principles of a Froebel education is the pre-eminence of family; thus, my initial visit to the Froebel school was to have a cup of tea with the founder and director of the school in a friendly and home-like atmosphere in order that I might learn about how the historic writings and methodology of Froebel were realized in the school today, and so that I might be introduced to all of the staff and school community before beginning data collection. As another example, Waldorf Kindergarten teachers strive to create a classroom that is warm and nurturing, with minimal disruption from outside influences. This meant that I approached the Waldorf classroom observations with a heightened sensitivity to and respect for Waldorf philosophy. I did this by discussing the overall purpose of the observation with the two Waldorf teachers selected for the classroom observation phase of the study, and explaining the specific data collection strategies that I
was using. I then asked each Waldorf teacher to identify those strategies that they felt were most congruent with the overarching philosophy and methodology of their practice, and which strategies might not be appropriate to use. The result of this conversation was that I was able to implement all of the data collection strategies in the Grade 1/2 combined class, but in the Kindergarten class—where children are not asked to engage in analytic meta-cognitive thinking, such as in an interview asking a child to identify what makes them happy and why this might be—I did not interview any of the students or ask them to produce any drawings for me. The Waldorf Kindergarten teacher explained to me that the Steiner model of child development is marked through the rhythm of seven-year cycles and is conceptualized as a ‘moving upward’ through the child’s body. This upward motion of development begins with the child’s physical body in the first seven years, to the child’s etheric body from ages seven to 14, and then to the astral body of the adolescent. Asking a child to engage in head-based, analytic thinking too early pulls a young child out of their body, leaving a metaphoric “hole” in the development of the child. Thus, Waldorf Kindergarten teachers allow children to have body-based experiences of play, learning, and feelings without asking them to analyze these experiences and feelings. Waldorf teachers encourage parents of young children to avoid asking the questions that parents of children who attend public school are typically encouraged to ask at the end of the day in order to promote language development, questions like “So, what did you do today?” Instead, parents of Waldorf children are encouraged to allow their children the space and grace to talk about their day—or not—at
their will. Accordingly, asking a child in a Waldorf Kindergarten class to analyze what makes them happy and why this is so runs contrary to the Waldorf philosophy of child development. The key point to be made here is that the five different school types, with eight different classroom observations, required me to be flexible in my data collection strategies.

**Parent questionnaire.**

A short, four-item questionnaire was sent home to parents with the initial letter of information and consent package. The purpose of the questionnaire was to elicit parents’ perceptions of what makes their child happy. The first two questions invited parents to list what makes their child happy at school and not at school; the third question invited the parents to describe what comes to mind when they think of a happy classroom, and the fourth question asked parents if they thought happiness should be a fundamental aim of education, and to articulate why or why not (see Appendix E for a sample of the parent questionnaire).

**Observations.**

I conducted classroom observations over the span of six months from November of 2011 through early May of 2012. This was a wonderful experience both professionally and personally, for I had the opportunity to see a breadth of communities, schools, classrooms, and pedagogy that is not afforded to busy classroom teachers who are focused on their daily teaching routines and practices. For each class, I completed an

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3 See Long-Breipohl (2008) for a more detailed explanation of child development from a Waldorf perspective.
average of 12 to 15 hours of observations spread over a two-week period. Generally, this meant I visited each class four to five times for three hours. This gave me the opportunity to observe the rhythms and routines of the classroom at different times of the day, and to observe the children at different activities. In addition, the seven-month study period meant that I was able to observe classrooms earlier in the school year, when routines and relationships are being established, and later in the school year, when routines and relationships are well established.

For indoor observations, I designed a letter-sized template, which I used to establish a consistent pattern of note taking. This template was divided into three columns: a narrow column to the left for time-keeping, a wide column in the middle for running records, and a narrow column to the right for making note of the ebb and flow of the volume, energy, and tone of the classroom. Across the bottom of the document was a list of tonal adjectives (e.g., bubbly, alive, chatty, silly, chaotic), and across the top was a section for demographic information. Each three-hour observation generated between 15 and 20 handwritten pages of notes. For outdoor observations, I used a small notebook, which fit easily into the palm of my hand.

**Hermeneutic activities.**

The purpose of each observation was to take note of (a) the physical features of the classroom, such as furniture, layout, and design, (b) the sensory experiences of the classroom, such as the sounds of children’s laughter, the light quality, the colours, and smells, (c) the social and relational interactions between students, and between students
and adults, and (d) my intuitive response to the tone of the room. Classroom life is woven deeply with the textures of sounds, sights, smells, energies, and feelings; as a researcher engaged in the problem of designing a hermeneutic phenomenological study, I needed to find ways to orient myself to the familiarity of these textures while simultaneously finding modalities of observation to allow myself to experience these textures in new ways. Smith (1999) explains that the hermeneutic endeavor is “not just focused on texts per se, but on the deep texture of our lives” (p. 40). Thinking about classroom life as text to be read and understood, I selected four observation activities described by Smith (1999, pp. 40–41) as a way to “shake loose” (p. 40) my pre-held assumptions and ways of interpreting the details of my lived experience of classroom life. For the purpose of this study, I called these activities *Hermeneutic Activities*. These are: *Icon Studies, Sounds Studies, Conversation Windows, and Time Studies*. I briefly describe each, below.

In *Icon Studies*, I paid attention to the visual landscape surrounding the children in the form of signs, pictures, photographs, and design in which the phenomenon is imbedded. In the classroom, this includes children’s art, word walls, anchor charts, posters, room arrangement, and colours. I documented the visual landscape by making maps and drawings of the classroom, and by taking digital photographs. *Sound Studies* calls to attention the sonic environment of the phenomenon being studied. In the classroom, this includes the sounds of teachers and children’s voices at work and play, announcement over the PA system, sounds in the hallway and on the playground, and music. I documented the sounds of the classroom by creating lists of sounds, and by
using musical notation to identify the rise and fall of volume and dynamic. In

Conversations Windows, I paid attention to the fragments of conversations held amongst children and between children and adults, the kind of conversational fragments that emerge naturally, as opposed to the call-and-response nature of an interview.

Conversation Windows also includes paying attention to the mood, tone, and vocabulary of the conversations. I documented conversations by keeping running records of the overheard dialogues and scraps of conversation. In Time studies I documented a running record of the minutiae of day-to-day events as I observed each classroom, including daily routines, interactions between children, teacher responses to children, and line-ups and the management of transitions.

Before I give the impression that each three-hour observation was conducted neatly and systematically, with a precise 30-minutes of note-taking followed by taking ten photographs for an Icon Study, followed by another 30-minutes of note-taking, it is important to observe that, while I did all of the Hermeneutic and observational activities over the course of the 12 to 15 hours of observation, the strategies that I called upon for each individual observation were responsive to the moments that I was observing, within the context and moments within which the class was situated. For example, in one forty minute period in one of the public school classes, I found myself sitting on the floor playing cars with three boys one minute, sitting in a low chair observing the children at carpet time the next, and shortly thereafter was walking down the hall at the end of the long line-up of children as they filed off to the library. Conversely, in one Waldorf
observation, I took on the role of a tree in an oral story-telling at the carpet, joined the class at the communal table for snack and Golden Silence, which was followed by a period of note-taking while the children played. In this way, I made my decisions to do this or that hermeneutic activity within the moments that they were called for: a shift of sunlight across a window caused a hush to fall across the room, signaling to me the opportunity for a Sound Study; children’s voices raised in territorial frustration over a wooden block signaled to me the opportunity for a Conversation Window, noting the language that the teacher used to help solve the conflict. Smith (1999) asserts that hermeneutic inquiry is inherently creative, both in its aim to interpret meaning from these events and within the lived experience of the inquiry itself. Thus, I employed the hermeneutic activities creatively within the lived moments of each classroom observation.

**Student drawings.**

On the second day of each observation, I invited the children to create a happiness drawing as an inclusive and participatory activity and so that no one felt excluded. I only analysed drawings from students with permission in place. Drawing activities are an effective means to access children’s ideas by providing an alternative to analytic conversations, by being a succinct representation of the child’s experiences, and as a useful tool to reveal participants’ feelings in response to the question or drawing task.

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4 *Golden Silence* is a short duration of silence sustained during snack time in a Waldorf Kindergarten class. When all of the children are seated and have their snack ready, the teacher lights a beeswax candle and sings the words “golden silence” to a short *sol mi* phrase. This indicates that it is time to eat. When the period of golden silence is over, the teacher snuffs out the candle, stating, “Children, you may talk quietly while you finish your snack.”
(Freeman & Mathison, 2009). To set the context for the drawing, I reminded the children that I was writing a book about happy classrooms, and that I thought the children would have some excellent ideas for my book. I facilitated a brief conversation about the things that children liked to do at school, places and spaces where they felt comfortable, and things that made them happy. At the end of this conversation, I invited the students to draw me a picture of things that made them happy at school, visiting with each child as they drew and scribing their stories; in some cases, the teachers also scribed the stories. I collected all of the drawings and sorted them for analysis according to whether or not they had cleared both the assent and consent process.

**Student interviews and photographs.**

Freeman and Mathison (2009) address the sensitivity and orientation the interviewer must hold when interviewing young children. They assert that the underlying attitude of the interviewer must be “the belief that children and adolescents are worth listening to” (p. 88). Listening to children involves not just listening to the facts of their answers, but more deeply to the ways that children use their language in order to express meaning. Freeman and Mathison argue that a responsive and sensitive interviewer of children pays attention to the child as a “meaning-making, active agent” (p. 92). They outline a number of characteristics of a good interviewer of children, including the importance of developing a rapport, the demonstration of genuine empathy, inviting and responding to the child’s questions and concerns during the interview, using age
appropriate language and sentence structure, and allowing the child to participate in setting the pace and direction of the interview.

I conducted an average of three student interviews for each classroom in the second week of observations because this gave the children time to gain comfort with my presence and to identify those students that I thought might be good interview candidates. I selected interview participants based on the following criteria: (a) they were identified by the teacher as being a suitable candidate to interview, (b) they cleared the assent and consent process, and (c) were students that I had observed as being social with other children and comfortable with my presence in the classroom. The purpose of these interviews was to determine, from the children’s perspectives, what makes them happy in their classrooms and at school, spaces and places in their classrooms and at school that make them happy, and how they recognize when others and themselves are happy. In addition, this interview was an opportunity to speak of unhappy feelings and experiences at school. Happy experiences and unhappy experiences are part of childhood; therefore, the aim in asking the participants to identify features that they identify with unhappy experiences was to gain a deeper understanding of children’s lived experience at school.

For each interview, I first had the student participant tell me the story of their drawing followed by having the student give me a tour of the classroom to show me those classroom conditions and activities that they like and associated with happy feelings. During the tour, I invited students to take photographs of the areas and features of the classroom that they identified as being happy places and associated with happy feelings.
If needed, I gave students instructions on how to operate the camera, but I did not dictate or stage the angle of the students’ photographs in any way. After the children had taken their photographs, we returned to the table where we talked about the photographs by flipping through the images on the digital screen. Freeman and Mathison (2009) note that providing children with the opportunity to take and then talk about photographs provides children with a sense of empowerment with the interview topic, promotes children’s ownership over the dialogue, and gives children a concrete reference point through which to share their ideas and stories.

I recorded the seated portions of the interview on my MacBook Pro, and used a hand-held digital recorder to capture the conversation during the moving tour portion of the interview. Each student interview was approximately 15-minutes in length (see Appendix F for the student interview guide).

**Teacher exit interviews.**

During the course of the twelve hours of classroom observation, I engaged in frequent and informal conversations with each teacher. Towards the end of the observation period, I conducted one final semi-structured exit interview with the teacher. The purpose of this interview was to deepen my understanding of what I had observed in the classroom, to clarify questions that emerged about the teacher’s methods and pedagogical decisions, and to determine if my interpretation of children’s experiences were in-line with the teacher’s understanding. In advance of each exit interview, I wrote out questions, observations, and key themes that emerged during my observations and
that I wanted to focus on during the interview. I began each interview by speaking for a few minutes about these key themes and ideas; I then asked the teacher to comment on my observations and to share their own thoughts about them, and about the experience of having me visit and observe their classroom. Each exit interview was approximately 45 minutes in length, and was recorded using Garage Band (see Appendix E for the teacher exit interview guide).

**Keyword reflections.**

After each interview and observation, I took myself to a café or a library as promptly as possible and wrote freely for about 45 minutes on that day’s experience. During each free write, one or two key phrases and words would emerge that would focus the writing; these phrases and words came directly from the participants. This process of writing on key themes also served as a means to hone and focus the next days’ observation or conversations.

Towards the end of the six months of data collection, I found myself overwhelmed with intense feelings of gratitude to my participants. They opened up their classrooms to me, gave me access to their thoughts and feelings, made time for me at the end of busy days to talk and answer my questions, and allowed me to watch them interact and be with their students. As a teacher, I know what it is like to have a guest in your classroom watching your every move and how exposed one can feel in this—particularly when children are misbehaving or when one is feeling out of sorts. As a result of this, and despite some of the tensions and judgments that, at times, arose unbidden within me as I
observed, it became my intention to represent the experiences and classrooms in the most appreciative of lenses, and to describe any tensions or contradictions I observed in a way that is both respectful and sensitive to the complex interplay of forces that can create unhappiness or tensions within classroom experience.

**Analysis**

A guiding principle of a Froebel education is that of *unity* (Brosterman, 1997). Froebel’s ideas about a harmonious unity amongst human, natural, and spiritual systems was ahead of his time, stating that at a young age, “I could already perceive unity in diversity, the correlation of forces, the interconnection of all living things, and life in matter” (cited in Brosterman, 1997, p. 18). Having spent his childhood and youth as a student of theology, religion, botany, architecture, mathematics, map-making, and philosophy, Froebel, as an adult, wove themes of unity—as expressed through part-to-whole relationships—through his Kindergarten curriculum. Froebel developed the Gifts as a means through which children in his Kindergarten could explore this guiding principle. Each gift was a small three-dimensional object divided into smaller parts. An example is the Fifth gift, a wooden cube, which is divided twice across each face, thus creating nine smaller cubes. The whole cube can be taken apart into its nine individual pieces and played with; it can then be reassembled back into its whole form and stored in one neat box. By playing with this Gift, making little towers or geometric designs, a child can discover principles and understandings about the world that are, in fact, greater than its parts or whole alone. A child can discover properties of symmetry, or the forces of
gravity, or the mathematical principle of fractions. In this way, a child can play with small bits, relate these to their whole form and, in doing so, make meaning and build knowledge that is connected to greater themes and ideas.

I call upon this example of Froebel because it points us in the direction of considering the aim of hermeneutic phenomenological analysis, which—as we have learned from Gadamer—is to find something genuine and worthwhile to say about something that compels us. And that it is through the creative gathering of the constituent parts of a lived experience as text to be read—a conversation overheard, a drawing representing the ideas of a child, the sound of children at play, the chronicling of the minutia of time within a busy classroom—that reveals to us understandings that are greater than these constituent parts. Of this, Smith (1999) states, “the hermeneutic imagination works to rescue the specificities of our lives from the burden of their everydayness to show how they reverberate within grander schemes of things” (p. 41).

Throughout the course of the six months of data collection comprising the whole of this study, a total of 704 individual pieces of data were generated. These pieces include digitally recorded interviews, handwritten observation notes, handwritten parent questionnaires, children’s drawings, transcriptions of all observation notes and recorded interviews, photographs, keyword reflections, and a methods log in which I kept track of all major and minor decisions, thinking and feelings, and events that transpired throughout the study. Castle (2012) points out that analysis is but a process of “reducing the data down into smaller units of meaning, examining the parts, and then making
holistic sense of the parts” (p. 96). The brevity of this description reminds me that an analytic process can be quite streamlined in its essential steps: reduce, examine, make sense. I always appreciate a basic framework as a point of entry to a new experience, as it helps me wrap my head around something that I am unfamiliar with. But this basic framework falls far short of a truth about the complexity inherent to the analysis of a large data set populated with a myriad of bits to be reduced and examined, and an endless array of possible relationships to be made sense of. Thus, the underlying analytic metaphor for this study was not one of sequential steps (i.e., reduce, examine, make sense), but rather a more elegant framework in the form of Froebel’s pedagogical principle of unity and his methodology of Gift Play. Guided by this framework, I gathered together the whole of the study, investigated the unique properties of each individual bit, messed around with its relationships to other bits, and then found ways to reassemble the bits into a new whole. But, unlike a Froebel Gift in which each small part must be placed back into its storage box exactly the same way each time, my analytic aim was to find new ways to articulate the meaning of children’s happiness at school and in learning, new ways to frame how one might think about cultivating and creating happiness at school and in learning, and to do this in such a way that is not limited by the boxes of classrooms but opens up and transcends endless new possibilities for teaching and learning.

This next section describes my process of organizing, transcribing, and analyzing the data in order to make sense of the whole that is greater than its parts.
Data Organization

Early in the data collection phase, I established two complementary, colour-coded filing systems: a digital filing system on my laptop, and a hard-copy filing drawer. I categorized files according to phase, school type, data type, and participant (i.e., teacher, student, parent). In addition, I created administrative files to organize letters of information, consent forms, interview guides, observation templates, and demographic forms. Finally, once all of the transcriptions were complete, I printed hard copies and organized the transcriptions into binders according to phase, data type, and participants (see Figure 3.1 illustrating my digital and hard copy data filing systems).

Figure 3.1. Data filing systems.
On the left, data was organized digitally by phase and data type, school type, communication and study documents, and analysis. On the right, hard copy data was organized by school type, hand-written notes, and transcriptions.
Data Transcription

Patton (2002) describes the process of transcribing data as being “a point of transition between data collection and analysis” (p. 441). Transcription provides researchers with the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the data. This is true with this study. This process allowed me to familiarize myself with the language, vocabulary, resonant phrases, and juicy tidbits spoken and written about by participants. While I tried to keep on top of data transcription during the data collection period itself, the sheer volume of documents, notes, and recordings meant that I was unable to do so as efficiently and timely as I had hoped. In addition, I had limited experience with data transcription, and I needed an extended period of uninterrupted time to teach myself how to use the features of the iTunes and Garage Band program on my laptop, and how to develop a system of transcription. Thus, I transcribed the majority of data between the months of May and August of 2012.

In keeping with both Patton (2002) and McMillan and Schumacher (2010), who assert that interviews should be transcribed verbatim in order to best capture and describe the natural rhythms and speech patterns of the participants, I transcribed the first five interview recordings verbatim. Upon completion, I read through these five transcriptions and noticed that the meanings and ideas of the participants were often hidden amidst the many “uhms,” “ahs,” and incomplete thoughts that populated these verbatim transcripts. In consultation with my supervisor, I decided to change my approach and began to transcribe for clarity, finishing the remainder of the transcripts by cleaning up all verbal
utterances and word redundancies as I listened to each interview recording. My rationale for doing this was (a) my experience of reading a confusing piece of transcribed text in a research report is neither pleasant nor illuminating, (b) my experience of reading a confusing piece of text in a research report often feels uncomfortable, like a disservice has been done to the participant by capturing in perpetuity their less-than-articulate spoken thoughts, a capturing of which contradicts the fleeting nature of spoken language, (c) I knew that that a cleaning-up process would need to be done eventually in order to communicate the ideas of the participants in as clear and respectful a manner as possible, thus doing it from the beginning saved time, and (d) a clean transcript meant that the coding process was completed with clean text, lending itself to richer and more immediately meaningful quotations. It is important to note that I did not ever change the meaning of a participant’s response; I simply removed meaningless utterances and word redundancies.

**Overarching Approaches to Data Analysis**

As described, above, my analysis was guided by the metaphor of Froebel’s pedagogical principle of *unity*, which served as a means for me to conceptualize the large number of individual bits of data and their relationship to the whole of the study, the multiple participants and school types, as well as the larger whole of the phenomenon of happiness in education. My overarching analytic approach was to move from the detailed to the broad and then back to the detailed. I did this using computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), by-hand strategies, and hermeneutic interpretation.
My aim was to analyze all five school contexts as a whole, and to do this in a way that was both interpretive and strongly grounded in the overlapping and co-occurring relationships that resonate between and amongst the various data sources, participants, and pedagogical traditions. My aim was not to analyze each school type as an individual comparative case study.

Methodologically, my analytic process was specifically informed by three theoretical frameworks: (a) Friese’s (2012) and the process of Noticing, Collecting, and Thinking, (b) Saldaña’s (2009) process of descriptive to the conceptual coding, and (c) hermeneutic interpretation. I briefly describe each of these three frameworks; this is followed by a description of the specific methodological approaches to analysis employed for this study.

**Noticing, Collecting, Thinking.**

Friese (2012) describes three basic components of qualitative data analysis: Noticing, Collecting, and Thinking (NCT). Friese explains that noticing refers to the process of finding interesting things when reading, viewing, listening to and sorting through data. During this process, the researcher might jot down notes, begin to compile a list of codes, or highlight key phrases. The primary aim of this process is to make note of interesting things in the data and to name them. Collecting is the process of starting to gather together those interesting things that are similar and to name them. Collecting is the process of starting to gather together those interesting things that are similar and to name them. This process can occur on paper, in a word document, or with the aid of a CAQDAS program. Friese points out that in the NCT model, collecting is like coding; however, she also explains
that the process of collecting can be flexible, and that the interesting things noticed and collected by the researcher, “may include themes, emotions, and values at the same time” (p. 93). Of importance is the flexibility of the process of collecting, allowing the researcher to develop approaches during the process that are responsive to their particular data set, questions, and style. Finally, thinking is not a discrete end-stop, beginning once the process of noticing and collecting has finished; rather, thinking is a constant process throughout the entire analytic process. To Friese, the central question guiding the researcher’s thinking should be: “how do the various parts of the puzzle fit together in order to develop a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon being studied?” (p. 100).

The NCT model is not a linear, sequential process, but is recursive, cyclical, and iterative, allowing the researcher to move back and forth, between and within each process in order to make sense of the larger picture

**Descriptive to conceptual coding.**

Saldaña (2009) describes the process of coding as having two fundamental cycles: the descriptive cycle and the conceptual cycle. To Saldaña, while the researcher might choose a specific method of coding within each of the two cycles, or a combination of methods, the fundamental frame of moving from the descriptive to the conceptual level remains. I used the following coding methods to inform my descriptive level of coding:

(a) **simultaneous coding**, in which two or more codes are applied to the same unit of data,5 (b) **descriptive coding**, in which I summarized the basic point of a passage of text

5 For a full explanation of simultaneous coding, see Saldaña (2009), pp. 62–65.
in the data using a single word or short phrase to label the passage, and (c) \textit{in vivo} coding, in which a code was created based directly on the words and phrases of a passage of text in the data. The aim of the second cycle of coding is to develop conceptual categories based on the descriptive codes. Different strategies can be used to do this: reorganizing the code list; merging and eliminating codes to reduce the list to a more manageable length; assessing whether or not codes with few quotations are of value and, if so, deciding upon what to do with them; and grouping and categorizing similar codes together. The second cycle coding method that most informed my conceptual level analysis was \textit{pattern coding}, which is the process of gathering together a large amount of material and codes into smaller conceptual categories by noticing patterns and similarities between and amongst the material.

\textbf{Hermeneutic interpretation.}

As a teacher, I have worked with many young children in the public system of schooling, a system which shaped my ways of being with children in ways that I sometimes found contrary: contrary to my view of what brings children to life and flourishing, contrary to what brings me to life and flourishing, contrary to the literature that has inspired me to imagine lively ways of educating children, and contrary to what I observed children were interested in themselves. As a doctoral candidate specializing in pedagogy and its relationship to children’s flourishing, my understanding of the

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{6} For a full explanation of descriptive coding, see Saldaña (2009), pp. 70–73. \textsuperscript{7} For a full explanation of \textit{in vivo} coding, see Saldaña (2009), pp. 74–77. \textsuperscript{8} For a full explanation of pattern coding, see Saldaña (2009), pp. 152–155.}
classroom and schooling has profoundly changed. Hermeneutic interpretation is at the heart of this change. Gadamer (1976) describes hermeneutics as being a relational, transformative, and interpretive philosophy. He states, “Hermeneutics has its origins in breaches in intersubjectivity. Its field of application is comprised of all those situations in which we encounter meanings that are not immediately understandable but require interpretive effort (p. xii). The act of interpretation—thinking to Friese and conceptualizing to Saldaña—is central to my analytic process. I find comfort in the identification of specific methods and strategies to support my analysis process. Friese’s NCT model and Saldaña’s two-cycle approach to coding are solid landmarks to move the researcher in a concrete way through large masses of qualitative data. But this sense of comfort begins to dissolve very quickly in the coding process, for even the very act of generating a descriptive code is an interpretive act in itself. One has to read a passage of text and, somehow, make a decision about how best to summarize that idea in a single word or two. Over and over again, with each new bit of data to be analyzed, the researcher makes decisions about how best to describe or conceptualize each discrete idea in order to reach for the larger whole of its meaning. And while a CAQDAS program can assist with the structuring of qualitative analysis and organization of large amounts of data, a computer program cannot substitute for the hard work of interpretive thinking. The computer will never tell you what the data actually mean.

The question of interpretive analysis becomes, “how, then, does one actually do this?” As with the methodology of data collection, Gadamer (1976) provides insight to
analysis with his description of hermeneutics as striving to close the distance between the past and present in order to imagine a new future. He states, “it is vitally important to recognize that the hermeneutical phenomenon encompasses both the alien that we strive to understand and the familiar world that we already understand” (p. xii). What is insightful about this thinking is that the aim is not to blindly reproduce past practice but to cultivate within ourselves the consciousness-raising ability to see that-which-should-be-questioned. Gadamer explains it this way: “only through hermeneutical reflection am I no longer unfree over against myself but rather can deem freely what in my pre-understanding may be justified and what unjustifiable” (p. 38).

The aim of a hermeneutic interpretation process is to connect meanings and to create meanings (Smith, 1999). First, connecting meanings comes from the researcher developing an abiding interest in the questions of human meaning and “how we might make sense of our lives in such a way that life can go on” (p. 41). In this way, Smith argues that we need to connect the everyday nature of our lives to the “grander schemes” (p. 41) of life, culture, and human existence. Connecting meanings also calls upon the researcher to use his or her hermeneutic imagination to call upon means of expression alternative to the phenomenon being studied and the methods being employed, in order to assist with a deeper understanding of the phenomenon in question. Alternative means of expression can be found in the genre of creative non-fiction or the writing of graceful vignettes designed to reveal insight into the phenomenon in question that a straightforward description might lack.
Second, Smith (1999) asserts that hermeneutic phenomenology allows the researcher to create meanings by moving beyond simply describing and reporting on phenomenon to the interpretation and creation of meaning. Hermeneutics always interprets from within ourselves: our experience, language, and understandings of life. The aim is not to translate meaning from one context to the next, but to develop ever-deepening layers of understanding through “the art of hermeneutic writing” (Gadamer, as cited in Smith, 1999, p. 42). Smith states that hermeneutic writing “provokes new ways of seeing and thinking within a deep sense of tradition, bringing about new forms of engagement and dialogue about the world we face together” (p. 42). In this way, describing happy classrooms from the perspectives of the participants in this study, and interweaving this description with my own experiences as a classroom teacher, will contribute to an enhanced sense of adults’ responsibility for creating the conditions that support and promote children’s happiness at school and in learning in the early primary grades.

**Specific Methodological Approaches to Data Analysis**

**ATLAS.ti.**

I selected ATLAS.ti (Version 7, 2012) to assist with my analysis as it provided a wide range of organizational and analytic tools to support and enhanced a rich interpretation of data. One challenge with ATLAS.ti is that the saving and transferring of hermeneutic units (the virtual container that houses documents for analysis) between computers is conceptually perplexing, and can lead to corrupted and lost files if not saved
and opened properly. This challenge is overcome by working with a hermeneutic unit on one single computer. As ATLAS.ti is only compatible with Microsoft Windows platform, and not a Mac platform, I had Parallels® installed on my MacBook Pro, which creates a virtual PC on the desktop of a Mac computer. This virtual PC supports the installation of Windows, through which one can work with the ATLAS.ti program.

At this point, I made the decision to focus my analysis on text-based transcribed data (see Table 3.2 for an outline of text-based transcribed data used for coding analysis). I created a new hermeneutic unit on ATLAS.ti and gave it the name “Dissertation Study.” In order to load my transcribed documents onto ATLAS.ti, I converted all /.docx/ files to /.rtf/ files; /PDF/ files were left as is. In ATLAS.ti terminology, these files became the primary documents for analysis. A total of 146 primary documents were uploaded into ATLAS.ti (see Appendix C outlining the number of documents per data type).

**Four cycles of analysis.**

I analyzed the primary documents loaded into ATLAS.ti in four cycles. The first three analytic cycles moved from descriptive to conceptual levels of analysis and resulted in the identification of 26 themes. The fourth analytic cycle was a detailed query of seven of the 26 themes. The seven themes chosen for in-depth analysis were chosen for their salience and the lyrical nature of the words used to label and capture the essence of each theme; these were the themes that, when I shared them, people would respond, “Oh, now that looks interesting!” I now describe each of the four analytic cycles. Following this, I describe how I analyzed data that were not included in the ATLAS.ti supported four
cycles; specifically, the first two questions of the parent questionnaire, children’s
drawings and photographs, and researcher photographs.

First analytic cycle.

I began broadly by reading across the data, noticing resonant ideas and key terms.
As I read, I made a list of possible codes in a notebook. I then began coding using
ATLAS.ti. I initially coded 24 transcripts in order to generate an initial code list of 332
descriptive codes. I coded one teacher interview, one observation, and one parent
questionnaire response for each of the school types. I used a combination of free coding
and a priori coding. A priori codes were based on literature and keyword reflections.
Examples of free codes include: handwork and dress-up play; examples of a priori codes
include: care and positive relationships. The reason why such a large code list was
generated with this first initial pass was because each teacher was imbedded within a
specific pedagogical tradition accompanied by language unique to each context. An
example is the Waldorf concept of rhythm and the public school concept of routine. Both
are words to describe repeated and familiar patterns of activities in school day, but each
has its own nuance and distinct meaning. Thus, each time I coded a transcript from a new
school type, a new bank of descriptive codes was generated. Ultimately, a list of 391
codes was established.

A list of 391 codes raises the practical question of, “how does one keep track of
all of the codes?” I used two strategies: (a) I would frequently print out a hard-copy of the
code list and put a line under every tenth code in order to make it easier to visually scan
through the list, and (b) the word search feature in ATLAS.ti. As I became increasingly familiar with the list, I developed the habit of typing a keyword or word tag into the search tab. This step would highlight all codes containing that word or tag, and I would then be able to select the appropriate code (see Figure 3.2 for an image of the code manager search feature). This process has the potential to privilege some codes over others; I maintained a familiarity and integrity with all codes by being equally detailed in coding each transcript; thus I was continuously thinking about, generating, searching for, and finding codes to name each new data segment. In addition, the word search feature in the code manager served an early high-order analytic aim, in that it allowed me to notice patterns of like-minded codes with each gathering of codes.

Figure 3.2. ATLAS.ti Code Manager word search feature.
By typing in the word “friends,” ATLAS.ti quickly retrieves the six codes containing the word “friends” from the complete list of 348. This saves having to scroll endlessly through a long list of codes.
Upon completion of the first cycle of coding, I went through a process of merging and deleting codes. I merged codes that were redundant or used different words to describe the same thing. For example, the two codes *security* and *safety* were merged to become *safety*; the three codes *care, circles of care,* and *care for others* were merged to become *care*; the three codes *Kindergarten goals,* *program goals,* and *aims and goals* were merged to become *program goals.* Once codes were merged, I then made decisions to cut codes all together that were thinly populated with quotations and did not appear to lend any descriptive value to the research questions. For example, in my observations, I made note of daily weather patterns. Being a detail oriented person, I generated individual codes to describe these weather patterns. Upon reflection, I decided that making note of the weather patterns would lend descriptive detail to the write-up of little vignettes from my observations, but would not be of any use in the process of developing conceptual themes. Thus I cut all weather-related codes. The final list contained 348 descriptive codes (see Appendix F for the final code list).

*Second analytic cycle.*

The second cycle had two components: (a) organizing the code list in ATLAS.ti, and (b) creating the first level of code patterns and categories by collecting like-minded codes together. As both of these components involved managing the large number of codes, they occurred simultaneously. I moved back and forth between the two components, each informing the other.
Organizing the code list.

The ATLAS.ti code manager automatically puts codes into alpha-numeric order. Friese (2012) recommends that to bring order to a code list, particularly one that is long and cumbersome, the researcher needs to create a short pre-fix label to tag the front of like-minded codes. That way, ATLAS.ti will automatically collect the newly tagged codes together in sequential order. Once this is done, the group of codes can be highlighted by creating a new and non-referenced free code (i.e., not assigned to any quotations) in upper-case letters, and by assigning the new group of codes a colour to distinguish it from the previous and following group (see Figure 3.3 for an example of a section of the organized code list).

Figure 3.3. Organized code list.
Alpha-numeric code tags are inserted to the left of each original code; each code group is then labelled with the tag in UPPER CASE letters and assigned a colour for visual clarity.

This is easier said than done. While the results of my newly well-organized code list aided in the next cycles of conceptual analysis, the process was arduous and time-
consuming. And, to an outsider, the newly tagged code groups look unnecessarily complicated. However, the benefits outweighed the challenges. As the Principal Investigator who was intimately familiar with the many codes and groups in the list, I was quickly able to train my eye to see the code label and overlook the alpha-numeric tag. In this way, this process was both organization and analytic, as the process of gathering codes together into like-minded groups allowed me to notice patterns and potential categories across the code list.

*Categorizing codes by-hand.*

In order to gather together like-minded codes into larger categories, I created a word document table of all 348 codes with each code enlarged using a very large font. I printed this 50-page document and cut out each individual enlarged code, thus creating a stack of code slips. I then sorted these code slips into categories. I worked quickly, like dealing a deck of cards, allowing myself to respond both intuitively and physically to the sorting process (see Figure 3.4 for a photograph of this process). Once all of the code slips were sorted, I took a stack of business-sized white envelopes and cut these in half. I stapled each stack of code slips together, placed them in the half-envelope, and labeled the envelope with a word or short phrase that best described the group of codes. I noticed that most of the envelopes were labeled descriptively, with a few that were conceptual. For example, the envelope labeled “Assessment” simply described the four codes within that related to issues of assessment in the early years. In contrast, “Creating Space for Delight” was a more conceptual level, reflecting two codes
describing experiences of magic, wonder, and imagination in the classroom. The idea of delight emerged from my conversations with teachers and classroom observations; what is considered delightful is a matter of conceptual interpretation.

This process generated 87 categories of like-minded codes. Within this 87, one was a group of methods-based codes. The methods-based codes were used to highlight in the primary documents (a) specific questions that I asked each participant, (b) hermeneutic activities, and (c) juicy quotations that I made note of while coding with ATLAS.ti. This group was separated from the rest, leaving 86 categories for further analysis.

*Figure 3.4. Sorting codes slips by hand.*
Third analytic cycle.

The following is a piece of text quoted from my methods log describing my interpretive frame of mind in this third cycle of analysis—what Gadamer (1976) calls the “hermeneutic consciousness” (p. 13):

I am beginning to create space for myself from the descriptive details of the codes and categories in order to think conceptually about the essences of what is being described. I feel that I am now operating on a more intuitive, sense-based level. By this, I mean that I am letting my mind clear of the minute details in order to let the words of the as-is code roll around in my head in order that a deeper, more meaningful connection will slide into my consciousness. (Methods Log, December 15, 2012)

To do this, I cut-and-pasted the list of second cycle categories into a new word document. I then read through the list to notice patterns, similarities, and commonalities. I shifted and gathered like-minded categories around in the document by cutting and pasting text. I named each group as they were formed. From this process emerged 17 thematic categories, which were further grouped into five overarching themes. The five overarching themes are called conditions and the 17 thematic categories are called facets. Together, these conditions and facets comprise a framework designed to support pedagogical and practical ways of thinking about creating happy classrooms. The conditions and facets of happy classrooms comprise the main body of findings of this study, which will be described in Chapter 4.

Fourth analytic cycle.

The first three cycles of analysis were a process through which I familiarized myself with the data, undertook a detailed and descriptive process of coding, merged and
reduced codes, gathered together like-minded codes to generate categories and themes, and repeated this process with a conceptual frame of mind to generate the resulting five core conditions and 17 facets of happy classrooms. In the fourth cycle of analysis, I selected five facets to spotlight in a detailed analysis. While the element of interpretation ran consistently throughout my analysis, this fourth cycle was the most explicitly interpretive. ATLAS.ti assisted me with the identification, organization, and retrieval of interesting bits; it was solely up to me to interpret their meaning.

To generate an in-depth understanding for each facet that was grounded in the words of the participants and my classroom observations, I ran an analytic query (Friese, 2012) using the Query Tool of ATLAS.ti. The Query Tool contains a number of features that allow the researcher to explore co-occurring relationships between codes, code families, and quotations. With each analytic query I (a) asked a specific question to guide the query, (b) created a series of code families specific to that query for comparison, and (c) generated an analytic memo to track the results of the query and to document my thinking in response. ATLAS.ti allows the researcher to assign code families and analytic memos to quotations within the primary documents, thus strengthening the virtual web of relationships that ground the analysis. Friese (2012) points out that code families are most useful when created at this later phase of analysis, for this allows the research to be very specific in their assignment of codes to the family, and thus be very specific in their interpretive and conceptual work at this stage; creating code families too early can lead to the “code swamp” (p. 123) of conceptually undeveloped codes and ideas.
As each analytic query was a detailed process unique to each selected facet, describing each analytic query would unnecessarily complicate this chapter. I describe the analytic query for the facet entitled *kids need to play*. The memo resulting from the detailed analytic query into how play was described by participants served as the outline and framework for its write-up in the following Findings chapter. A memo was generated for each facet, which outlined the write-up for each spotlight.

*Analytic query specific to “Kids Need to Play.”*

First, in order to get a sense of the language, vocabulary, and ways in which play was described in the data, I isolated and read through the 23 codes that explicitly contained the word *play*, along with their associated quotations. Two examples of play codes are: *play: complexity of* and *play: play=happiness*. Due to the detailed nature of the codes generated during the first, descriptive pass at the data, I noticed that the word “play” was generally associated with curricular learning, with learning experiences, and with feelings.

Second, I created three code families based on this observation. The three code families were (a) *play*, containing 18 codes relating to different ways children play (e.g., *play: play time*), (b) *happy kids play*, containing 12 codes related to children’s favourite play activities, as reported by children, parents, and teachers (e.g., *happy kids create: favourite activity, dress up & house*), and (c) *happy kids learn*, containing six codes relating to children’s learning and feelings (e.g., *happy kids learn: kids taking risks*). The reason for choosing to categorize codes into these three families (i.e., *play, happy kids*...
play, and happy kids learn) was to take advantage of the analytic tools of ATLAS.ti, which will search for and retrieve quotations that contain overlapping and co-occurring codes and code families.

Third, using the ATLAS.ti query tool, I ran two queries to retrieve quotations that demonstrate the relationship between children’s play, learning, and happiness. The first query was the Boolean AND query between each code family; the second query was a proximity CO-OCCUR query between each code family. In ATLAS.ti, the Boolean AND query tool will retrieve quotations that occur commonly between one code family AND the second (imagine a Venn diagram in which the overlapping circle is coloured); the proximity CO-OCCUR tool will retrieve the portions of the quotations that are imbedded in and between the identified code families (think of a series of boxes nestled within each other). This process yielded 39 quotations, which include quotations found in teacher, student, and parent data, and classroom observation notes. I ended this analytic process by reading through all 39 quotations. This final, interpretive pass through the quotations identified the ways in which participants conceptualized play, and the ways in which they described the relationship between play, learning, and children’s happiness (see Figure 3.5 for a screen shot of this analytic query).
Figure 3.5. Screen shot of the analytic query for analysis of the theme of Play. On the right is the Query Tool window showing the code families (upper left), objects for comparison (upper right), and the 39 retrieved quotations (bottom right). The left margin of the Query Tool shows a panel of the retrieval options; the nested boxes of the co-occurrence tool is the bottom icon. The blue highlighted text is the first quotation. In the middle of the screen shot is the small red and white “Children need to play” memo icon, which is linked to the highlighted quotation. Linking memos to quotations strengthens the networks of relationships amongst the data.

Analysis of Parent Questionnaires

The Parent Questionnaire had four questions: (a) what makes your child happy at school?, (b) what makes your child happy when they are not at school?, (c) what comes to mind when you think of a happy classroom?, and (d) do you think happiness should be an aim of education? Why or why not? Parents responded to the third and fourth questions in full sentences, thus these were transcribed and included as primary documents in the ATLAS.ti analysis. As I anticipated, parents responded to the first two questions in single words and point form, thus I choose not to include these responses in
the ATLAS.ti analysis. Rather, I listed and counted up the number of times each response occurred in the parent questionnaires. I then categorized the many different activities that parents listed according to the nature of each (e.g., all of the different types of play listed were categorized into one group entitled, *play*). In keeping with my aim to analyse across the data for resonant themes, as opposed to a comparative cross-case analysis, I did not keep track of how many times each activity was listed by parents from each school type. I only tallied up the total number of times each activity occurred across all of the school types.

**Analysis of Photographs and Drawings**

Drawings were scanned into PDF documents and organized into hard-copy and digital files according to school type and classroom observations. Digital photographs were organized school type, classroom observation, and by photographer (i.e., researcher photograph, teacher photograph, or student photograph). Drawings and photographs were not coded or “themed” for content but, rather, were read through and viewed repeatedly throughout the analysis process as a visual reminder of the people I met, the observations I made, and the experiences I had during the data collection phase of the study. Photographs and drawings will be selected to provide visual illustration of the findings.

**Summary**

The design of this study was informed by the philosophical framing of hermeneutic phenomenology, which guided my practical decisions with regards to data collection, and enhanced my understanding of the phenomenon of children’s happiness at
school and in learning in the three ways: (a) orientation, (b) integration, and (c) interpretation. Woven throughout the analysis of the data was Froebel’s pedagogical principle of *unity*, which acknowledges the interconnectedness of humans, nature, and spirit. This principle guided my thinking as I grappled to make sense of the large amount of individual bits of data generated over an extended period of time. This principle also guided my decision to analyse across the school types as opposed to conducting a comparative case study. By reading across the data, I was able to generate answers to the research questions that are greater than the whole, itself. There were many glorious, thoughtful, surprising, and captivating ideas embedded within and across the data; bits that were offered with a generosity of spirit by each participant. It is my continued effort to gather together these bits in such a way as to say something that is genuinely meaningful about how happy classrooms are cultivated. In the following chapter, I will describe the results of my detailed analysis.
Chapter 4

Findings

Figure 4.1. Conditions and facets of happy classrooms.

Table 4.1 outlines the five core conditions and 17 supporting facets of happy classrooms that emerged through the first three of the four cycles of analysis. The conditions and the supporting facets describe pedagogies and practices which answer, broadly, the three research questions: (a) what makes a happy early primary classroom?, (b) how do teachers promote children’s happiness in their early primary classrooms?, and (c) what makes children happy at school and in learning in the early primary grades? I have chosen the word *condition* because this word means a premise upon which
something is built or is a component essential to the occurrence of something else (Sykes, 1982). In this way, the presence of the five core conditions created a pedagogical foundation upon which happiness was created in the classrooms I observed. I have chosen the word *facet* because this word evokes the image of a cut gem, with its many facets reflecting light, each in its own unique way. Together, the facets comprise the whole of the gem. In this way, the 17 facets of happy classrooms reflect the pedagogical and practical ways that its associated condition was characterized and realized throughout the data.

In this chapter, I will briefly describe each of the 17 facets in relation to their associated core condition, which comprise the body of the findings. I will follow this by presenting the findings of the tallied responses from the student drawings and parent questionnaires, in that order. Next, I will outline the theme of *barriers and tensions* that emerged during both data collection and analysis. The barriers and tensions associated with the creation of happy classrooms emerged parallel to the five core conditions and serves to remind us that happiness is a dynamic process and that happy classrooms do not operate in idealistic bubbles. There are very real challenges that teachers face, every day, that can undermine positive experience and the aim to create programs that are responsive to young children. Following this, I will shine a spotlight on five of the facets through an in-depth analysis: (a) kids need to play, (b) stepping in stepping out, (c) sounds shape feelings, (d) rhythms and routines, and (e) romancing children into delight. I will conclude this chapter by asserting ten key findings that answer the research
question: what makes a happy classroom? These key findings are grounded directly in the conditions and facets of happy classrooms as identified through analysis across all data sources and school types.

In writing about the core conditions and supporting facets of happy classrooms, I experienced the difficulty of binding each as a discrete entity. van Manen (1997) reminds us that, while helpful in pointing us in meaningful directions, the frames we develop to describe lived experience will always fall short of the experience itself. In writing about each condition and facet, I noticed the myriad overlapping and intermingled ideas, quotations, and conceptions between and amongst the ideas. Rhythms and Routines are associated with the daily patterns that provide a comforting familiarity and confidence for children; but rhythm is also a way of conceptualizing the small and large cycles of learning infused in each school day, week, and term. Sounds shape experience in ways that are comforting or unsettling, and thus specific practical strategies to producing lovely sounds, such as singing, can be described; however, sound is also an energetic experience that contributes to the hum and vibe of a sonic environment...which is a facet of happy classrooms. The point to be made here is that, while each of the conditions and facets are written as a discrete entity, the very act of writing about these conditions falls far short of the complexity of the ways that these conditions interplay and overlap through, amongst, between, and within the data. Further, these conditions resist the boundaries that writing about them create: sounds want to hum, which ebbs and flows, which is a rhythm, which provides a way of thinking about balancing active time and listening time, which reminds
teachers to gift children with enough time to do what they need to do which, when kids are busy doing what they will when they have time to do so, creates a hum that teachers recognize as a landmark of happiness, and hum is something that ebbs and flows...and so forth.

**Core Conditions of Happy Classrooms**

Analysis of data from both phases of the study and from all school contexts revealed five core conditions of happy classrooms, supported by 17 facets, that answer the three research questions of what makes a happy classroom, how teachers do this, and how children experience happiness at school and in learning. The five core conditions are: (a) relational pedagogy, (b) an ethos of happiness, (c) embodied learning, (d) pedagogical thoughtfulness, and (e) an ethos of possibility.

**Relational Pedagogy**

Through my in-depth analysis of the large amount of data, I found that having experiences of positive relationships is one of the conditions of happy classrooms that is the most strongly grounded across all school types, data types, and participants. Children talked and drew pictures about playing with friends (Figure 4.2), parents indicated that friendships bring their child happiness, and teachers discussed significant having good friends and getting along with others is to a young child. Of the 348 descriptive codes, 33 described different aspects of relationships (n=9.4%). Different aspects include getting along with others, relational attributes (e.g., care, kindness, sharing), psychological and emotional well-being (e.g., feeling connected, belonging), and positive student/teacher
interactions. The Grade 1 public school teacher described the relationship between friendships and happiness by pointing out what makes kids unhappy. He stated, “what makes kids unhappy is if they are not feeling strong social connections. Social connections are huge, and in Grade 1, social connections can be as simple as having someone to play with at recess” (SC:P:TI).9

![Student drawing of herself playing with friends. The scribed caption reads: “I like to play with my friends.” (ZT:P:SD)](image)

In response to the interview question “What does pedagogy mean to you?” teachers all spoke with conviction about pedagogy as being relational, and the ways in which positive relationships contribute to children’s happiness. For example, one public school teacher described his daily practice of little relational gestures with his students to ensure that they feel valued and important. He explained that, to him, little relational

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9 Participant quotations, photographs, and drawings are indicated using the following coding system: Participant’s Initials:School Type:Data Type. Thus (SC:P:TI) indicates the participant, public school, and teacher interview.
gestures—like looking your students in the eye when you say hello to them in the morning—contributes to a strong sense of community. And community with positive relationships is one of the fundamental experiences that he thought his students should have. He explained:

I want this to be about: ‘We are a community.’ I want, as much as possible, for each child to feel that they are seen by me. I think that we’ve all had the experience of getting to the end of a day and feeling like there’s a kid in our class who we didn’t even speak to all day or even really even notice. And I feel like at this age, at any age really, but at this age I’m again just more aware that they need to be seen, and that there needs to be a kind of warmth, a kind of just friendliness, you know, and an openness to who they are. (SC:P:TI)

**Knowing children.**

The Froebel teacher pointed out that being “very interested in children” (WH:F:TI) is a fundamental attitude that teachers need to cultivate in themselves in order to have positive relationships with young children. Through the in-depth process of analysis of both teacher and parent data, I found that the adults who are interested in children know children. It is this facet of knowing children that contribute to decision-making about curriculum and programming that promotes conditions for children’s happiness. Participants spoke about knowing kids as being both a professional knowing, such as knowledge about child development, and a relational knowing, such as being sensitive to and valuing the things that bring young children pleasure. For example, in each of my observations and teacher interviews, the topic of how children love their birthdays eventually came up. I observed different routines and approaches to celebrating birthdays: singing songs, making birthday books, sharing cupcakes, or giving an
inexpensive gift to the birthday child. During one of my observations, I watched a child beaming with pleasure as her classmates sang “Happy Birthday” to her; her happiness was palpable. In a student interview, one Kindergarten student commented that the thing that makes him the most excited to come to school is when it is his birthday, because “I am so, so, so excited” (SK:I:TI). In another example, the Waldorf teacher would place little wooden hoops or a series of wooden frames in front of the classroom door so that, each morning, the children would have to hop through the hoops or crawl through the frames as they entered the classroom (Figure 4.3).

*Figure 4.3.* Wooden frames for crawling through.

This example of the way in which the Waldorf Kindergarten teacher invited her students into the classroom each day demonstrated both professional and relational knowing of children: the teacher knew her students, what their interests were, and what they needed in their learning and development. She knew that the ability to hop on one foot is a gross-motor skill that four-year-olds need to develop, and she knew that fun little
games and challenges delighted children’s spirits—how unusual and exciting it is for them to *hop or crawl* through a door as opposed to simply walking through!—and, at the same time, addressed the goal of physical development.

**Learning to get along with others.**

One of the questions I asked each teacher in the first phase interview was to identify the most important thing that children should learn in their class. One public school teacher stated, definitively, “Oh, to learn to get along with others” (LB:P:TI). Notice that this teacher did not say, “to *get* along,” but rather, she said: “to *learn* to get along.” This highlights that building positive relationships with others is a process, one that begins in childhood and continues through life. All teachers addressed this theme. One teacher explained that having conversations with her students about ways to get along is one of the ways that she promotes happiness. She explained: “We talk about happiness fairly explicitly. We learn how to communicate, and help each other, and the idea that you take responsibility for somebody else’s happiness” (SI:P:TI). Schools and classrooms are social places, and so I found that this idea of being responsible for others resonated amongst the classrooms I visited. Of this, the Waldorf Grade 1/2 teacher observed: “We are learning to be kind, civilized, and well-meaning social beings. The children are learning to find their individual self through that community space” (SM:W:TI). Teachers also observed that having conflict with friends and *not* getting along with others is one of the greatest sources of unhappiness for children at school. Teasing, not sharing, making fun of others, not getting their way, and being mean were
all forms of conflict that were described. One public school teacher spoke about addressing conflict in a very pragmatic way, stating, “I’ll sit on the floor or whatever is needed so that I’m eye-to-eye with them. I ask ‘what is bothering you, what happened?’ I just need to get down to the nitty-gritty and help solve that child’s unhappiness” (LT:P:TI).

Cultivating lives.

In tandem with helping children learn to get along with others, teachers discussed their role as being a cultivator of and in the lives of children. Specifically, teachers spoke about the ways in which they are a participant in the cultivation and development of their students’ human and relational characteristics. In my analysis, 11 individual characteristics were coded that supported the creation of happy classroom spaces and the condition of relational pedagogy: being caring, being nice, being compassionate, being comforting, being grateful, being loving, being respectful, being welcoming, being curious, being creative, being community minded, and having humour. The Froebel teacher pointed out that cultivating a strong sense of humanity in children is of heightened importance over academic skills, and that this lays a strong foundation for future success:

I guess what we are all about here, is about building character. Not just children who can count to 100 by Grade 1. It’s important for them to have academic skills. But it is not much good if you do not have a fine or sound character. I am of the belief that all of those other things can take you places, but the people who have fine or sound character are the people who will be really successful in life. (WH:F:TI)
Of the 11 characteristics identified, being caring was the most strongly grounded, with 68 occurrences and quotations across the data. This included being caring of others and caring of the materials and objects in the classrooms. For example, I observed the ways in which the Waldorf Grade 1/2 teacher cultivated a sense of care into her classroom. Her room was neat and beautiful, the chalk drawings and printing on the blackboard at the front of the room were created with great intention, she spoke respectfully with children at all times, and each child had their own potted plant to look after and care for (Figure 4.4). She explained: “I expect the children to be caring, and so I need to be that person in their eyes as well” (SM:W:TI). In this way, the role of the teacher in the cultivation of the lives of children is as much about the teacher himself or herself being a caring, compassionate, and respectful role model as it is about actively teaching about these characteristics.

![A potted plant for a child to care for in the Waldorf Gr. 1/2 class.](image)

*Figure 4.4. A potted plant for a child to care for in the Waldorf Gr. 1/2 class.*
Embodied Learning

In all of the classrooms that I visited, children were actively involved in their learning and experience of school. I observed children at play, making choices, at the carpet building structures, sitting at tables manipulating objects and materials, pushing paint about on paper, and running with glee outdoors during recess. This condition describes the ways in which children’s body senses were brought to life in the classroom and how happiness was cultivated through active, hands-on, experiential, and playful learning. This theme was well grounded in data: of the 348 descriptive codes, 34 were related to different active, hands-on learning (n=9.7%). These 34 codes were linked to 497 different quotations in the primary documents. As a point of comparison, of the 348 codes, 9 were related to traditional academic activities, which were linked to 230 quotations. In making this comparison, it is important to note that academics and hands-on experiences were not identified as being exclusive experiences; however, the code anchor charts\(^10\) and the code dress-up centre describe two very different ways that the children in this study experienced learning and life in the classroom. The latter brings the senses of a child infinitely more to life than the former. In this way, embodied learning speaks to the ways in which teachers put learning into children’s bodies. Embodied learning as a condition of happy classrooms is described through the facets of play, having experience, and the cultivation of liveliness.

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\(^{10}\) An anchor chart is a strategy used by teachers to make learning visible for students. The teacher will list learning expectations or a sequence of learning (e.g., listing three steps that students should follow when trying to decode an unfamiliar word in a book they are reading) on a large piece of chart paper and will then display the chart prominently on a classroom wall so that all students can see and refer to it.
**Kids need to play.**

Play, as an activity and an experience, was described in three ways by participants: play *for* learning, play *as* learning, and play *in* learning. Each of these three conceptions of play refers to the function and aim of the play: in support of curricular learning, in support of an emergent modality of learning, and as a way of being. One public school participant spoke about the change in the Ontario Ministry of Education’s Kindergarten program from being a more explicit literacy-centric program to a more play-based program, and how this shift towards play has benefited her students. She stated, “There’s definite happiness going on in the classroom. I mean they’re playing, right, and they’ve got all these toys or manipulatives that they’re with and they just seem so much calmer and much happier” (LT:P:TI). Play was strongly identified by children in their drawings as being something that makes them happy at school. Of the 30 different types of activities that children drew about, 18 were activities involving play. These included playing with friends, playing outside, playing sports, imaginative play, playing in the snow, and playing with Barbies. Figures 4.5 and 4.6 show two different Kindergarten students’ drawings about play. A spotlight will be shone on this facet, below, in order to explore it in greater detail.
Cultivating liveliness.

This facet describes the different ways that teachers engaged and brought to life the senses of their students. I noticed this attention to children’s sensory experience of learning especially in the Froebel, Montessori, and Waldorf schools and classrooms. For example, the Montessori classroom was situated in an old limestone building. There were arched, limestone frames around the windows which were cool to the touch; light came into the classroom through large and small windows and skylights, casting interesting pools of light and shadow about the room; the floor was covered with the contrasting textures of carpet and tile; and there were soft cushions and hard chairs for children to sit
on when they were working or eating their snack. In the Waldorf Kindergarten classroom, children made bread every Wednesday. The children would knead their own small roll of dough, singing a rhythmic song as they worked, would mark-out letters in the soft flour with their fingers, would bake the bread—filling the whole school with the delicious, yeasty smell of baking—and would then eat the bread for snack on Thursdays. The children touched, smelled, and tasted the bread; more subtly, they would have listened to the sound of the dough being kneaded, and the melody of the song as they worked. With this weekly rhythm of bread making, all of the children’s senses where brought alive. Another example is the way in which Waldorf teachers are thoughtful about the materials that children work with. The Waldorf Grade 1/2 teacher pointed out, “We use materials that feel and smell nice to the children: large wooden pencils with a soft lead, wooden recorders rather than cold plastic ones, beeswax crayons which have a lovely feel and smell. Sometimes I have to ask the children not to chew on them!” (SM:W:TI). I drew with the beeswax crayons during my observations, and noticed the way that they sat in the palm of my hand, the smooth texture, and the soft smell. I found that the classrooms that I observed where children’s senses were engaged in lively and body-based ways, such as through bread making or the textures of their experience, were classrooms that evoked a strong ethos of happiness.

**Being Pedagogically Thoughtful**

Through analysis of all data sources and from all school types, and in company with my classroom observations, I noticed a pattern emerge in the ways teachers...
described their thinking about children and happy classrooms. As a result, I developed 28 codes that described different ways teachers were pedagogically thoughtful (e.g., teacher as loving authority; pedagogy as drawing out the child; pedagogy as guideline). These codes were linked to 410 different quotations and occurrences in the data set. I found that the condition of being pedagogically thoughtful is rooted in the values and beliefs of the teachers, is embedded with the school community where they work, and is put in practice through the practical decisions that they make about children. Being pedagogically thoughtful, as a core condition of happy classrooms, describes the ways in which teachers, and parents were thoughtful, insightful, and intentional about their work with young children. Figure 4.7 demonstrates an example of a teacher being pedagogically thoughtful about his work as a teacher.

Figure 4.7. A nest as a metaphor for a happy classroom.
This photograph of a bird’s nest was taken by the Junior Kindergarten teacher from the independent school as a way to represent his ideas about a happy classroom. He explained the meaning of the nest: “The nest was given to me by a friend. It is in our classroom. The nest represents my perspective on a happy classroom, which is a safe environment where children may grow and develop” (MK:1:TI).

**Stepping in stepping out.**

Teachers spoke about the different ways they thought about children, child development, their beliefs and values that shaped their practical decisions, and the philosophical foundations that guided their actions. One way that teachers enacted their pedagogical thoughtfulness in regards to children was through their awareness of knowing when to step in or out of the actions of learning, which unfold during the day. I first noticed this pattern during my observations of the Montessori and independent classrooms, which I wrote about in my reflections as being an “ignoring” of certain behaviours but not of other behaviours. For example, one day I observed a 30-minute Senior Kindergarten music class. The children sang lively, boisterous songs—*Charlie Over the Ocean, Little Rabbit, Just Got Back from the Army*—during which there was laughter, silliness, and off-pitch singing, which the teacher ignored. As a result, there was an energetic flow and movement to the class that was not hampered by a repeated stopping of the action to address minor behavioural infractions. But, at one point, a girl began to bang her hard plastic headband on a metal chair, drastically disrupting the
energy and rhythm of the songs. The teacher did address this, respectfully. In my reflection, I wrote:

I think that the pedagogical piece that needs to be in play for teachers in order to know how to respond appropriately is the piece of orientation to children. One must be oriented to children, their developmental attributes and actions, their interests and social behaviours, in order to know when to step in or out of children’s learning and experiences that are helpful or harmful, between exploratory or gone-too-far. (R:I:ON)

Through the cross-analysis of all data sources and school types, the “pedagogical piece” that I wrote about became a facet of knowing when to step in our out of the action. A spotlight will be shone on this facet in greater detail, below.

**Gifting time.**

In my conversations with teachers, and in the written responses of parents, I found that the element of time emerged as something that contributes to, or detracts from, creating happy classroom spaces. Through analysis of the 15 codes and the 259 quotations about time, I identified the following pattern about the way teachers talked about time and children’s happiness: providing and protecting. Teachers, who are being mindful about the well-being of their students, provide children with time to do the things they need to do, and protect children from being rushed through time or being pushed to do things that they are not yet ready to do.

For example, the Waldorf Kindergarten teacher spoke about cases where she has advised parents of children who need more time to grow and develop, such as those children whose birthdays fall close to the date of the minimum age of entry into the Kindergarten program, to consider giving the child an additional year in Kindergarten.
She calls this giving the child the “gift” of time. In this way, gifting time is a facet of being pedagogically thoughtful, and one that is a facet of happy classrooms.

The Froebel teacher explained this duality of providing children with and protecting children from time,

We often have people say to us, in a naïve way about Froebel, “Why should you shelter a child, because they are going to have to face that anyways?” My feeling about that is: let’s shelter them as long as we can! in order to build the child up. So that they are strong enough to face those influences, out there, when they are ready. (WH:F:TI)

The Waldorf and Montessori teachers also spoke about their aim to create a protective space for children in which children have time to be children. The participants spoke about how giving children the gift of time in order to grow and develop, without being pressured or rushed, provides a strong foundation for children’s emotional well-being and future success. The Montessori teacher stated, “We live in a very rushed world, and we don’t give children enough time to complete things. I think we step in and intervene too much. As parents and teachers, we are all guilty of that” (MT:M:TI). The Senior Kindergarten teacher at the independent school echoed this, saying, “I think there is this kind of rush...this rushness now, and that we forget about the value of having time for things like play” (DK:I:TI).

An Ethos of Happiness

In response to the question, Do you think that happiness should be an aim of education?, one parent responded: “Yes, because happy classrooms make kids happy and means they are enjoying their school” (WK:I:PQ). This comment points out the important
relationship between classroom tone and children’s experience, and reminds me of the Stiglbauer, Gnambs, Gamsjäger, and Batinic (2013) study, which found that happiness generates happiness in an upward spiral. Cross-context analysis of the data identified that the core conditions and the supporting facets of happy classrooms are both practical and pedagogical. Practical refers to the kinds of conditions, strategies, practices, and actions that one can do to generate happiness; pedagogical refers to the kind of thinking that one engages when considering these conditions. What results from the interplay between the practical and the pedagogical nature of these conditions is an underlying ethos of happiness that shapes the tone of student experience.

**School is for kids.**

In busy classrooms, crowded curriculum documents, and hectic school days, it is not unimaginable that one can lose sight of the very reason why schools exist. The Waldorf teacher made note of this in our exit interview when she pointed out, “In the effort to try to move our children into the 21st century, we have forgotten that they are still children” (TC:W:TI). She went on to explain that she thinks that one of the fundamental ways that children need to experience school is “as children.” She stated, “They should experience [school] in a way that allows their time to unfold as children, to be allowed to unfold and develop as children” (TC:W:TI).

During my observations, I noticed that all of the classrooms I visited were, each in their own way, “for kids.” Every classroom, in each school type, had short furniture that was kid friendly, had toys and construction materials for play and exploration, had thick
pencils and stubby crayons for small hands to grip and grasp, had shelves of picture books, and kid art and academic work displayed on the walls. But, there were ways that some of the classrooms communicated a deep orientation to children that was lacking in other classrooms. For example, the only classrooms where I noticed a designated teacher desk or area were in the public schools, with the exception of one Grade 1 classroom, where the teacher’s desk was tucked into the corner and served more as a repository of artwork than a space for adult work. There was no obvious designated area or desk for the teacher in any of the independent, Froebel, Waldorf, or Montessori classrooms I visited. While this is a subtle distinction, what I noticed was that the lack of a teacher desk—a space where adults do work, write reports, consult curriculum documents, or file files—shifted my attention away from an adult presence and highlighted the presence of children: their learning, their artwork, their creative use of construction materials, the jumble of their stubby crayons tucked away in colour coordinated bins. What I also noticed was that in the classrooms lacking a teacher desk, my attention was drawn to children while they played and worked. This was in contrast to the classrooms with a teacher desk, where a clutter of adult-focused elements distracted my observational attention to children. Elements that distracted my attention from children included information posters, anchor charts, learning goals, and success criteria.

It is my observation that the classrooms that communicated a strong ethos of happiness were those classrooms with a strong attention to and focus on children. An example of the way in which a school, and the adults who work there, communicates a
strong focus on children is found in the motto, “Come, let us live in harmony with our children,” which is engraved in a smooth block of granite and displayed prominently by the front door of the Froebel school (Figure 4.8). This motto serves as a powerful reminder that the school is a space for children, and that the adults who work there are deeply considerate of the children they serve.

Figure 4.8. Froebel motto.

Classroom as home.

This facet describes the ways in which the classrooms I observed and the practices of the teachers created a warm, comforting environment that is home-like. Teachers described home-like characteristics in the classrooms both in terms of the cultivation of positive feelings, like a family, and in terms of the furniture and design choices that reflect the age, interests, and development of children. The Froebel teacher explained that one of the underlying principles of a Froebel education is the centrality of family. She explained that they strive to uphold this principle by working to ensure that
children feel valued and love. She stated that, “Children feel that at Froebel. They feel that it is a home away from home. For us, what is consistent is that school is a loving place, that caring, that concern, that interest in children” (WH:F:TI). I noticed this strong home-like feel when I visited the school. Each visit, I was welcomed with warm smiles and an offer of a cup of coffee. The director of the school made sure that I was introduced to all of the staff, individually, and that I was made to feel welcome.

![Figure 4.9. Comfortable beanbag chair.](image)

Low tables, short chairs, comfortable reading corners, small table lamps with a warm light, and soft cushions where all home-like touches that created comfort for children in the classes I visited. One Kindergarten student explained to me that her favourite chairs in the classroom were the red ones, “because I am comfortable in them” (HT:M:SI). Another student took a photograph of the bean-bag cushions tucked under a table because, to her, these were the most comfortable items in the class (CB:P:SP) (See Figure 4.9).
An ethos of happiness was also generated by the *rhythms and routines* that teachers set in place for children, and the *sounds that shape feelings and experiences*. Participants described how rhythms and routines created a pattern of predictable, familiar activities that gave children comfort. One teacher explained that routines help children “feel right” (JS:I:TI). A junior Kindergarten student explained to me that a routine “makes it easy to know what comes next...but if you don’t know, you can look at the schedule” (SK:I:ON). During my visits to the five different classrooms, I noticed the way in which the sonic environment of the classroom shaped the feelings and experiences of children, both positively and negatively. Bells, singing, playing recorded music, quiet times, and loud times were all part of the ebb and flow of the classrooms I observed. The facets *rhythms and routines* and *sounds shape feelings and experiences* will be described in detail, below.

**Cultivating gratitude.**

In my conversations with teachers, and throughout my observations, I noticed the various ways in which the cultivation of gratitude and the dimension of spirituality was woven into the classrooms. Gratitude, as a facet of happy classrooms, was expressed both as a way of being in positive relationship with others, and as a component of being happy. During my observations in all of the classrooms, I noticed that each teacher was particular about polite manners, ensuring that children said their “please” and “thank yous” to each other and to adults. During my observations in the Froebel and Waldorf school, I noticed that a blessing was spoken or sung before each snack or meal. The
Waldorf Kindergarten teacher explained, “We sing at the beginning, everyday, and when we’re done, again we say thank you to everybody who has helped with the meal, and then they clear their own dishes” (TC:W:TI).

The cultivation of a personal sense of gratitude was spoken about by participants as being a condition of their happiness. In response to the question, “What does happiness mean to you,” teachers from all school types spoke about being grateful for the things in their lives that bring them happiness: their partners, families, and homes, and for their jobs. One public school Kindergarten teacher said, “gratitude doesn’t have to be in response to a big moment; you can wake up in the morning and just smile because you have so much in your life that you’re grateful for, thankful for, or love doing” (LB:P:TI).

The Senior Kindergarten teacher at the independent school associated her happiness with her job by observing the freedoms she has had in developing her classroom over many years, and for its beauty: “I am so often very happy here at work. I’m grateful to have this space, and grateful to have had the freedom I’ve had to create this space” (DK:I:TI). In a third example, the Froebel teacher explained to me that her school is grounded in Christian spirituality. She spoke explicitly about her relationship with God and how that relationship is an important part of her practice:

Honestly, sometimes, for me, I have had times where I have felt spiritual at school. It almost feels God driven. I have had times where I have troubles in my life, and I come to school, and it is almost like a spiritual experience. Where you feel that all of your troubles are lifted away. Because when you are with children, you need to be there, so present. (WH:F:TI)
An example is the presence of daily, ritualistic gestures such as found in the Waldorf classroom during snack time. For snack, the children and teachers eat together family-style around a long, wooden table, with the two teachers sitting at opposite ends of the table. When the food has been served, the class holds hands and sings a blessing in gratitude for the food they are about to eat. Then, two teachers light a beeswax candle and sing the short, sol mi, phrase: “golden silence.” This marks the beginning of snack, a period of silence and reflection while eating. When the period of golden silence is over, the two teachers snuff out the candles, indicating to the children that they can now chat quietly amongst themselves. The Waldorf teacher explained, “There are not very many times in our day when we let ourselves just sit quietly in a group of 20, you know. And it’s amazing” (TC:W:TI).

**An Ethos of Possibility**

This condition describes the way in which participants oriented themselves, pedagogically, to children; it also describes the way in which participants spoke of children’s experience of school as being a shared path of being and becoming. In this way, _An Ethos of Possibility_ speaks both to children’s lived experience in the here and now of the classrooms I observed, but also to the multiple possibilities of who children might become as they live into their future. The Senior Kindergarten teacher at the independent school explained it this way:

> Last year, I got a letter from a mom who said, “In Kindergarten you see what is the best in the kids.” And I thought, “Mmm, no one has ever articulated this to me before, and I haven’t even articulated it myself.” Now, because of that letter, I
look at them and see where they might grow, who they could be. I see their potential. (DK:I:TI)

**Romancing children into delight.**

Participants articulated the possibility and potential of their students as being an act of cultivation. Participants spoke about cultivating creativity, curiosity, and a positive classroom environment. Participants also spoke about the many ways they *Romance Children Into Delight.* This facet describes the many little magical gestures and choices that teachers make to capture and delight children’s imaginations and spirits. An example is the Waldorf felt gnome, a magical creature that sleeps by day, and then wakes at night when the children have left the classroom. A spotlight will be shone on this facet, below, in order to explore it in further detail.

**Honouring children and cultivating potential.**

During the final exit interview with the Montessori teacher, we fell to talking about who children become after a Montessori education. The teacher observed that these children become adults who “are excellent problem solvers, and know themselves very well” (MT:M:TI). She shared a Montessori quotation that guides her thinking: “your classroom needs to be a key to the universe.” (MT:M:TI). Afterwards, I wrote the following reflection on this conversation:

Today, MT said to me, “Your classroom needs to be a key to the universe.” MT explained that this does not mean that the classroom can unlock the same universe for each child, or that the classroom, or the years of schooling, is an absolute promise that the universe can be attained or achieved. Rather, the classroom is the space for children to move towards their possibilities: who they are, what their interests are, what holds them captivated, who they might become. In this way,
the child herself is the universe, and holds for themselves all the potential of becoming who they are to be. (R:M:ON)

Through the course of my observations in the Montessori classroom, I noticed the many ways in which the teacher lived in congruence with this quotation. I observed this teacher being, at all times, gentle, kind, and loving. I observed her humour and sparkle when she worked with children, I observed the way in which she gave children freedom to choose, run, move, and engage—or not—and I observed the way in which she created structures to hold and guide children. In these ways, the teacher honoured the children she taught and, in doing so, was an active and positive participant in cultivating the potential of her students.

The idea of cultivating the potential of children was expressed differently in the public school context. The two public school classrooms that I observed were situated in a community that was disadvantaged socially and economically. Both teachers explained that many of the children came from families that were in their second generation of being financially dependent upon social welfare programs, often not having completed high school. One of the teachers explained to me that her goal for these kids was for them to learn “that they can learn” (LB:P:TI). Not “to learn how to learn,” but to learn that they have the potential and capacity for learning.

**Student Drawings**

The purpose of the student drawing activity was to elicit students’ ideas about what they like to do and makes them happy at school. All children in each class completed a drawing; a total of 62 drawings cleared the ethical process and were used for
analysis. Student responses were categorized and tallied according to the type of activity and the number of times it occurred in the scribed student drawing responses (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1.
Student Drawing Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Specific Responses</th>
<th>Occurrences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Play</td>
<td>play with friends, play outside, imaginative play, play at school, play on the playground equipment, play with blocks and Lego, dress up, play games, skipping, play sports, play with trains, play at centres, play at the sand table, play Barbies, play hide and seek, play in the snow, play tag, play video games, play with toys</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>play with friends</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts (visual, dance, singing)</td>
<td>drawing and painting, music</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Outdoors</td>
<td>run outside, be in nature, play in the snow, walk to school (not drive)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academics</td>
<td>computer, writing</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading and Stories</td>
<td>read, stories</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Environment</td>
<td>quiet time</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Activities that addressed two different categories were tallied twice, one for each category (e.g., play with friends was tallied for both play and friends). Children indicated that play was their top favourite activity and made them happy at school. This included play with friends, outside play, dress up, skipping, and playing in the snow. Of the seven different categories of activities, four categories involved active and hands-on experiences utilizing big body movement (i.e., play, friends, arts, and the outdoors) with
a total of 91 occurring examples, two categories involved academic learning (i.e., *academics*, and *reading and stories*) with six occurring examples, and one category addressed a calm classroom environment (i.e., *positive environment*), with one occurring example.

**Parent Questionnaire**

The purpose of the parent questionnaire was to elicit parent perspectives on what makes children happy at school and when not at school. Parents have an intimate and deep knowledge of what makes their child happy or unhappy; eliciting their perspectives contributed very specific and detailed information. The first question was “What makes your child happy at school? The second question was “What makes your child happy when he or she is not at school?” A total of 66 questionnaires were returned.

Table 4.2 shows the tallied result of the different types of activities that make children happy at school that parents listed in response to Question 1. Table 4.3 shows the tallied result of the different types of activities that make children happy when they are not at school that parents listed in response to Question 2. Specific activities were categorized according to the type. Parents listed both specific activities (e.g., *gym and P.E.* ) and general experiences (e.g., *laughter*). As with the student drawings, activities or experiences that addressed two different categories were tallied twice, one for each category (e.g., *playing with friends* was tallied for both *play* and *friends*). Parents listed different types of play as being the top activity that makes their child happy, both at school and when not at school. This is followed by positive relationships with friends,
family, and teachers; experiencing positive feelings (e.g., *feeling loved*); involvement in the arts; and time outdoors. This parent questionnaire response is very similar to what students indicated makes them happy at school, with play being the most frequently listed activity.

The fourth question on the parent questionnaire was: “Should happiness be a fundamental aim of education? Why or Why not?” Of the 66 questionnaires returned, 64 answered “yes,” while 2 answered “no.” Parents gave a range of reasons for why happiness should be an aim of education, including: being a means to promote life-long learning, as being a basic human need, as a way to promote strong learning, and because it promotes positive friendships and self esteem. One parent made the following observation about how being happy helps a child:

A happy child will share, give, communicate, be thoughtful and compassionate, and will be far more creative and open-minded than when unhappy. An unhappy child will be withdrawn, disconnected, and will not have the motivation to do anything. (AH:F:PQ)

The two questionnaires that were marked “no” in response to this question gave a similar reason as to why happiness should not be an aim of education, which was that in their opinion, happiness should be a *product*, and not an *aim*. One of the parents who responded “no” stated:

We think that the aim of education should be to open the minds of our kids. Happiness, we think, is maybe a symptom of a good education. If the kids are happy it means they are in a good place. In this way, learning and discovering will be viewed as a pleasure. They will always want to learn if it makes them happy. (PM:W:PQ)
In this way, the parents who responded to these two questionnaires indicated that children’s happiness results from a good education and a positive experience of school.

Table 4.2.  
*Parent Questionnaire, Question 1*

Q: What makes your child happy at school?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Specific Responses</th>
<th>Occurrences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Play</td>
<td>play, centres and activity time, playing with friends, games, gym &amp; P.E., dress-up, recess, imagination, movement, blocks,</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>friends, playing with friends, older buddy,</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts (visual, dance, singing)</td>
<td>arts and crafts, singing and music, painting, dancing,</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>teachers, calm teachers</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Feelings</td>
<td>feeling loved and cared for, having accomplishment, feeling safe, loves school, feeling valued, laughter,</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning (in general)</td>
<td>learning, special days, hard work, gaining useful skills, homework, small groups, having an interest in the activity, field trips, adventure</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Outdoors</td>
<td>outdoors</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Environment</td>
<td>a happy environment, calm environment, having choice, having time,</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading and Stories</td>
<td>reading and stories</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academics</td>
<td>math, computers, library, writing</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Routines</td>
<td>routines</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food and Eating</td>
<td>eating or preparing food</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>being allowed to be self, having choice</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>parental participation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.3.
*Parent Questionnaire, Question 2*

Q: What makes your child happy when he or she is not at school?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Specific Responses</th>
<th>Occurrences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Play</td>
<td>play, role and imaginative play, playing with friends, doing a sport, games, playing with toys and dolls, exercise and physical play</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>time with parents, family, siblings, pet, time at home, movie night, summer time and holidays</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Feelings</td>
<td>being helpful, positive attention, feeling loved, accomplishment, laughter, safety, feeling included</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts (visual, dance, singing)</td>
<td>arts and crafts, singing and music</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>playing with friends, friends</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Outdoors</td>
<td>outdoors</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning (in general)</td>
<td>special activities, exploring, learning</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading and Stories</td>
<td>reading stories</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food and Eating</td>
<td>food and eating, baking, bacon</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Routines</td>
<td>routines, familiarity</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>screen time, sleep</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Environment</td>
<td>positive environment</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academics</td>
<td>homework</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>able to be self</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Barriers and Tensions**

Analysis of data revealed the following patterns of barriers and tensions that teachers face in creating the optimum conditions to promote and cultivate happiness in the classroom: curriculum and assessment pressures, scheduling interruptions, class size, lack of time and resources, and parent entitlement. I found that the most grounded source
of the identified barriers and tensions was from the public school participants. I have
categorized these tensions under the headings, (a) external forces, and (b) working with
tensions, to describe the forces that teachers have to negotiate, work with, and manage in
order to be fully responsive and responsible to their students

External Forces

During each Phase One teacher interview, I asked the participant to identify
barriers or tensions that they experienced in promoting children’s happiness and well-
being. Of the 12 participants, three spoke about curriculum, six spoke about limited time
and resources, four spoke emphatically about their frustration with having to work with
interrupting and inconsistent schedules in order to accommodate older-grades’ gym time
/etc.) and the impact this had on their students sense of comfort and stability, and two
spoke about barriers specific to working in a low socio/economic community.

One public school participant spoke about her frustration with curricular
expectations and the accountability measures that she is expected to keep up with. She
stated, “What I find frustrating is the curriculum. It’s the push of all these things we have
to get done: the data, and the paperwork we’re tied to. And all of the things that we need
to have these students learning by the end of their second year of Kindergarten”
(LB:P:TI). Note that the participant said, “what we need to have these students learning,”
not “what the students need to be learning.” Most likely this was an unconscious
distinction; however, it serves as a reminder that within the public system, curriculum
documents and learning expectations are often a first point of decision making about instruction and classroom programming rather than children’s needs.

Another tension participants experienced was the way in which curricular expectations meant that they had to limit the amount of play children could have in any one period. One public school teacher explained that children’s play becomes more complex the longer they play, but that she is limited in her ability to provide extended play time due to the government mandate of a set number of minutes per day of literacy and numeracy activities:

I only have time for a half-hour of play. I would like the kids to play longer, but it just doesn’t work perfectly with the number of hours that we have to do for math, or the number of hours we have to do for literacy. (SI:P:TI)

The Montessori teacher addressed a third tension. Her program is embedded within a parent-funded school. As a teacher with 18 years of experience, in both publically and parent-funded schools, she made note of a rise in parents’ sense of “entitlement” in having the educational needs of their child met in a particular way. She commented:

There is now a huge sense of entitlement. But our goal is not for the child to take home pieces of paper and work books just to please the parent. Our goal is to watch that child’s development in a safe environment and promote that child’s happiness to the best of our ability at school [participant’s emphasis]. (MT:M:TI)

**Working with Tensions**

Teachers are the centre-point in the Venn diagram of children, parents, school systems, curriculum, and other professionals. Accordingly, teachers in this study spoke
about working with tensions in terms of the balancing of multiple needs and concerns, including being attentive to themselves. One teacher commented,

You have to be kind to yourself. We’re our own toughest critics. We have to be okay to sit back and say, “Okay. So today I didn’t really get to writing our numbers from 1 to 10; but we did sing and dance, and we worked together as a community. (LB:P:TI)

Another teacher described her daily practice of a brief moment of meditation before the children arrived. She explained that she does this in order to gather her thoughts so that she can be as present as possible during the busy day. Other participants described a variety of strategies to build positive relationships with parents and families, which included writing regular newsletters, writing individual letters home, and spontaneous calls to parents not just to talk about problems but also to pass on compliments and happy stories of the day.

Teachers from the Waldorf, Montessori, and Froebel schools, which are pedagogically and philosophically specific, spoke about the need to educate parents so that they have a better “buy-in” to the school’s philosophy. The Montessori teacher explained, “We work very hard at parent education. We work to inform parents about why we do things the way we do” (MT:M:TI). It is important to note that these teachers did not speak of a buy-in in terms of being a coopting of parents, but rather, as an acknowledgement that having an alignment of practices and expectations between home and school is better for the child. The Waldorf Kindergarten teacher explained that she does home visits at the beginning of the year, holds parent education meetings, and is in
frequent contact with parents in order to “emphasize congruence between home and 
school” (TC:W:TI).

While I found that the topic of barriers and tensions came up most frequently in 
my interviews with public school teachers, and that my observations made note of many 
incidents of tension and difficulty that were not present during my observations of the 
non-public schools, I also observed that the public school teachers were deeply 
passionate about their students, their job, and their commitment to public education. I 
found that it was this passion for children that helped temper the weight of the external 
forces that they worked with, and helped them create classrooms, within their context and 
community, that were happy.

**Spotlight on Five Facets of Happy Classrooms**

Table 4.10 highlights the five facets of happy classrooms that I have selected for a 
detailed analysis. Writing a detailed analysis of all 17 facets would be an unnecessary 
overload of information. Thus, I have chosen five facets of happy classrooms as 
supporting pedagogical and practical subsets of core conditions to discuss in detail for the 
following reasons. Each selected facet is resonant across all school types and data 
Sources, is well grounded in the first three phases of the coding process, and was a pattern 
that that emerged during interviews, observations, and free writing reflections. As well, I 
selected these facets for the unique ways in which they reflect and illuminate both new 
and familiar ways of thinking about life and learning in the early primary classroom. The 
five facets selected for in-depth analysis are: (a) kids need to play, (b) stepping in
stepping out, (c) sounds shape feelings, (d) rhythms and routines, and (e) romancing
children into delight.

**Figure 4.10.** Spotlight on five facets of happy classrooms.

I will introduce each facet with a short vignette. These vignettes *hermeneutic windows* because they provide a descriptive lens into the classrooms and school types that I observed, a lens that is filtered through my experience as a researcher and a teacher. Each hermeneutic window is followed by a short review of literature to set a theoretical context for each facet. This is followed by the findings specific to each facet. For each facet, a fourth cycle of analysis, called an *analytic query*, was conducted using ATLAS.ti. The details of each analytic query are outlined in the following five appendixes: Appendix G: Kids need
to play; Appendix H: Stepping in stepping out; Appendix I: Sounds shape feelings;

Appendix J: Rhythms and routines; and Appendix K: Romancing children into delight.

The five facets are now described, below.

Facet Number One: Kids Need to Play
A Subset of the Core Condition “Embodied Learning”

Hermeneutic Window

Observation Notes

Early March
Wednesday morning
Public

There is a thin layer of fresh snow on the playground this morning. Children are busy rolling out tiny snowmen as they wait for school to begin, leaving skinny trails of black asphalt across the tarmac, heralding their efforts. The morning bell jangles as I walk down the hallway to the Kindergarten class. It feels like a smiley day today. I am not sure why; it just does.

Children crowd into the classroom, snowsuits squeaking as pant legs brush against each other, squeezing their knapsack into cubbies, dropping wet mittens on the floor. They are bubbly and filled with chatter. [A.] comes up to me and tells me all about his morning: “I shoveled snow and fed the fish and fed the rabbit and then I said “hello!” to the raccoon who lives under our porch!” he tells me, all in one breath. Meanwhile, today’s Special Helpers set out chairs at each table so that children can have their morning snack, right away. “These children sometimes come to school hungry,” the teacher told me in our first interview, “it is hard to be happy when your belly is empty.” As the children take to their chairs for snack, the teacher announces loudly that today is [E.’s] birthday. The children turn to [E.] and sing the birthday song; she glows.

Later in the morning, just before the class returns from the library, I find myself sitting on a cracked chair documenting the academic posters layered on the walls, the messy piles of old plastic toys stored awkwardly under tables, the caustic sounds of unexpected PA announcements and lunch bells that jangle my nerves, wondering whether a happy classroom is possible in such a chaotic, cluttered, and crowded space. I am surprised by a group of eight children who enter the classroom in advance of the others. They make a beeline straight to the carpet—a cheery mat of fish and lily pads in bold primary colours—and begin to play “hop.” They hop from one fish to the next, laughing with
delight. They are in tune with each other as they play. They are not arguing or fighting or shouting-out or being bossy by telling each other what to do and how to do it, in the way that children can when they are not getting their way. Rather, they hop from lily pad to lily pad and fish to fish, saying generous things like, “cool,” and “it’s my turn,” and “okay, you hop there now!” They are laughing and talking and encouraging each other. There is a sense of ease, a sense of child-like play and spontaneous exuberance. The rest of the children enter and are drawn in to this exuberance, each choosing their own activity, easily pulling tattered toys from under crowded tables, marching off in twos and threes to find a play space to claim as their own. The room begins to hum, like sympathetic vibrations filling the sound box of an acoustic instrument.

It is a moment that feels, simply put, happy.

**Play = Happy Kids**

The combination of children and play is so ubiquitous that it would be almost impossible for ideas about play, learning, and well-being not to emerge during a study on happiness in the early years of schooling. This is true of the present study. Teachers, parents, and children alike across the school types and data sources made frequent reference to play and its association with children’s happiness. However, conversations about play also revealed tensions associated with time, assessment, and curricular accountability, particularly in the public school context.

A child’s right to play is enshrined in the 31st Article in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The article states: “Every child has the right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts” (UN General Assembly, 1989, p. 3). UN Article 31 charges governments with the responsibility for creating provisions that promote and support this right. Despite the clarity that play is fundamental to children’s development, exactly what play is and whether or not play should or should
not be part of formal, school-based learning remains up for debate. Like happiness, play is hard to define and comes in many characterizing functions and forms involving many different types of players and contexts (Wood, 2009). Yet, within literature, play is described with several different, identifiable, and defining features. For example, play is frequently conceptualized as being the work of a child (Elkind, 2007). Play can be categorized according to behavioural factors, affective states, and the different social contexts that enable play (Johnson, Christie & Wardle, 2005). Play can be framed either in terms of being spontaneous and adaptable (i.e., free play) or rule bound (i.e., a sport) (Wood, 2009). Play is voluntary, inherently attractive to the player, is done for its own sake, and suspends the player from restrictions of time (Brown, 2010). Further, play comes with a cycle of positive emotional responses, including anticipation, curiosity, surprise, and pleasure leading to the acquisition of new knowledge and understandings (Eberle, 2008).

It is this final conception of play—that play generates positive emotions and promotes learning—that resonated throughout the multiple data sources and school types used in this study. Teachers discussed the role of play in the children’s school experience both in response to direct questions about play and as unprompted examples to illustrate their observations about learning and happiness, photographs were taken by teachers and children alike that illustrated favourite play activities in and out of the classroom, children drew pictures about playing during activity time, recess and lunch breaks, and with friends, and parents identified play as being one of the top activities that makes
children happy when they are at school and when they are not at school. In order to represent the many layers of play as it was evident in the data, I ran a specific analytic query using ATLAS.ti to identify the codes, code categories, and quotations associated with play (see Appendix J). Below, I describe the following two key themes which emerged from this query process: (a) concepts of play, and (b) play and happiness.

The Findings

**Concepts of play.**

In reading through the quotations retrieved through the initial query, it is evident that participants conceptualize play in three distinct ways: play *for* learning, play *as* learning, and play *in* learning. Qualifying play in relation to learning—*for, as,* and *in*—is congruent with current frameworks that support thinking about complex educational concepts. For example, current assessment practices are conceptualized using a three-part heuristic: assessment *for* learning, *as* learning, and *of* learning. Each qualifier lends itself to strategies and practices that push classroom assessment beyond simply an evaluation of student achievement (or lack of achievement) to being a teacher/student/parent feedback loop that shapes, guides, and promotes student learning and teacher instruction. In relation to play, the qualifiers *for, as,* and *in* speak to the ways in which teachers weave play into their day, not just in service to children’s learning, but also as a means to create a positive classroom environment.

**Play for learning.**

Play *for* learning refers to the use of play as an instructional strategy that is related
to student learning. One independent teacher explained, “here, in Kindergarten, play is for learning; it is open-ended, which I am passionate about.” While this teacher’s classroom was not large, she managed to have multiple areas for children to explore during their play time: at one end a long art table next to a cupboard richly stocked with art materials, beads, feathers, paint, and paper; at the other end shelves of blocks, both large and small, and a corner with costumes, shoes, and glittery handbags; in the centre, an open area to gather for story time, and a set of tables for snack, drawing, and academic work. The set-up of this room allowed for the easy alternation each day between teacher-directed activities, and play activities that are a structured part of the children’s school-based learning experiences (see Figures 4.11 & 4.12).

This example demonstrates how play for learning is conceptualized as a means to support children’s learning in the independent school context. In the public context, play for learning is explicitly connected to the term play-based learning, which is the framework of play found in the current Ontario Ministry of Education’s Full-Day Early Learning Kindergarten Program (FDELK) (2010/2011), a structure that is echoed across
Canadian provincial curriculums and early primary classrooms. The FDELK document describes play-based learning as being a structured approach to play, one in which the Early-Learning Team (comprised of a Teacher and an Early Childhood Educator) capitalizes on a child’s inherent curiosity about their world by providing materials and opportunities to enable a child’s inquiry into their interests and their “real-life contexts” (FDELK, 2012/2011, p. 16). Further, the Early-Learning Team is expected to take an active role in guiding the child’s inquiry and play. It is this active role of the adult in guiding the play of the child that distinguishes play-based learning from child-initiated free play.

While the FDELK document clearly describes what play-based learning is in the public school context, the public school teachers did not interpret its meaning and associated practices in the same way. One teacher highlighted the structures she uses to organize children’s play, stating, “every day we have twelve centres set out, and
anywhere from two to four children go to any one of the centres, and then they rotate; they have a little ticket with their name that they put on a board and they rotate” (LT:P:TI) (Figure 4.13), whereas another teacher spoke of the practice less in terms of structures, curriculum, and learning expectations and more in terms of a method through which to infuse the day with choice and independence, and as a means through which to integrate learning. She described: “[My room] is really play-based. Children are moving around all the time and are able to choose things that they like to do. I try to make things fun all of the time” (SI:P:TI). A third teacher spoke more philosophically about his program, wondering, “Is this play-based learning? I don’t know what play-based learning is; I think of it as this thing floating out there” (SC:P:TI).

One public school teacher described her involvement in a child’s play-based learning less in terms of guiding, and more in terms of prodding, “in the new play-based program, everyone plays most of the day. And while they’re playing they’re being prodded along in the direction that we want them to learn and what we need them to learn” (LT:P:TI). This nuance of language—prodding vs. guiding—reveals a tension associated with play-based learning as a program (i.e., the FDELK play-based program) as opposed to a methodology (i.e., the earlier example of the independent school classroom program). The function of play-based learning as a program is to serve curricular learning expectations. And, in serving these learning expectations, tensions that are associated with providing ample time for play, the assessment of what is being learned, and expectations of accountability—all inherent to the responsibility of meeting
the expectations of curriculum documents—arise.

Lack of time for ample play was addressed by public teachers. One teacher explained,

I read in a study that after 40-minutes of play the complexity of the play changes, and that’s when children really get into much more difficult and intricate levels of learning. But we don’t have time for that. That is the only thing that I ever feel sad about with my whole program. I would like to have more playtime so that they can really get into whatever it is that they are doing. (SI:P:TI)

A second public teacher explained that due to the schedule of recess and lunch breaks, scheduled time for gym, library, and teacher prep time, they are constantly in and out of the classroom: “we are supposed to let the children play for large periods of time...but we don’t have large periods of time in our classroom” (LT:P:TI).

Assessment of children’s learning is another source of tension associated with play-based learning. One Kindergarten teacher described her frustration with the FDELK program, not frustration with the value of play for learning, but with her experience of a contradiction between play and assessment. She explained:

When we started the play-based program last year, the Ministry said, “Play, play, play.” And so we are not doing carpet time anymore, we are letting kids explore. They are learning through play. And then, when we had the same Ministry start to talk to us about learning goals and success criteria, we felt like we were being pulled in two different directions. (LB:P:TI)

In our second interview, this teacher went on to explain that success criteria and learning goals are best met, in her opinion, through explicit instruction, a practice which should be used to balance out play-based learning:

It’s wonderful to have a writing centre and all, but if you never actually show children that need direct instruction, “here’s a pencil, and here is how you pinch it,” then how are they going to learn this specific skill? There are definitely ways
children can explore things, which is fine, but I think they need a balance of instruction. (LB:P:TI)

Finally, play-based learning is not free from the strictures of educational accountability. One public teacher explained that in the training she received on the FDELK play-based learning program, she was instructed to engage children in accountability talk. When I asked her to explain this term to me, she said, “when children are playing, they are supposed to be interacting with each other and an adult. Through questioning and accountable talk, the teacher is supposed to steer the children in the correct direction” (LT:P:TI). Though this is the only time the term accountable talk was used by a participant in the study, its presence reflects the current paradigm of accountability in public schools in which even children’s play, when it is for learning, is never far from the need to know exactly what is being learned. While the foundation of the FDELK play-based learning program is to be applauded for reintroducing play back into the early primary years, how teachers interpret what it means for children to play, the purpose of play, and the role that an adult has in guiding (or not) the play of children changes from one context to the next.

Play as learning.

In the above section, play for learning is one conception of play in the early primary classroom. While the re-introduction of play for learning into Kindergarten programs demonstrates a positive move towards appropriate activity for children—because, in a day and age when there is the potential to shift play aside in order to meet academic mandates, can one be truly critical of providing children with opportunities to
play at school, even if it is directed by the teacher?—play for learning is also associated with tensions inherent to meeting learning expectations tied to curriculum documents.

In contrast is the conceptualization of play as learning. In this conceptualization, play is unhinged from curriculum and is not associated with any tensions. It is the kind of play through which learning emerges. In this way, a child’s learning is not driven by curriculum but by the child herself. The learning and development that children experience through play as learning results directly from their experience, interests, and motivation. Play as learning is often self-directed and self-initiated. This conceptualization of play as learning was evident across all school contexts.

Teachers who articulated an understanding of play as learning tended to think reflectively about what play is and what it is not. In the above section, a teacher is quoted as being uncertain about what play-based learning is. His uncertainty was not a lack of professional knowledge or competency but, rather, a reflection of his recognition that play for learning is, largely, a teacher directed activity, whereas “true play” (SC:P:TI) for children is generated by children. He states, “I think that true play is child-driven, and child-directed, where they decide what they want to do and how they do it. Play is not … you know, ‘now we’re going to play Bingo to learn our math numbers’” (SC:P:TI).

Another teacher explains that children find play that is generated by themselves to be inherently rewarding:

I think a lot of it comes down to not understanding what good play is and how much learning happens when children play. And how when kids are interacting in make-believe play in a group how challenging that is. If adults had to do that and worked together, its hard, it’s not easy [participant’s emphasis]. But as adults, we
look at play as a break, when we’re not working. That’s not how it is for children. It’s work for children, but they choose it, they enjoy it, it’s really satisfying for them. So they don’t mind the hard parts about play because it is intrinsically rewarding. (DK:1:TI)

Play in learning.

Play in learning is spoken about by participants in two ways: as a way of being playful with others, and as a way of being playful with learning materials. I describe both, below.

Teachers spoke about play in learning as being the light-hearted ways in which they infuse playfulness into the day. In this way, play in learning—playfulness—is a tone through which a happy environment is cultivated. Playfulness refers to a way of being for both children and adults alike. Playfulness includes being funny, having fun, being silly, having humour, laughter, and delight. As a point of note, when parents were asked to describe what comes to mind when they thought of a happy classroom, laughter was frequently identified by as being important. This is valuable as a reminder that laughter, humour, playfulness, and learning in happy classrooms are intimately connected.

One teacher, when asked to describe what teaching means to him, responded, “It’s a sharing of knowledge and enthusiasm; it is having fun. Here in the classroom, teaching and learning is a sense of playfulness” (MK:1:TI). This teacher described ways in which he is playful with children, such as making funny ‘mistakes’ while reading his morning message: “Even when we’re reading the morning message sometimes instead of starting at the top while I’m reading, but I’ll be pointing to the bottom of the message. It cracks them up” (MK:1:TI).
While being playful is a spirited and lighthearted way of being in the classroom, it is also serious business. Teachers discussed play in learning as being an intentional, pedagogical act within which to draw children into the experience of school. The Montessori teacher spoke about how it is her job to know children, to know where they are in their development, and to consider the intentional ways in which she might engage children in their learning. She stated,

My job is to figure out when that child is ready for each new lesson. What I never want to do is give a child a lesson when they are not ready. I want them, always, to have the opportunity for success. A sense of humour. A sense of playfulness. You have to be very alluring to the children [participant’s emphasis]. You have to excite them about learning. (MT:M:TI)

I observed this teacher be intentional in the animated, lively, and friendly ways in which she interacted with children. She always had a smile on her face with her students, she would take a child by the hand and, with great intention and graceful gesture, demonstrate a new material, her face lighting up with pleasure as the child tried out the new task. In this way, her sense of playfulness was infused with delight, which transferred to the children. One day, I listened to three boys in Junior Kindergarten playfully engage in rhyming word games, calling back and forth to each other across their table, “cat BALL / fat BALL; hair-EE / gar-EE; dee DEE / pee PEE” (M:ON). Even when this exchange devolved into potty humour, the teacher simply took them by the hand and, with a big smile and laugh, directed them to a new activity.

Resnick (2006) asserts that the words we use to describe the ways we work with children are important, in that they inform how we think and what we do. He compares
the two terms *edutainment* and *playful learning* as an example. Edutainment is a conflation of the words *entertainment* and *education*. He explains that edutainment is most often applied to educational computer software and computer programs. Like the entertainment of a TV show, such programs often place the learner as a passive recipient, bedazzled by a brightly-coloured interface, with frenetic characters and boppy music.

Resnick observes that,

> The edutainment products often miss the spirit of playful learning. Often, the creators of edutainment products view education as a bitter medicine that needs the sugarcoating of entertainment to become palatable. They provide entertainment as a reward if you are willing to suffer through a little education. Or they boast that you will have so much fun using their products that you won’t even realize that you are learning—as if learning were the most unpleasant experience in the world. (p. 195)

He argues that the term playful learning, unlike edutainment, evokes a more integrated, stronger sense of active participation, leading to deeper learning.

While Resnick’s focus is on how computer technology might be created to engage children actively in playful learning, as opposed to passive entertainment, he raises a valuable point that playfulness can be an attitude to be cultivated with how children might engage with learning materials. This kind of play *in* learning, in which children engage playfully with learning materials, was evident in the Froebel methodology of gift play.

In my time at the Froebel school, I observed a number of gift play lessons, each with a different gift, yet each following a similar pattern of instruction: introduction, conversation, time for play with the gift, and closing with a connecting story. The teacher
would gather the children around a circular table and hand out the gift for that day. While doing this, the teacher would talk with the children about things going on in their lives: a birthday party on the weekend, a new pet, or a song that they had sung in the morning. As they talked, each child would play with the gift, stacking the small wooden blocks of the fifth gift to look like the pile of presents at the party, or twirling the woolen string of the first gift to look like the tail of their new cat (Figure 4.14).

Figure 4.14. Froebel's First Gift.

When all the children had ample time to play and create something, the teacher would tell a connecting story in which she would go around the table and talk about each child’s creation, extemporizing a funny anecdote as she went. Her anecdotes would bring forth gales of giggles from the children. In providing this structure for playful learning, the Froebel teacher addressed multiple dimensions of child development: language, spatial awareness, patternning, and fine motor development, to name a few. More deeply, this activity engaged children in a process of play in learning that enlivened their spirits,
both by being playful in their interaction with each other, but also by being playful with the materials.

**Play and happiness.**

During my visits to the eight different classrooms, I had the opportunity to observe children at play. I observed children at play indoors and outdoors, during structured and unstructured play times, and in stolen moments, such as the day I watched a line-up of children collectively and spontaneously begin to skip as they filed down a hallway to the library. I noticed the openness of children’s bodies and the liveliness of their faces during their playtime. When they are happy, children smile. Smiles, bright faces, and relaxed, open bodies are the signs that cue adults to the affective state of a child.

This observation raises the question, “what is the relationship between play and happiness?” The co-occurrence tool of ATLAS.ti identified 11 codes related to happiness that occur at the same time as the code “play.” In reading through the quotations and list of co-occurring codes, the following five key ideas emerge: (a) that children love and need to play (b) movement in play, (c) that freedom and choice are strong components of play, and (d) that play and happiness are intertwined.

**Children need to play.**

Teachers spoke about play as being an inherently intrinsic need of children. The participants emphasized the word “need” when they spoke about children and play, as in, “children need to play.” For example, one public teacher spoke about providing time at
the end of the day for his Grade 1 students to play. He explained,

A couple times a week, at the end of the day, I try to allow a flow from whatever activity they are doing to finding something to play with, where they get to bring it out and play with it. They need this. They can build with blocks, or whatever they want to really do, is within a range of things available in the room. This is so important [teacher’s emphasis]. (SC:P:TI)

One independent teacher spoke about play as being central to her practice as a kindergarten teacher. She stated,

I have very strong views about play, but it is more than just an opinion for me now after twenty years of teaching. I know that it’s what kids need [teacher’s emphasis]. If I couldn’t provide children with play, I couldn’t teach. (DK:I:TI)

**Bodies and movement.**

The words *bodies* and *movement* resonated across all data. The code category *Kids Move* was linked to 78 quotations, and was populated with descriptive codes such as *skipping* and *dancing*. The code category *Kids’ Bodies* was linked to 25 quotations and was populated with descriptive codes such as *happy kids’ bodies*. Teachers across all school types explained that one of the reasons why play is attractive to children is because it involves their bodies. One teacher explained that play is rewarding to children because it feels good and supports an increased engagement in other learning activities. She stated:

There is something about getting outside that just encourages a sense of play and that sense of...using your body. I think we sometimes neglect our bodies when we learn. I know how much better it makes us feel when we use our bodies, and how much more ready we are for other activities. (SI:P:TI)

Teachers described children’s bodies when they are happy and at play.

Descriptions of a happy child’s body included, *relaxed, at ease, shoulders down,* and
standing upright. One teacher described, “when [my students] play, they move around a lot in Kindergarten, so I think they’re unaware of themselves, like they’re not holding themselves in. There’s no tension in those moments or in their body. They’re just relaxed and expressive. Expressive” (DK:I:TI). Another teacher described children’s faces and bodies when they are deeply engaged in play:

I think their bodies are relaxed, they’re not tight. They’re either smiling or maybe they’re doing something that they’re very involved in, so their face is quite concentrated if they’re doing a puzzle, or they’re sort of chatting this lively chatting and their faces are quite animated, especially in something like the house area, building something or making tea. (JS:I:TI)

**Freedom and choice.**

The word freedom in relation to play appeared frequently in teacher and parent transcripts. One teacher, in response to the question, “why do you think kids love recess so much?” stated emphatically, “I think it’s the freedom of it all. They love to be able to disperse; to be climbing something one minute and running free in the grass the next minute, and then skipping rope on the pavement the next” (LB:P:TI).

Providing young children with choice is a common practice amongst teachers and parents. Providing children with choice is responsive to their need for independence, their need for accomplishment, and their need to develop as self-agentic beings. But too much choice can overwhelm the child. Too much choice might translate into too much, too complicated, or false choices. An example of a false choice is found in the question, “do you want to...?” As in, “do you want to put on your coat before going out for recess in the cold?” Here, putting on a coat is presented as a choice, but, in reality, it is not. When we
go out to play in the cold, we need to put on a coat in to stay warm!

Waldorf teachers address the aspect of choice in play in terms of simplicity. The Waldorf participants spoke about the need to pare down choice for children so as not to overwhelm. Simplicity is not in opposition to the need to provide time and space in order to promote increased level of complexity in play but, rather, considering simplicity is the act of making pedagogical decisions for and with children that align with their development. Framing work with children in terms of simplicity is an antidote to complicated nature of schools and classrooms: complicated choices, complicated calendar walls in classrooms, complicated organizational systems and routines, complicated answers to questions, and the complication of play through accountability talk and curricular expectations.

The significance of the paring-down of children’s choices in relation to play is that, as demonstrated in the Waldorf context, play is viewed as something that children do freely. The Waldorf Kindergarten teacher explains:

In the effort to try to move our children into the 21st century, we’ve forgotten that they’re still children. And children haven’t changed a lot over the years. They haven’t changed a lot. When we think about traditionally how children used to grow up and be raised—and not to say that everything about that was great—but children were given more time. They were given time to unfold and they were given simple responsibility. Simplicity. (TC:W:TI)

Here, the intention is not to link play to curriculum or specific learning expectations, in which the teacher holds the child accountable for their learning, but rather the intention is for children to explore, discover and be free from unnecessary adult intervention.
**Play and happiness.**

In response to the interview question, “what makes children happy at school?” every teacher identified play, in any form, as being central to children’s happiness. When asked why, one teacher explained, “I think play makes kids happy because it involves them completely. It involves them physically, it involves them imaginatively, it involves them with language. I think it’s just such an all-encompassing thing” (DK:I:TI). Another teacher explained, “oh, they are so excited about play. The children are all engaged in these finger-knitting projects right now; during play, they will be with their friends, walking around finger-knitting together. They’re just so into it” (TC:W:TI).

*Figure 4.15. Grade 2 Waldorf classroom play corner. The student took this picture of the play corner because playing here made her happy. (NS:W:SI)*

Children also associate play with happiness through the identification of different areas in the classroom and school that support play. For example, one Grade 2 Waldorf student identified the play corner as a space that makes her happy. In this particular
classroom, the play corner is an intimate space, demarcated from the larger open areas of the classroom by wooden shelves and draped fabric. When asked to describe why, she responded, “it is where all of the toys are, and it is smaller than the big carpet” (NS:W:SI) (Figure 4.15). During my observations of one of the public school classrooms, a Senior Kindergarten student said to me—sotto voce—as he headed off to the gym, in a line-up of 29 children, immediately after the teacher had just instructed all of the children to be quiet and stop talking: “you know,” he said, “playing outside makes kids really happy” (AT:P:ON). This student’s observation, confessed in confidence with a of clarity of focus and subtle good humour, reminds us that children truly do find happiness in the freedom of movement, choice, and self-directed independence afforded by play of all sorts and functions.

Facet Number Two: Stepping In Stepping Out
A Subset of the Core Condition “Being Pedagogically Thoughtful”

Hermeneutic Window

Observation Notes

Late January
Tuesday afternoon
Independent

The first thing I noticed, as the children in the Junior Kindergarten class were getting into their snowsuits for outdoor time, struggling with zippers and twisted pant legs, was what the teacher didn’t do. He didn’t untwist the pant leg for the boy with his leg stuck half-way, he didn’t reach over and pick up the mitten, which another boy couldn’t find, lost because it had slid under the cloakroom bench in the melee of clothes and bodies, he didn’t zip up the coat of the boy who stood in his spot, puzzled, looking quizzically at his mitten-ed hands, trying to figure out what to do, because his sequence of first-coat-then-zipper-then-mittens was a little backwards today.
What the teacher did do was sit on a low chair, observing the children getting ready. Once, he did say to one boy: “Remember, put your coat down on the ground flat, and upside down. Now where do your arms go? Now flip it over your head...that’s right! You can do it on your own, now.” He did ask the boy with the lost mitten, “If a mitten falls onto the floor next to a bench, where might it go? Why don’t you look a little lower? Good!”

A short while later, after everyone was tucked into their warm outfits and we had left the schoolyard, we walked through the old stone gate into the park, in pairs and holding hands. My partner explained to me that when we got to the forest, we were going to find a rocket ship, “with a steering wheel, and a Martian blaster!” he said, all-in-one-breath. Once we were in the safety of the park, the children began to run towards the forest on the other side of a large field of snow. They ran slowly at first, and then faster. The teacher loped along behind them, chatting with a straggler.

When I finally arrived at the forest, the space explorations were well under way. There was a rather plain looking but sturdy pile of sticks and branches that the children had transformed into a rocket ship. One group had commanded the ship—with the Martian blaster!—while another group, the Martians, were inside a naturally forming ring of trees, marking off the entranceway with sticks. “You can’t come in here unless you have the secret key,” one of the boys whispered to me.

I watched the teacher watching the children; there was also an assistant, and I watched her, too. I noticed what they didn’t do. They didn’t get involved with the children’s play. They didn’t guide children with ‘accountable’ talk. They didn’t step in and proclaim, “No guns” when the spacemen began to blast Martians, a few collapsing dramatically in the snow. And they also didn’t talk to each other, in the way that adults can when children are at play, creating a little psychic border zone of us/you; adults/kids.

And then I noticed what they did do. They stood apart from each other, forming a small protective loop around the children. They stood tall, their bodies strong and attentive to the children. They watched the children completely, their eyes roaming about, looking for little signs of danger or potential mishaps. Occasionally, a student would run up for a hello; they would chitchat together, and then off the child would go. After about an hour, I noticed a small shift in energy, like when a cloud passes in front of the sun, and the momentum of life seems to pause for but a brief instant. Playtime was over. The teacher and the assistant raised their hands high in the air; children noticed the signal and, one at a time, pulled themselves away from their play to start the walk back to school.

As we walked back to class, the children making spontaneous little snow angels along the way, the teacher explained, “I have very few rules: always be where you can see an adult, if you carry a stick then point it in the air, and if you see a dog, then freeze. When
we are at the forest, my job is to keep them safe; their job is to play. The rest, they can figure out for themselves. How will they learn if I do everything for them?”

Stepping In to the Lives of Children

A quick Google Scholar search using the key term “stepping in stepping out” revealed a curious pattern. Of the first 50 results, 30 had titles with the words “stepping out” but not “stepping in” (e.g., *Stepping out of the flow: Capillary extravasation in cancer metastasis*[^11^]), all of which were about medical science, economics, or global politics; 16 had titles with the word “step” or “stepping”, but neither “in” nor “out” (e.g., *The stepping test: Two phases of the labyrinthine reflex*[^12^]), all of which were about medical science or mathematics; yet only four contained the exact phrase “stepping in stepping out” (e.g., *Stepping In/Stepping Out*[^13^]). These four articles were about the professions of relationships: teaching, counseling psychology, religion. Far from being a bibliography fluffer, the pattern revealed in my Google Scholar search points out that relational and human endeavors, such as teaching, requires a sensitivity to knowing when to get involved with someone and when not to.

Rittenhouse (1998) describes two essential roles of the teacher: that of participant and that of commentator. She illustrates these two roles through the example of a secondary school math class in which students are learning specific content about mathematical discourse and processes. In her role as a participant, the teacher steps into

students’ discussions. In this role, she contributes by listening to what students are saying, asking questions about things she doesn’t understand, and shares her own connections and ideas. In her role as a commentator, the teacher steps out of the discussion in order to more formally teach the concepts and ideas that are being explored by the students. In stepping out of the role of participant, she steps back in to her more formal role as teacher. Rittenhouse’s example reminds us that teachers hold multiple roles, and that there is fluidity between and amongst these roles.

Like the teacher in Rittenhouse’s example, teachers of young children step in and step out of the learning of their students, shifting between participation and commentary. A contrast, though, is that teaching young children is considerably less about content and considerably more about lives. The subjects of early primary educators are children, themselves. Analysis of data from this study revealed how participants conceptualized and described the act of stepping in and stepping out, the ways in which the act of stepping in and stepping out are unique to the education of young children, and the role of pedagogical thoughtfulness in knowing how, when, and why to do this.

The Findings

Stepping In Stepping Out.

The idea of knowing when and when not to intervene in children’s activity emerged very early in the study during my first set of observations in the Montessori class. On a number of occasions, I noticed children behaving in ways that I might not have allowed in my own classroom. I noticed that, at times, children would run quickly
across or around the room; I noticed children sitting and looking about themselves, appearing like they were doing nothing; I noticed children wandering about the room, appearing a bit aimless; I noticed children going in and out of the cloak room at unpredictable intervals. When I asked the teacher about this, she told me a story about Maria Montessori who, when teaching at a Montessori Centre in India, noticed that the women there would wear a belt of beads. Every time the women felt they wanted to intervene with a child who they knew, intrinsically, could do something for themselves, they would move a bead from one side of the belt to the other. Nine times out of ten, all of the beads would end up on the other side of the belt at the end of the day. The Montessori teacher observed, “As adults, I think that we intervene because we do not have faith in the child” (MT:M:TI). She went on to explain that the criteria she pays attention to in order to know whether or not to intervene is the potential for harm. She explained,

Things do fall and break, but we do not jump up and run over to the rescue. If it is broken glass, we will walk over and remind children, “you have to be careful when you pick up broken glass,” and then we will show that child how to pick up the broken glass, safely. (MT:M:TI)

Resonating across the entire data set, the word freedom was used in relation to knowing when and why to step out of the way of children and their learning. Other resonant words included: independence, having choice, not being restricted, and freedom with boundaries. Eight parents described a happy classroom as being one where children have freedom to explore and choose. For example, one parent wrote, “[A happy classrooms has] opportunities for self-directed play; a classroom in which not every
moment of the day is directed or mediated by an adult” (WM:W:TI). In another example, one teacher explained that, to her, one of the fundamental experiences that children should have in their early years of schooling is the freedom to make choices, and that individual choices are embedded within a larger community. She explained,

I think that they need to learn that they have the right to make choices, and that others should not dictate their choices. They should have the freedom to be able to choose what they would like to do. There is a saying that I use often, which is “Freedom within boundaries.” To me, it means that children need to realize that they are a little piece of a much bigger picture, but that them as a little piece is just as important as the big picture. (MT:M:TI)

Resonating across the data set, the words safety and control were used to describe reasons for stepping in to the action and learning of children. Control was not used to mean controlling, but rather, as a means to provide young children with age appropriate structures for safety, choice, and independence. One public Kindergarten teacher described the gym as a place where she feels strict rules for safety are needed. She explained, “safety and comfort are always first in the gym. There’s no nonsense. If you’re not going to be listening in the gym, then you need to take a break for a moment” (LB:P:TI). Similarly, another teacher explained that the one kind of behaviour that she can’t ignore in class is behaviour that might lead to harm, such as physical aggression, or too-loud voices making it hard for other children to learn or concentrate. She added, “but I want to be able to step out as soon as possible, so that the child, you know, is not being all directed by me or learns to be dependent upon an adult” (DK:I:TI).

Teachers described the time sensitive nature of knowing when to step in and out. This is especially true with young children, where the beginning of the year is spent
establishing rules and routines. One independent teacher explained, “We spend a lot of time the first weeks of school practicing routines. Eventually stepping in really only tends to be when there are conflicts, or if a kid is stuck with something and really needs help” (MK:I:TI). The Waldorf Kindergarten teacher described her role as being a “loving authority” (TC:W:TI), in which her job is to create a protective bubble around the children in her classroom, one that keeps them safe and allows them freedoms to explore and be children. She described her process of providing structures to support student learning, and then, over time, releasing the child into greater independence. She stated, “here, we start off by guiding the child, and when we see that they are comfortable with the process, and doing well with it, then we can start to let go” (TC:W:TI). In a similar vein, one public school Kindergarten teacher commented that, “it is about a gradual release of responsibility. The stepping in and stepping out ratio changes from the beginning of the year, to the middle of the year, to the end of the year” (LB:P:TI).

The Junior Kindergarten teacher at the independent school spoke about his role as being more of a guide than a teacher; seeing himself this way helps him know whether or not to involve himself with a child and their learning. He stated, “I see my role more as a facilitator than a direct teacher doing direct teaching all of the time. So it’s not a question of stepping back so much as only stepping in when it’s needed” (MK:I:TI). He described ways in which he steps in to guide children, including asking “I wonder” questions (i.e., “I wonder what would happen if you tried [blank]”), giving children a reasonable, but not overwhelming, number of choices, and having consistent routines and patterns through
each day. He acknowledged that, with schedules and busy days, it is sometimes much easier to step in and do things for children:

Oh, sometimes it is painful to watch [participant’s emphasis], and requires a lot of verbal cues: “Put one foot in the snow pant, now put the other foot in the snow pant...what comes next?” But you have to do this so children learn to be self-sufficient. (MK:1:TI)

This example demonstrates ways in which adults who work with young children are continually assessing the needs of their students within the lived moments of teaching and learning, by considering factors such as schedules, individual and group needs, and each child’s capacity and development. It is through an awareness of and sensitivity to these factors that help teachers know when to step in or out of children’s learning and, in doing so, support children’s well-being.

**Being pedagogically thoughtful.**

I developed the code *being pedagogically thoughtful* to identify and describe those landmark points in the data when teachers were being philosophically reflective about their work with children, were discussing their values and beliefs about children, or were describing the thought-patterns or questions they call upon when making decisions about and for children. Pedagogical thoughtfulness touches upon all aspects of classroom work. Analysis of the 44 descriptive codes that co-occur with the code *pedagogical thoughtfulness* identified the following patterns: personal values and beliefs (n=12); valuing children (n=11), care and relationships (n=5), active learning (n=5), classroom design and environment (n=4), happiness (n=3); and academics (n=3). The pedagogical thoughtfulness of the teachers was filtered through their training, early influences, their
professional experiences, and the context within which they work. One parent wrote that a key factor in creating a happy classroom is “a strong, competent teacher who can think [participant’s underscore]” (SH:F:PQ). The following example illustrates how pedagogical thoughtfulness informs both small and large decisions. In this example, the Waldorf Kindergarten teacher is explaining how the concept of simplicity is realized in her practice:

How I do simplicity in my class is by having a rhythm; this makes life very simple. I always know what I am doing by the rhythm and nature of the breath. And it doesn’t just become a series of rote activities; there is a lot of meaning lived into the day. I think carefully about the colours we paint with, or if we’re drawing a picture it is often for a child whose birthday is coming up. The vegetable chopping and bread making is purposeful, because we are going to eat that the next day. If we don’t do this work, we’re not going to have snack. (TC:W:TI)

Analysis of data identified that a teacher’s pedagogical thoughtfulness towards and about children is one of the factors that helps teachers know when to step in and participate in a child’s learning, and when to step out in order to give a child space. One of the public school Kindergarten teachers stated simply that, to her, “The criteria for deciding when to step in or out has a lot to do with knowing who the children are. And knowing the situation” (LB:P:TI). In this way, the pedagogical thoughtfulness of the teachers in this study was rooted in a relational way of being, which informed teachers’ practical decisions and responses in the lived moments of teaching and learning within the classroom.
Facet Number Three: Sounds Shape Feelings and Experience
A Subset of the Core Condition “An Ethos of Happiness”

Hermeneutic Window

Observation Notes

Mid-February
Thursday morning
Waldorf

All of the children are sitting in a circle, chatting happily amongst themselves. In the centre of the circle is a round slice from a log; on it are little bits of blue beeswax. The teachers hand each child a bit; they grow very calm and quiet as they begin to soften and mold the beeswax between their hands. From a distant room, above and on the second floor, the sound of an instrument is heard: perhaps a violin or a flute. The melody sings, looping and rising and falling around a melodic centre.

The lead teacher cups her hands together and begins to sing, “Sail away on a boat...” The children join in, rocking their hands gently like little sailboats bobbing in the waves. Later, the teacher explains to me the significance of this song and the arrangement of its melody: “The melody is in a mode called ‘the mood of the fifth.’ These are natural tones for children. This song sets the right tone for the carpet and transports the children in and out of the magical world of the story.”

She begins to tell a story about a gnome going on a walk through the wintry woods. It is rich with images of white snowflakes and red woolen mittens and sweet mint tea. The children settle deeply into the story, listening attentively, squishing the wax between their fingers. There are no interruptions or shout-outs from the children, no sounds of brittle teacher voices managing disruptive behaviour. The only sounds are the lilting rhythm of the story, the ghost notes of the beeswax being shaped into mittens and small animals, the looping strains of the melody from above, vibrating throughout the building.

A sense of peace descends. I feel myself relaxing into the small chair I am sitting on—a rare experience in my stressed adult body. I notice my breath, my thoughts, the easy thump of my heart in my chest.

Meanwhile, the gnome continues on his journey...

“...past the chickadees, who are resting on a snowy branch,
...past the frozen pond,
...past the still meadow,
...until he gets home.

He takes off his snow pants, brushes the snow from his red mittens and, taking off his blue cap,
crawls into bed
and falls fast
a-
-sleep.”

The melody from the second floor cadences and becomes still.

A moment of silence.

A single, plump beat.

The soft scrape of someone shoveling snow outside the classroom window.

Peace.

The teacher stands up and places her little beeswax creation on the log; the children follow, one at a time. They cup their hands together and sing, “Sail away...,” transporting us back into the classroom for the noise and exuberance of tidy-up time.

Classrooms are Noisy Places

Classrooms can be noisy places. Factors that contribute to classroom noise include external sources, such as traffic noise reverberating through the building, and internal noise, such as computers, air vents, and noises from other classrooms (Shield & Dockrell, 2003). However, a British study of 140 primary classrooms found that the major source of noise in a classroom is generated by students and teachers themselves; the nature and quality of these sounds was determined by the nature of the activities that children were engaged with (Shield & Dockrell, 2002). A Canadian study investigating
the noise level in 60 Kindergarten through Grade 3 classrooms found that high levels of noise in the classroom impacts negatively on students’ ability to focus and comprehend verbal directions spoken by the teacher (Rubin, Flagg-Williams, Aquino-Russell & Lushington, 2011).

For young children, much of their learning is hinged to the clarity of message communicated by the teacher. The effect on the speech patterns of a teacher who has to raise their voice to be heard over a noisy class is that, while their voice might be more audible, their voice is not more intelligible. A loud voice will stretch out vowel sounds and obscure consonant sounds, potentially making the meaning of the message more difficult to understand (Rubin, Flagg-Williams, Aquino-Russell & Lushington, 2011). An American study investigating the impact of classroom noise level on children’s instructional comprehension found that children ages 5 to 10 require higher audibility than adults ages 18 to 35 (Stelmachowicz, Hoover, Lewis, Kortkaas & Pitman, 2000). Children who are chronically exposed to noise have increased mental health issues, increased deficiencies in sustained auditory and visual attention, and diminished memory skills (Shield & Dockrell, 2003). An Austrian study investigating the effect of typical, everyday neighbourhood noise levels (e.g., highway or road traffic noise) on the mental health of 1,280 children age 8–11 found small decrements in children’s mental health and school behaviour. This was a larger concern for children with a history of mental health issues (Lercher, Evans, Meis & Kofler, 2002). While this latter study was an investigation of neighbourhood noises and not classroom noises, exposure to chronic
noise, whether at home or school, can undermine one’s sense of comfort and well-being. Millett (2009) points out that, although there are standards for acoustics and classroom construction in place in the America context, no such standards exist in Canada. Further, “school boards are not legally obligated to adhere to these standards when building or renovating schools” (Millett, 2009, p. 2). In this way, the noise-levels and acoustical properties of a typical North America classroom can create an acoustical barrier that impedes learning (Anderson, 2004).

The Findings

Classroom sounds.

Sounds were a constant presence through my observations. I noticed loud sounds, quiet sounds, calm sounds, and energized sounds. I made note of children’s laughter at play time, classical music played to signal the end of a rest time, teachers’ voices murmuring quietly or raised in annoyance, the omnipresent hum of computers, singing for transitions and singing for the sheer pleasure of it, and the jangly sound of PA announcements. One teacher observed that sounds are a feature that contributes to the ethos of a happy classroom. She stated, “Sounds are important. I love that we get to hear singing and playing piano from the other classrooms during the day, and violin playing and the recorder, too. These are the lovely sounds that we get to enjoy” (SM:W:TI). In reading through data, I noticed two qualities of sound that contribute to—or detract from—a feeling of happiness in the classroom: comforting sounds and unsettling sounds.
Comforting sounds.

All 12 teacher participants used the word “calm”, and I made note of its presence and tone frequently within my observation notes, as a means to describe both a feeling of happiness and as a comforting quality of sound. For example, when asked to describe how she recognizes that she is happy, the Froebel teacher responded, “That is easy to answer. It is a very serene feeling. Peaceful. Calm” (WH:F:TI). The first cycle of descriptive analysis generated 12 codes containing the word “calm.” These codes were grounded in 110 quotations associated with calm sounds, a calm classroom tone, and the recognition of happy kids. Thus, data revealed that calm sounds are a condition of happy classrooms, and contributes to feelings of comfort.

Calm teachers’ voices.

Teachers’ voices contributed to the timbre and tone of the classroom during both instruction and social interaction. For example, during my 6 hours of observations in the Montessori classroom, I made note of three specific times in which the voice of the teacher supported children’s learning in a calm and comforting way. In Montessori classrooms, children work with materials individually; thus teacher interaction with children is largely one-to-one. In each of the three events noted, the Montessori teacher sat next to the student and talked in a quiet voice. I noticed that her body would be relaxed and her voice would be low, but that she communicated in a lively way with her face and hands. This calm way of being is expressed in my notes: “The teacher whispers to the child as she works with him. Her body is quiet and still” (R:M:ON). Another entry
describes the teacher as being, “calm, quiet voice, animated hands” (R:M:ON). In another observation, I made note of the way in which the voices of the adults in the room never competed with the children or were raised above them. My notes read: “Teachers’ voices are very quiet, like a low, gentle murmur under all other classroom sounds” (R:M:ON).

The Waldorf teachers also used their voices in a calm and intentional way, which was one contributing factor to the calm nature of their rooms. For example, during tea time in the Grade 1/2 class, I made note of the sounds of sipping tea, children chatting amongst themselves, and “the teacher’s voice bubbling below the children’s conversations” (R:W:ON). This positive relationship between a calm teacher voice and classroom tone was echoed by one parent who described a happy classroom as being a space with, “a calm, in-control teacher who does not raise his/her voice” (GM:W:PQ).

In contrast to the comforting effects of a calm teacher voice is the impact of loud teacher talk on the tone of the classroom. In my observations of the public school rooms, I noticed three incidents in which there was a negative, though unintended, relationship between the volume level of adult talk and student talk. For example, during one snack time, after the teacher had instructed the children to eat without talking, another adult walked into the room and began to speak with the classroom teacher at a regular

14 There were two adults responsible for the children in the Montessori classroom I observed: the lead teacher and the assistant. My study focused on the lead teacher as a participant; therefore I received clearance from her as both an interview participant, and to observe her classroom. I did not seek consent from the assistant teacher, as I did not interview her or record any informal conversations that I had with her. Occasionally my observation notes make reference to “teachers” in the plural; I include these plural references in my quotations for the sake of integrity to the data. An example of this is my observation here about the sounds of two adults who are talking at a low murmur.
conversation volume. Figure 4.16 is a reproduction of a running record from my observation notes that describes this relationship between the dynamic levels of teacher talk and student talk. This example is a reproduction of my observation note template, with the time column on the left, the running record column in the middle, and the tone column on the right. I used musical notation to indicate the rise and fall of tone and dynamics as I observed a class. In the example, \textit{mf} means \textit{mezzo forte}, a medium volume, like a regular conversation; \textit{f} means a loud dynamic. The symbol < indicates a crescendo, or increase in volume; the symbol > indicates a decrescendo, or decrease in volume.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Notes</th>
<th>Tone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:30</td>
<td>Teacher: “Let’s eat and not talk.”</td>
<td>&gt; quiet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:33</td>
<td>All children are eating. No one is talking.</td>
<td>quiet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:34</td>
<td>An adult enters the room. Starts to talk at a regular adult voice with the teacher.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:34:30</td>
<td>Children begin to start talking.</td>
<td>&lt; \textit{mf}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:35</td>
<td>A second adult walks into the room. Joins the conversation. All three adults are talking at a regular volume.</td>
<td>&lt;f</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:36</td>
<td>Teacher: “If you are going to talk, then that must mean you are done eating. Let’s go to the carpet.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textit{Figure 4.16.} Teacher talk influences student talk.

In another example, I made note of a carpet activity in one of the public Kindergarten classrooms being led by the music teacher. The classroom teacher and the
ECE stood at the back of the classroom and had a conversation between themselves throughout the game. In my observation notes, I noticed that the children were also “over-talking each other” (R:P:ON) throughout the game, making it difficult for the music teacher to manage the group and hold the attention of the children.

*Singing.*

The two combined codes describing singing (i.e., *singing* and *singing for transitions and routines*) were the second most grounded codes, with a total of 106 linked quotations (*routines* was the most densely grounded code, with 123 quotations). The combined groundedness of all codes related to singing and music (i.e., *singing, singing for transitions and routines, lack of singing, music, background music,* and *favourite activity: music*) is 150 quotations. These codes were linked across all school types and data sources. This signals the important role that singing and music had in the participating classrooms and schools of this study.

Singing was most present in the Froebel and Waldorf schools. The Froebel teachers sang short songs at all times of the day to support transitions, to begin an activity, to give a blessing before a meal, or to get children’s attention. One example is the following melody: “*Hands, hands, hands; Thank you God for hands.*” This short melody, spanning the range of a perfect fifth, is sung at the beginning of each new activity and each Gift play lesson. It is sung to acknowledge the role of the children’s hands in their learning and explorations of materials. Traditional singing games were also sung during Circle time, with skipping and movement and lots of laughter. For example,
during a 20-minute observation of one morning circle, between 8:57 am and 9:17 am, a total of seven different songs were sung. Of these, three involved large body movement, three involved finger play, and one was the morning greeting sung between teacher and child; all were sung a capella (i.e., without instrumental accompaniment). The songs included phrases such as, “Love is something if you give it away, you end up having more,” “God’s love is like a little circle,” and a “Sunshine, pour your gold on me!” The Froebel teachers made no pretense at being trained singers, but they used their voices through song with intention at all times of the day.

Singing and song was infused into the Waldorf in equally present ways. By “equally present” I mean that the Waldorf teachers, like the Froebel teachers, sang at every opportunity they could and, in doing so, singing was a constant presence that children experienced. Some of the songs were for participation, some were to instruct, and some were to support transitions. An example of an instructional song is the familiar, “This is the way we wash our hands, wash our hands...early in the morning.” This song was sung everyday before snack time, as children wiped their hands clean with a small towel steeped in warm water and a drop of peppermint oil. The following is an example of a song to support transitions. Every morning, the children in the Kindergarten class began the day with outdoor play. When it was time to go in to the school, the teacher would stand in the same spot in the playground, everyday, and simply begin to sing. The song would cue the children nearby to come to the circle; children playing further away would notice and join in. Another example is the cloakroom transition. The teacher
would stand in the cloakroom and sing while the children removed their outdoor clothes and put on their indoor shoes. When the children were ready, the teacher would lead the line into the classroom, singing the whole way.

In the Waldorf Kindergarten program, songs were sung to support language and fine motor development. For example, every Wednesday is bread-making day. On bread-making day, children would get their own lump of dough to knead. The class would sit together at the large wooden table, kneading and incorporating a small pile of flour into their dough, and sing: “This is the way we knead our dough, on the bread-making morning.” As they did this, the teachers would sing short rhyming songs, encouraging the children to print out in the flour with their finger the first letter and sound of each rhyming word. Looking at this weekly bread-making activity through an academic lens, children were developing their phonological skills of rhyming letter/sound recognition, were developing finger strength to support pencil grip and letter formation, and were developing a sense of social responsibility and agency by helping make the food that they would then eat for snack the next day.

Music.

Playing recorded music served an important function in the independent, Montessori, and public school classrooms. In the Montessori classroom, music was played as a backdrop to support and ferry children through their work. The teacher observed,

I think that there needs to be a lovely hum of activity. Not that silence is a bad thing, because there are lots of moments in my day where I have classical music
playing, and all I hear is the music because all of the children are working so independently. MT:M:TI)

In the two independent Kindergarten classrooms observed, I noticed that both teachers would signal the end of a period by playing classical music. For example, a minute or two before the end of rest time in the Junior Kindergarten class, the teacher would play a recording of a string arrangement of Pachelbel’s Canon in D. This signaled to the children that quiet time was coming and it supported their transition from the still and quiet rest time, into the more lively playtime, which followed. In contrast, a minute or two before the end of playtime, the teacher played a recording of some light jazz. This music was more lively, but not frenetic. It signaled to the children that cleanup time was coming up and gave the children time to complete their activity. When it came time to actually start to tidy up and put away their activities, I noticed that the children consistently did so in an efficient manner. One time, I even observed that “children skipped to the carpet” when they were done. Children who spontaneously skip tend to be in good moods! In one of the public school classrooms, recorded music was played as a means to energize children after they had been sitting at the carpet for an extended period of time.

**Unsettling sounds.**

By *unsettling sounds* I mean those kinds of sounds that can lead to a negative response, such as loud sounds causing ear pain, or an annoying sound which grates on the nerves over time. I chose the term *unsettling* as being in contrast to *comforting*. Loud, painful, and annoying sounds can unsettle us in large and small ways. For example, many
teachers have had the experience of teaching a class in a room with the omnipresent hiss or buzz of technology underscoring their instruction. It is not until the technology is turned off and the sound ceased that the teacher recognizes that they have been raising their voice over the noise and that the students’ shoulders are elevated up to their ears in tension; it is in this moment of recognition that everyone in the room relaxes and breathes out collectively, allowing their shoulders drop, and that the teacher can speak at a relaxed dynamic. It is this quality of sound, and the way in which it creates an unspoken pall of tension, that the term unsettling sounds refers to. The most consistently unsettling sounds, which I noticed throughout my observations, were loud bells in the public school context.

_Loud bells._

The sound quality and volume of school bells that mark a public school day was associated with a loud and frenetic classroom environment. I noticed this relationship each day of my observations in the public school classroom. Previous to entering the public school for observation, I had spent two months divided between the Froebel and Waldorf School, where there are no announcements or amplified bells. Both of these schools were particularly calm spaces with conscious attention paid to the physical and sonic design of the school: lots of wood, laughter, singing, and modulated teachers voices. Entering the public school was a jarring contrast. The very first line of my notes on my very first day of observation in the first public school Kindergarten class reads: “Ouch. The entry bell was very loud and abrasive...it startled me” (R:P:ON). I remember being startled because, having spent time previously in quieter and calmer schools, I had
forgotten the experience of hardening myself to the bells that mark a public school day.

In the 20 hours of public classroom observations, I made specific note of ten events involving the sound of bells; each event was recorded with words like “jarring,” “harsh,” and “abrasive.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Notes</th>
<th>Tone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10:02</td>
<td>Children are putting their work away; some are already finished and are going out to the hallway cloakroom to get into the snowsuits for recess.</td>
<td>&gt; mf Bubbly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 10:04 | Announcement bell comes on BEEEEEEEEEEEEP!!!!!!! 

*Oh Canada* is projected through the PA system. It is a boppy, dance version of the anthem. The PA system is extremely loud and painful. | < < fff LOUD JARRING |
| 10:07 | Announcements. Children continue to work or talk or get into their snowsuits. The energy is starting to rise.                                                                                       | < < ff Chaotic |
| 10:08 | All children are in the hall getting ready. They are very loud.                                                                                                                                   | Chaotic    |
| 10:09 | Teacher (raising voice): “STOP! You are too noisy. I should not have to speak like this on a Monday morning. You should be getting ready quietly and right away.”                                           | Tense      |

*Figure 4.17. Impact of jarring bells on a Kindergarten transition.*

I frequently noticed the impact that the loudness of the bells and the Public Address (PA) system, which crackled on at irregular intervals throughout the day, had on the classes I observed. Figure 4.17 is a transcription of an excerpt drawn from my observation notes, which describes this impact. The event is a class of Kindergarten children getting ready for recess, and the chaos that results when their transition was interrupted by *Oh Canada* and morning announcements. As with the earlier example, I
have used musical notation to indicate the rise and fall of dynamic level. In this example, *ff* means *fortissimo*, a very loud dynamic, like shouting; *fff* means *triple forte*, the loudest possible dynamic in classical music.

The public school teachers expressed frustration at the scheduling of the bells and PA announcements. Bells are rung in accordance with the morning entry, recess, and lunch schedules; PA announcements are scheduled to begin ten minutes before recess time. A Kindergarten class takes time to transition from their in-class activity, to the cloakroom to get dressed, and then outside for recess. This is especially true in communities where getting dressed for outdoor recess in the winter means coats, snowsuits, boots, mittens, and hats. For some young children, managing to get dressed into these many layers is an Olympic effort. Of this tension, one of the public Kindergarten teacher observed:

The issue with the overlap between the announcements and getting-ready time, is that the announcements come on very close to recess. This does not leave enough time between the end of the announcements and the beginning of recess for children to get ready. This is definitely an older grades/younger grades issues at the school, and an auditory/scheduling conflict. (LB:P:TI)

**Sonic backdrop.**

Analysis revealed that the sonic environment of a classroom shapes children’s experience and sense of well-being in one of two ways: it provided a comforting backdrop, promoting learning, attention, focus, and sense of liveliness or it created a jarring backdrop, unsettling children and contributing to a frenetic and chaotic environment. The following two examples, quoted directly from my observation notes, demonstrate this
difference:

Example A. Off in the distance, you can hear the faint sound of a hand-bell being rung, calling the end of recess. (R:W:ON)

Example B. The bell has rung, very loudly. It is a harsh sound. Recess is over. (R:P:ON)

Note the difference in language: the “faint sound” of the hand-bell “calls” the end of recess, as opposed to the “harsh” sound of the amplified school bell, stopping recess. On a sonic level, one sound supports an easy and gentle transition from outdoor recess back into the classroom, whereas the other marks a dividing line between one activity and the next in a manner that is jarring. I acknowledge that I could very well have written these observations differently—The bell rings cheerily over the PA system, inviting children in from their recess play—however, my experience of having my nerves jangled as a result of the harsh end-of-recess bell was real for me. My experience of an internal clench—a result of the sonic punch from the PA system—was reflected in the three short, punchy sentences that I hastily wrote down to capture this experience. While each child is going to have a different feeling response to different sounds, and each child is more or less sensitive to jarring noise, it is common sense to recognize that a gentle bell will lend itself more readily to a calm, orderly, and happy classroom environment than a bell that is harsh, jarring, and painful to the ears.

Another example of the different backdrop that sounds can create for children is found two Sound Studies as represented in Table 4.4. Each was a three-minute study, recorded during the transition from outside play to carpet time. As has been pointed out
with previous examples, the language used to describe each transition is different according to the school context. One is populated with words like: clear singing, vibrations, gently falling; the other is populated with words like: chatty and loud, not much listening, sharp. Further, the dynamic ranges of the two are described differently: the Waldorf example is at a *mezzo forte*—a medium dynamic. The public example is at a *fortissimo*—a loud dynamic. Arguably, dynamics are subjective and, in music, a loud or a soft dynamic is determined only in relation to the other dynamics of the piece being played. A pianist will play a *mezzo forte* louder or softer depending upon the size of the concert hall or the strength of the orchestra accompanying him. Yet, as a musician who has studied and played classical music for almost 35 years, I am comfortable enough with the subjective nature of dynamics to determine whether the sound in a classroom is medium loud, loud, or very loud.

Table 4.4.

*Two Sound Studies*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Waldorf School Kindergarten class, 19 children</th>
<th>Public School JK/SK combined class, 28 children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Ringing of a hand-bell outside</td>
<td>• End-of-recess bell: loud, sharp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Clear singing, gently falling: <em>sol mi sol la sol sol mi</em></td>
<td>• Voices: children chatty and loud: <em>f</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Absence of warning bells or PA system</td>
<td>• Clapping, the teacher attention clap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sound of the Intermediate choir from the gym</td>
<td>• Laughter, talking, noise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Voices: children chatting as they sit at the carpet: <em>mf</em></td>
<td>• From the hallway, intermediate class walks by, talking: <em>ff</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Adult voices and children’s voices of equal tone</td>
<td>• There is a lot of talking, not much listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A piano being played: the room vibrates a little</td>
<td>• Teacher starts to read a story; children keep talking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Teacher (sings): <em>Sail away...</em></td>
<td>• Talking, talking, talking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Teacher (speaks): <em>Oh, let’s start again and use our best manners.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While the two descriptive words calm and quiet were frequently used by participants to describe a sonic environment that is comforting and contributes to positive feelings, participants also described loud environments that were energized and lively.

The independent Senior Kindergarten teacher described a noisy drama activity this way:

When I watched the children’s faces, I noticed that even though the noise level of the room was loud, and even though the dramatic play was chaotic, because all of the children were being their own characters all at once, and all of the voices were layered on top of each other, the faces of the children were smiley, laughing, open, alive. Their bodies were moving freely, and I felt like the room was energized. (DK:1:TI)

Parents identified two livelier, energetic sounds that contribute positively to the sonic backdrop of a classroom and children’s experience: (a) laughter, and (b) singing and music. One parent observed, “a happy classroom has a calm, warm atmosphere; kids are engaged in meaningful activities. A room where there is smiling and laughter” (KK:I:PQ). Another parent commented that a happy classroom has, “Times for quiet, for laughing, for singing, for being on your own, and for socializing” (PM:W:PQ).

It is my observation that these data reveal a nuance of difference between a loud sound that is unsettling or one that is comforting and contributes to a positive classroom environment. Loud sounds that are unsettling are imposed upon children, such as bells or frenetic music. Loud sounds that are not unsettling tend are generated from within, by the children themselves, such as laughter or dramatic play. This is demonstrated by the following observation from the Waldorf Kindergarten class, written as the children transitioned from the Golden Silence of snack time to the noise of playtime:
Golden Silence is over. The children are now loud, chatty, and social as they head from the snack table to play. SW walks over and gives me a big hug. It is spontaneous, out of the blue. She is smiley and friendly as she does this, and then heads off to play with a good-bye wave. (R:W:ON)

Considering the complexity of the interplay between externally imposed and internally generated sound leads to the observation that the sounds generated within a happy classroom space are the result of the comforting, lively, thoughtful, and rhythmic conditions set in place by the teacher and the school. School days are filled with quiet and loud sounds. Loud sounds do not need to be unsettling but can, in fact, reflect the engagement and exuberance of children being children. Children, when given the chance to be so, can be naturally exuberant, an expression that children will willingly share when they are comfortable, engaged, and happy.

Facet Number Four: Rhythms and Routines
A Subset of the Core Condition “An Ethos of Happiness”

Hermeneutic Window

Observation notes

Late February
Thursday after lunch
Independent

The sky is low today. It embraces the room like a soft, felt blanket, the grey light leaking through the lowered window coverings. The children have returned to the classroom from their boisterous outdoor play. With confidence, they follow a daily pattern of classroom entry: shrugging themselves out of snowsuits, hanging up lunch bags, lining up boots, shaking the rapidly melting snowflakes from their hair, entering the classroom, swinging by the sink to wash their hands, grabbing a yellow Nagahyde cushion (“Easy to wipe and clean,” the teacher explains to me), and then they find a quiet spot on the carpet to lie down. Some have a blanket with them; a few have Stuffies to hug close.

As the voices of the children diminish, the teacher turns off the fluorescent lighting, one
careful click at a time. She walks to the carpet with intention, the soles of her shoes marking a soft “meep, meep, meep” with each step. Settling into her comfortable armchair at the centre of the room, she clicks on the table lamp sitting next to her; it casts a warm glow on the resting bodies. She then picks up a small music box Snow Globe sitting next to the lamp, and slowly winds it up. The tinkly melody of Judy Garland’s “Somewhere, Over the Rainbow” drifts out, the light of the lamp illuminating the glittry snow as it swirls about the globe, casting tiny little dots across the carpet. She begins to read a chapter book, her voice measured and even: “And now a very curious thing happened. None of the children knew who Aslan was any more than you do; but the moment the Beaver had spoken everyone felt quite different.” The children breathe in and then out, collectively, their bodies loosening into the rhythm of the words.

“This is our daily ritual,” the teacher explains to me after school. “I read a little bit of a chapter book each day. The children come in from lunch and get settled. Then, I wind up the music box and I begin to read. That’s how story time starts: we just wind up the music box and the music plays and then I start to read. There’s a ritual to it, and this feeling of family. And then we have play time.”

Sometime later, after Lucy and Peter and Edmund and Susan have finished their meal with Mr. and Mrs. Beaver, and after the music box has wound its way down, the children begin to stir. They slowly rise and return their yellow cushion to the corner, giving each one a quick wipe to banish any meddlesome germs. One helper stands and hands out the antiseptic towelettes; another helper clicks the ceiling lights back on. The window coverings are pulled back to let in the pale afternoon light and, with this shift, the children begin to chatter amongst themselves. They move about the room, finding their name card placed next to an activity. The teacher remains seated at her chair, observing, drawing in the energy of the children as they mark out the day’s next pattern of learning.

**On the Comfort of Predictability**

Classroom life is marked by repetition. Each new day brings about a familiar pattern of activities and events. Toys are taken off the shelf and put back; weather is recorded on daily charts; plants are watered by a helper whose name is marked on the job board, next to the task labeled, “Plants.” Every day, the same bell, a rhythmic handclap, or a rhyme calls children to attention—“One, two three, eyes on me!”—so that the teacher can deliver a piece of instruction. Some patterns are established to help children
gain independence with daily classroom functioning—“When your work is finished, it always goes in the blue bin”—some patterns are established for independence—“Always remember to ask three friends before me to see if you can answer your question by yourself”—and some patterns are established to help children develop socially—“When you want to play with someone, remember to smile and ask nicely, ‘would you like to play with me?’”

Patterns, such as the ones described above, serve as strong organizers for children during their school day. At home and school, patterns are most commonly called routines. Noddings (2003) points out that humans find psychological comfort in their daily routines. This is affirmed by research, which demonstrates that well-established routines at home and school make a powerful contribution to children’s psychological health (Fiese, et al., 2002). Routines are thought to be critical in the establishment of a child’s sense of predictability and security, and the development of independence and trust (Sytsma, Kelley, and Wymer, 2001). Common home routines are related to mealtimes, sleep, chores, and daily activities; research has found that consistent mealtime and bedtime routines are associated with positive behaviour and academic success (Keltner, 1990). Positive school experience is further enhanced when there are consistent patterns of routines between home and school, and when teachers and parents are working together to create consistent expectations (Wildenger, McIntyre, Fiese, & Eckert, 2008).
Complementary to the practice of establishing consistent routines with children is the idea of rhythm. Whitehead (1929) uses the term *rhythm* to mean the patterns of the experiences of learning that cycle in and through lessons, school terms, and the school year. *Rhythm* is also a term used to denote patterns of life that are closely associated with the natural ebbs and flows of nature, energy and time. Payne and Ross (2009) explain rhythm this way: “just as night is replaced by day, children learn that there are movements and changes that, with their regularity, can be counted on” (p. 96). *Rhythm*, like its cousin *routine*, is built upon a regular, familiar pulse of events that are predictable, dependable, and consistent. Psychological health and comforts are not the only benefits to children whose school days are marked by rhythm. A Canadian study into the relationship between engagement and rhythm in nine early primary classes from three school contexts (four Waldorf classes, three public classes, and two university laboratory school classes) found that students were more engaged in activities that were physical and rhythmic; inversely, longer periods of sitting still and listening to the teacher led to decreased engagement (Smithrim, Garbati, & Upitis, 2008).

In this study, participants across all five types of schools discussed well-established, consistent routines as being an accepted and familiar practice that makes a strong contribution to children’s sense of comfort and confidence in their classroom. Waldorf teachers and parents spoke most frequently about rhythm. In addition, teacher participants in the Waldorf context spoke about breath as being the underlying, cyclic metaphor for rhythm. While rhythm and breath were specific to the Waldorf context, both
explicit and implicit examples of rhythm and breath were found throughout all school contexts.

The Findings

**Context specific language.**

In this study, rhythm was consistently associated with Waldorf education, whereas routines were consistently associated with the public and independent school contexts. Accordingly, participants used context specific language to describe the structures of repetition and predictability in their school day. In the Waldorf context, rhythm was spoken about as a way to think about creating predictability and a balance of activities in the day. For example, one Waldorf teacher explained,

Rhythm is so key. I see that in our daily and weekly rhythm, and in our class rhythm, which the children are very, very familiar with. The children know where they need to be and what’s expected of them, and it’s consistent. (SM:W:TI)

Another Waldorf teacher explained,

You can’t see it but it is there every day. If you came into my class on Monday you would see a rhythm that becomes very predictable on Tuesday. But within that rhythm there would be different things happening each day. (TC:W:TI)

Context specific language was also evident in the parent participants written description in response to the question “What comes to mind when you think of a happy classroom?” Two parents of children who attended the Waldorf school described a happy classroom as being one with predictable rhythms. For example, one parent wrote, “I think of a gentle nurturing environment in which children are allowed to be children and teachers are guiding them through a day filled with enjoyable, rhythmic routines”
Waldorf teachers consistently spoke of breathing-in and breathing-out as being a central to the understanding of rhythm and its role in the day. Breathing-in activities are those associated with listening, stillness, or the taking-in of information. Breathing-out activities are those associated with creativity, movement, and exuberance. In my observations of the Waldorf classes, I noticed the ways in which breath was realized. For example, in one morning’s observation of the Kindergarten class, the children played freely outside for about thirty minutes; then they gathered together in a circle to sing a song for five minutes; then they went to the cloak room to take off their coats and boots and listened to the teacher recite a poem while doing this; then they entered into the classroom by skipping through hoops laid on the floor; then they sat at the carpet and listened to a story while quietly massaging their solar plexus in order to focus their energy. Note the alternation of descriptive words in each phrase of that sentence: played freely; sang; listened while moving (taking off boots); skipped; listened while sitting quietly. The Grade 1 Waldorf teacher spoke about breath in relation to rhythm this way:

When the children come in the morning, the class is a very active space...and there’s a breathing out. And then we sit at our desks where they now need to focus and it’s a breathing-in, and the space is held a little tighter. And then, within the main lesson, there’s time to breath-out again, for the children to do something more creative. (SM:W:TI)

In the public school context, teachers spoke about routines more as a series of tasks that provide structure in the day:
The first thing the children do is walk to their table, put their stuffy and snack bags down, pick up their name card, walk to the attendance chart, and put their name card in it. Then the children go back to their tables. They open their snack bags and begin to eat. (LB:P:TI)

This idea of routines as being structured tasks and activities was echoed by the other public school teachers, especially with regards to the morning entry routine: “They get themselves undressed and unpack their backpacks...they change their shoes, then walk into the classroom and put their communication bags on their table” (LT:P:TI). One public teacher spoke about her practice of starting the school year off with “crisp” routines so that “children get really comfy right away” (EM:P:TI). The teachers in the independent schools also spoke about starting the year off establishing strong routines in order to promote children’s confidence: “You empower them so that once they know the routine, they don’t ask me to do it because they know they can do it themselves. They say, ‘I can do that!’” (JS:I:TI). A second independent teacher echoed the idea that children are empowered through consistent routines, stating, “If we have taught the children well right from the beginning of the year, then they really understand what the routines are and they can run things themselves” (MK:I:TI).

The Montessori teacher used both the words rhythm and routine to describe her classroom day. Like the public schools, routines were talked about in terms of being the tasks and activities that help structure children’s learning. Yet, in reading through the Montessori transcripts, I noticed a softness to the language that was not evident in the public school transcripts. This softness of language communicates a sense that the users of the routines are *children* and thus requires a sensibility that allows them to function at
the level of their age and development. For example, the Montessori teacher described her morning routine as being one that has space for choice and child-direction:

The children arrive between 8:45 and 9:00, which allows them to have a full two-and-a-half hour work period in the morning. Maria Montessori felt very strongly that children need that time, with the rhythms of the morning, to be able to...(short pause)...do what they need to do. We ease them into their routines. Normally, we play outside for the first fifteen, twenty minutes as the children arrive. Then we all enter the classroom together. The children come in, and they independently get ready for the classroom. Some of them take 30 seconds to get ready, some of the 20 minutes. They are given the time to do so. When they are ready, they come into the classroom and they choose a table to sit down at and have a little bite to eat. (MT:M:TI)

**Function.**

Both rhythm and routine serve the function of providing children with a pattern of predictability and stability in each day. One independent teacher noted, “I think that if there is structure and a certain amount of predictability, then kids will know what is going to be happening” (MK:I:TI). A significant difference in the function of each is that rhythm is *conceptual* and is associated with large and small patterns and repetitions; whereas routine is *practical* and is associated with repeated tasks and activities that children are familiar with.

The function of rhythm as a framework to support broad thinking about repetition, is evidenced by the way in which the Froebel teacher describes what teaching means to her in relation to the ebb and flow of classroom activity: “When I think of teaching, I think of waves. There are moments of this and then moments of that; there are whole mornings of this and then whole afternoons of that. I would say it feels orderly, but I
don’t like that word. Peaceful. Content” (WH:F:TI). The Waldorf teachers described rhythm in terms of the changes that larger seasonal cycles bring about. The Grade 1 Waldorf teacher observed that the feature of her classroom that she likes the most is its large windows, which allow her students, “to watch the season and the treetops change; we get to see the geese fly overhead in the fall, and first flakes of snow in the winter” (SM:W:TI). All Waldorf classrooms have a seasonal table, which is decorated with homemade and nature-found objects that children bring in to school; the seasonal table changes and shifts with each new season (Figure 4.18).

Figure 4.18. Waldorf seasonal table at Easter time.

Another function that rhythms and routines serve is to support transitions in the school day. Transitions are a common experience for children in every school, everywhere. Children transition from home to school, from outside to inside and back

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15 By “this and that,” the Froebel teacher was speaking about the different activities that children do each day. At this school, different activities included circle time with songs and games, Gift play around a table, free play, Partner play (a weekly art activity where younger children are partnered with an older buddy), seat work (i.e., traditional academic pencil-and-paper tasks), and outdoor play.
again, from the cloakroom to the carpet, and from the carpet to an activity. Vogler, Crivello, and Woodhead (2008) define childhood transitions as being events that lead to change, such as a change in appearance, knowledge, or location. Transitions can be developmental (e.g., Piaget’s theory of child development), vertical (e.g., moving from K to Grade 1), social (e.g., a rite of passage such as First Communion), or horizontal (e.g., moving from one classroom to the next).

In this study, participants only spoke of horizontal transitions. In the five school contexts comprising this study, singing was used to support smooth transitions and to infuse the day with a pattern of musical rhythm. Songs were sung to get children’s attention, to provide an auditory cue for a change from one activity to the next, or to signal that it was time for cleanup. For example, the Froebel teacher spoke about the role of song to support transitions in this way:

The teachers start to sing the tidy-up song when we feel it is time, usually about 8:55. The children know to put their things away, and then they come to the circle for the opening of the day. We do the weather and the date. Then we sing the anthem, and greet any visitors. Then we talk about the children’s news. Then we go off, usually with a song. (WH:F:TI)

Another example is found in the following vignette from my observation notes, taken during one visit to the Waldorf Kindergarten class:

Children come to the circle for a good-bye song. I am invited to the circle. All of the children turn to me and sing: “Au revoir, Scott.” In return, I sing, “Au revoir, mes amis.” Children are dismissed, one-by-one, each with their own “Au revoir,” as their parents come to the door to greet them. (R:W:ON)

A third function of a rhythm and routine of predictability is that of ritual. While the word ritual appeared only three times in the whole breadth of the transcriptions—one
being found in the opening hermeneutic window, which is based on the conversation and observation the independent Kindergarten teacher’s daily ritual of winding up her snow globe music box to mark the quiet story time—there were numerous examples of the practices of daily rituals in each context. Rituals that I observed included a daily prayer during the Froebel Kindergarten morning circle; the independent school Junior Kindergarten teacher’s daily practice of turning on quiet classical music to signal to the children the last five minutes of quiet time; and the daily, conscious practice of kindness woven into the Montessori teacher’s way of being with her students, which she described as being “rituals of the little things” (MT:M:TI).

One day, as I was having snack with the Waldorf Kindergarten class, the girl sitting on my right turned to me the moment the Golden Silence candle had been snuffed out and the teacher had announced—as she does everyday—“You may now talk,” and explained that each day of the week has its own special food that is served for snack. She said, “You know, Monday is rice day, Tuesday is oatmeal day, Wednesday is soup day, and Thursday is bread day...my favourite is rice day, because of the sauce” (R:W:ON). This child’s matter-of-fact observation—“You know, Monday is rice day...”—shared during a moment of conversational intimacy, points out the comforting way in which the rhythms of ritual lend themselves to positive school experience. When you are four-years-old, the little shiver of pleasure experienced every Monday morning on the way to school, knowing that today I get to eat the sauce!, becomes a shiver of pleasure that underscores how you experience school: with pleasure, with comfort, and with the
authority of knowing what the day will bring. Further, little ritualistic gestures, like the turning on of music to signal the end of quiet time, become the architecture of a day that is not held captive by a stultifying dullness of the same, but allows for a flex between the familiar and the new.

**Tone.**

One of the most striking differences between rhythm and routine was revealed through an analytic query of the descriptive level code *rhythm* and the descriptive level code *routines*. The purpose of this query was to identify co-occurring codes associated with each of the two constructs. This query resulted in a list of 59 codes co-occurring with rhythm, and 118 codes co-occurring with routines. Reading through each of the lists revealed a marked difference in the tone of the words. While both lists contained codes that described positive experiences (e.g., *play=happiness* and *calm energy*), there were more codes describing negative experiences associated with routines than there were with rhythms. Of the 90 codes co-occurring with routines, 19.0% were associated with academic codes (e.g., *anchor charts, literacy*) and 38.0% were associated with positive experiences (e.g., *place of comfort, story telling*). Of the 33 codes co-occurring with rhythm, none were associated with academic codes and 67.0% were associated with positive experiences (e.g., *recognizing happy moments, sounds of laughter*). Table 4.5 presents the codes that specifically describe negative feelings and experiences and through which analysis identified co-occurred with rhythms and routines throughout the data.
Table 4.5.
Negative Experiences Associated with Rhythm and Routine

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rhythm</th>
<th>Routine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total co-occurring codes = 33</td>
<td>Total co-occurring codes = 90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative co-occurring code (n = 3.0%):</td>
<td>Negative co-occurring codes (n = 12.0%):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>being unhappy</td>
<td>anxiety, being hungry, curriculum as tension, harsh sound of bells, interruptions, negative teacher talk, not enough time, external restrictions, rules and consequences, tensions in teaching, unsettling PA system</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A rhythm of predictability = happy kids.

A core feature of both rhythm and routine is predictability. Participants spoke about the relationship between predictable and familiar patterns in the day as being one of the underlying conditions for supporting children’s happiness and well-being at school.

At the end of the first cycle of descriptive analysis, the code routines was the most highly populated of all of the codes, being linked to 123 quotations. Parents identified routines as being something that makes their children happy: 9.0% of the parents identified that routines make their children happy at school, and 3.3% identified that routines make their children happy when they are not at school. The value in this finding is not that it is quantitatively significant; rather, the value is found in the fact that the Parent Questionnaire was open-ended, which required parents to think of and list activities and conditions that promote the happiness of their child. To many, listing routines would not be as obvious as friends or play; yet these parents voluntarily identified having clear and consistent routines as being an important element that creates happiness for their child.
Participants identified that predictability contributes to children’s sense of ease and comfort in the classroom. One public school teacher stated, “I think that kids feel most happy at school when they know what to expect” (EM:P:TI). Another public teacher summed up the significance of routines in terms of their grand and overarching importance:

Routines are huge. It’s just huge for the children to have that security of predictability. It means they are able to come in to the classroom and feel competent, and to feel reassured that things are where they are meant to be, to feel reassured by the predictability of it all. (SC:P:TI)

Children did not speak explicitly about rhythms or routines; however, all children confidently spoke about or demonstrated the sequence of events and activities that structured their day. When asked to describe his day, one boy in the Grade 2 Waldorf class rhymed off the events quite cheerily:

First, we did the morning verse, then we did roll call and names. Then we skipped. Then we had main lesson. Then we had snack and outdoor recess. Then we had an extra main lesson. Then Français. Then lunch and recess. And then a visit from Scott! This is where we have stopped. (IM:W:SI)

In response to the question, “What is the first thing you do when you walk in the class?,” one boy in the independent school Junior Kindergarten class responded by getting up from the interview table, walking across the classroom to his name card, which was placed on a table next to a bin of math manipulatives, and began to play. When I went over to join him at the table, I moved two other name cards to the side in order to make room for my notepad. The boy quickly spoke, and said, “You can’t move the name cards.” “Oh,” I said, “where should they go?” He moved the cards back to their spots,
stating emphatically, “These name cards go here.” This demonstrates that children appreciated the predictability of routines; they also see routines as rules that are not to be broken.

Figure 4.19. Kindergarten calendar, ticket board, and phonics chart. (JS:I:TI)

Another core feature of rhythm and routine that participants identified was its role in supporting children’s independence and self-agency. For example, in response to the interview question, “Please take a photograph of something in your classroom that you think represents happiness for children,” one independent teacher took two photographs of her organizational bulletin board (see Figure 4.19). The teacher explained that, for her, having a consistent routine is an essential component of a happy classroom, stating: “These photographs show daily activities: the Calendar, the Ticket Board, and our Phonics Charts. This gives children consistent routine, choice, self-involvement, and excitement about their activities. I believe these are essential components to creating a happy learning environment” (JS:I:TI). As illustrated by this example and supported by
analysis, a condition of a happy classroom is the provision of easily managed systems and structures to promote the development of children’s independence and self-agency.

Facet Number Five: Romancing Children Into Delight
A Subset of the Core Condition “An Ethos of Possibility”

Hermeneutic Window

Observation notes

Late February
Thursday noon
Waldorf

The felted gnome has made his daily journey across the classroom and is quietly waking up on the seasonal table. The children have tidied-up from their boisterous time of play and are sitting in the circle, each on their own short wooden chair painted a robin’s egg blue. The teacher walks carefully to her big rocking chair and sits down, gracefully and with intention. From her pocket she pulls out a length of pale yarn and, laying it upon her lap, begins to tell the children a story. The story is about a family of five elves who are hat makers. The elves have lost their hats and so they need to make more. As she talks, she picks up the yarn and begins to weave its length through her fingers, looping circles over and under each finger so as to create five new hats, one for each elf. The children listen and watch, mesmerized by the rhythm of the words and the weaving, each able to form their own picture of these careless but resourceful magical creatures. As the story comes to a close, and the yarn has reached its end, the teacher holds up the five hats and, deftly tugging on the loose end, pulls the loops out and—presto!—the five hats disappear as the elves return home from their busy day of work. In this instant, the children all sit up a little straighter in their chairs, surprised and delighted. It is a moment of sheer magic.

The Role of Magic and Wonder in Happy Classrooms

In his seminal text, Aims of Education, Whitehead (1929) describes a threefold rhythm of education in relation to both the grand development of learners as they grow from childhood to young adult, and to the more intimate cycles of the presentation of a lesson. The three stages are: romance, the time of childhood in which children are drawn-
in to their learning; *precision*, the time of adolescence in which there is an increased focus on fact and skill development, and *generalization*, the time of early adulthood in which analytic and critical thinking are developed. These three stages as articulated by Whitehead are an early echo of by-now common understandings of child-to-youth development, in which the young child learns through exploration and experiences associated most strongly with their emotions and body; to the youth who begins to explore facts and ideas on a more systematic, meta-cognitive level; to the young adult who begins to both synthesize abstract ideas and concepts and to apply them. Upitis (2010) observes that these three stages denote a pattern of learning that are evident not only in the first twenty years of life, but are woven through individual lessons, days, and terms. In this way, education is richly conceptualized in terms of its rhythms of entering into, living through, and experiencing learning.

Whitehead (1929) describes the first stage—the romantic stage— as being a time when the learner is drawn-in to the forthcoming learning experience. The romantic stage, Whitehead states, “has the vividness of novelty; it holds within itself unexplored connexions [sic] and possibilities” (p. 29). This is a time of anticipation, of curiosity, and of the recognition that ahead lays new discovery; it is one of excitement for both the student and the teacher. Similarly, the early primary grades denote a time of new beginnings. For children, these new beginnings happen on many levels. On a global level, this is the beginning of a new life-chapter, that of becoming a school-age child. On the academic level, this is the time of beginning new skills to be carried through life, such as
learning to read and get along with others. On the level of immediate day-to-day life—children’s most immediate level of lived experience—this is a time of micro-beginnings: a new day, a new unit of learning, a new activity. Each level brings about its own set of ways for the teacher to ‘romance’ his or her students into learning: the demonstration of the fizzy properties of vinegar and soda to hook children into a science unit; the singing of a song to welcome children into each new day; the gentle guiding and patience necessary in helping a reluctant reader learn to read.

The above examples of global, academic, and daily new beginnings are classroom examples of how Whitehead’s (1929) notion of romance ushers children into their experiences of learning. They are examples of familiar learning experiences in contemporary classrooms found in many schools in Canada: a science unit, a reading lesson, the goal of becoming a life-long learner. Yet, for children, classroom experience is not just about curriculum, subject matter, and instruction; it is also about experience in and of itself. Because of this, Noddings (2003) asserts that learning should be pleasurable. Here, it will serve us well to remember that pleasure is well established in both historical and contemporary literature as being an important component of happiness. The children who participated in this study, regardless of school type, articulated pleasure in terms of the comfortable spaces in the classroom that they gravitated to for work and play, the eating of food both as nourishment and enjoyment, and the act of having fun while at their favourite activity. While the phrase “this is fun!” is not a particularly complex analysis of a pleasurable experience, these are the words of
children; they are directly and immediately reflective of children’s school experience. For children, having fun is part of the pleasure of learning, of school, of play, and of friendship; having fun—or not—is often the way in which children articulate whether they had a happy or unhappy day at school. In this way, a happy classroom experience is about the tone through which children are romanced into school and learning through those things that captivate and delight their imaginations and spirits. Cultivating a happy classroom is about romancing children into delight.

Across the data, classroom experience as being a *romancing of delight* was spoken about by both teachers and students. Teachers spoke about delight in terms of the things they do whereas children spoke about this idea in terms of what they experience. Teachers used the terms “magic” and “magical” frequently—not to mean the magic of a black art or a conjuring trick but rather to describe those routines, planned activities, and improvised happenings that evoke a sense of wonder, awe, or delight in children. Three themes of delight were identified across the school types and data sources: (a) magical creatures, (b) magical experiences, and (c) the magic of learning. The analytic query that identified these three themes is found in Appendix N. I now describe the three themes.

**The Findings**

**Magical creatures.**

Teachers described different kinds of magical creatures they bring to life in the classroom, including faeries, gnomes, and talking animals who live in the forest. While gnomes, as magical creatures, were most frequently associated with a Waldorf classroom,
the presence of magical creatures was not limited to the Waldorf classrooms in this study. Of the eight classrooms I observed, five had a magical creature, stuffy, or character that was part of the fabric of children’s daily experience. For example, one public school teacher talked about “Ricky Douse,” a magical creature who lives in the small forest rimming his school’s playground. He grew lively and animated as he explained:

We have this little fellow named Ricky Douse, who it’s said will come out when he hears children singing beautifully, and he’ll come closer. He apparently lives in the woods. The kids are delighted by the idea that there’s this little character. So sometimes we’ll go out and see if we can find traces of Ricky Douse, footprints. We don’t know which hole he might live in, so we look. The kids are very, very intrigued by this. We went out the other day and looked for signs of animals that might live in the woods, and we found tracks in the snow, we found leaves...little things that give clues about Ricky Douse. (SK:P:TI)

Delight was cultivated not just through the bringing to life of magical creatures, but in explicit programmatic choices that appealed to children’s sense of magic and wonder. For example, the independent teacher spoke about a Faeries unit that she does with her Senior Kindergarten class. Because the Faerie unit was so popular, the children in the previous years’ Junior Kindergarten class eagerly anticipated the excitement of doing this unit with her in their Senior Kindergarten year. The power of this anticipation was so strong that when she decided to not do the unit, she was met with great disappointment. She explained,

I usually do a unit on faeries, where we read about faeries, and we have a faerie circle, and notes came from the faeries. It is really amazing. One of the JK kids was so taken by what was happening in the SK class. He noticed all of the magical things hanging outside in the trees; he noticed all of it. He asked if we were going to do faeries this year, and I said, “You know, we’re probably going to do something different,” and his face fell. So I said, “hmmm...then there are years that we do something again, and I think actually, yeah, we are going to do faeries
again this year.” So we’re doing faeries again this year! I guess I plan things that I
find interesting but that I’ve found are also intriguing to kids. (DK:I:TI)

Children described the presence of magical creatures in their room in matter-of-fact ways. For example, in one independent classroom a number of stuffed cats lived by the teacher’s chair. These cats were magic: some could read, some could write to the children, some were able to help the children to print neatly, and some are able to move to different parts of the room to help the children with their school work. One student explained about the printing cat, “That’s Gertie. She doesn’t know how to print very well, so we teach her” (HK:I:SI). Another example is from the Waldorf school. During an observation of outdoor playtime, on a cold February morning, one boy sidled up to me to tell me about the lives of outdoor gnomes. “It is too cold for gnomes outside right now,” he said. “They stay underground where it is nice and warm, and they keep working underground during the winter” (AC:W:SI).

In Waldorf early primary classes, the presence of a felted gnome underscores the small and large rhythms of days and seasons. During the day, when children are busy at school, the gnome sleeps in the corner. At the end of the school day, when it is time to tidy up, the gnome wakes up. The teacher signals tidy up time by gently carrying the now-awake gnome across the room, from his sleeping to his waking place. The teacher explains, “This is part of the magic of the classroom. Some years, all I have to do is carry the gnome, and children know it is time to clean up without me saying anything.” (TC:W:TI).

Carrying a gnome across the room to signal tidy up time is in stark contrast to
many familiar practices, such as flicking the lights or announcing loudly over the din of children at play that it is time to tidy up. I had the chance to observe the strength of such a practice one early afternoon. At 12:07, during free play, when 18 children were busy and engaged in many different projects, including building a massive fort with logs and blankets, I noticed the teacher quietly carry the gnome from his resting to his waking place. By 12:08— one minute later— every child had switched gears and was actively putting away their play materials and placing chairs at the circle for story time.

**Magical experiences.**

One of the questions that guided my interactions with children was to inquire about their favourite activities. Many children identified activities that entailed an element of imaginative pretending, such as playing with knights and castles (Figure 4.20) or transforming a pile of sticks in the woods into a rocket ship, as one of their favourite school activities.

*Figure 4.20. Student photo of his favourite activity. (JX:I:SI)*
Teachers described the different ways they appealed to children’s sense of magic and wonder. For one independent teacher, this meant starting each story time with the ritual of winding up a music box: “They all settled and I open the book, and then I have this music box that we wind up. That’s how story time starts. We just wind up the music box and the music plays and then I start reading. There’s a ritual to it” (DK:1:TI) (Figure 4.21). For another independent teacher, this meant doing simple activities with his students involving nature and the outdoors, such as freezing icicle ornaments in small yogurt containers with glittery pipe-cleaner hooks and then hanging the ornaments on the trees outside his classroom window, each ornament coloured by a brilliant shot of food colouring which captured the late afternoon sunlight as it slanted low into the room (Figure 4.22).

![Glittery music box.](image1) ![Sparkly icicle ornaments.](image2)

Another teacher reflected on the influence of her mother on her development as a teacher. Her mother was a Kindergarten teacher, one who knew about appealing to children’s sensibilities. The participant explained:
On the first day of school she would blow bubbles on the schoolyard so the little kids would know that she is the Kindergarten teacher. Who else but the Kindergarten teacher could possibly be blowing bubbles outside? Some of these things I now do because, growing up, I listened to her talk about how much fun it was to blow bubbles on the playground. And so I do it too. And the kids love it.

This quotation speaks to the power of captivating a child’s sense of delight and wonder. Bubbles wafting on a breeze on a warm, sunny day is an image of delight, of ease, of a release from tensions. It is an iconic image of summer and childhood. Children love to blow bubbles, and are endlessly amused by the shifting, swirling, iridescent colours that play across the surface of bubble. Children delight in chasing after a bubble: some to pop the bubble with triumph, others to hold it aloft on the tip of their finger like a delicate treasure. In the preceding quotation, the participant reveals the way in which her mother (the bubble-blowing teacher) romances her new students into learning on the first day of school by appealing to their sense of wonder, magic, and delight. Further, this quotation reveals an important relationship between the pleasure of having fun and school.

_**Magic in learning.**_

Early childhood is a time of enormous growth and learning. Being present to learning is one of the joys of being an adult in the lives of children. Teachers of young children are often the ones who bear witness to the moment when a child discovers that _this_ block balances quite nicely on _that_ block, or the moment when a child figures out a tricky pattern in the math centre. The Montessori teacher shared this story of her sense of privilege in bearing witness to a child’s learning:
Locks and Keys is a preliminary exercise in the Practical Life area. It’s concrete, it’s simple, it’s magical. To see the light in a child’s eyes when you put the key in the lock for the first time...and it turns...and it opens! And if you catch them, and they are looking at you, they just [MT makes a bright face, like a surprised and delighted child] and say to me, “you opened the lock!” It’s fantastic to witness to this magic of learning. (MT:M:TI)¹⁶

For young children, the materials they learn and play with often carry transformative, magical properties. Transformation is, to define it simply, the change from one state or form to another. An example is Froebel’s Second Gift, which is comprised of a small wooden sphere, cylinder, and rectangular prism, each about the size of a hard baseball. The three objects are suspended on a wooden frame by a thin lanyard of twine. Twisting the twine will cause each object to spin; taking a slender wooden stick and manipulating the twisted lanyard up and down will cause the object to spin very fast. So fast, in fact, that the outer edges of each object will blur, causing a new shape to magically appear inside the blur. The Second Gift not only demonstrates properties of two- and three-dimensional shapes and objects in a way that is magical for children, but also becomes a means to generate creative thinking. The Director of the Froebel Education Centre explained how Froebel gift play can be a transformative experience for children, one that captures their imaginations and sense of delight:

Gifts can be anything. They are like a Rorschach Test. The Froebel teacher lets children do their own thing with a gift, to allow the gift to become whatever is on the child’s mind. (BC:F:TI)

¹⁶ Locks and Keys is a Montessori lesson in the Practical Life domain. The purpose is to teach children to open a lock with a key. The teacher will gather a variety of different sized locks and keys and store them in an attractive container. The child will take the basket and a tablemat and practice locking and unlocking the locks.
I was captivated by this magical transformation the afternoon that Director introduced me to the Second Gift. I was immediately transfixed by the blur of the suspended objects, and I found myself playing with the tension and twist of the lanyard, experimenting to see how fast or slow I could make the objects spin. If I, as an adult, can be transfixed by something that my rational brain has long ago learned—that twisting a piece of twine will cause the object that it is attached to spin and blur—I can well imagine just how marvelous this experience would be for a young child.

I am reminded of childhood visits to my Grandparents house. In the sunroom at the back of the house, my Grandfather kept a Newton’s Cradle on the coffee table. A Newton’s Cradle is a series of five metal balls suspended in a frame so that they are just barely touching each other. Swinging one or two of the balls against its neighbor causes a chain reaction of energy and momentum through the other balls, which leads to a pendulum swing in an intriguing pattern across all five balls; this is accompanied by an immensely satisfying rhythmic “click, click, click” as each metal ball smacks against its neighbour. I remember being transfixed by this device, and would spend long periods of time suspended inside its rhythm staccato. In many ways the Newton’s Cradle, like the Second Gift, is a very simple object; and yet, what it generated in me was a sense of awe and wonder that something so simple could be so marvelous and delightful.

**Key Findings: What Makes a Happy Classroom?**

In the introductory chapter, I stated that the purpose of this study was to understand the phenomenon of happiness in education by examining characteristics of
happy classroom spaces from across a broad variety of pedagogical traditions, classrooms, and perspectives; I also stated that the purpose of this research was not to measure the degree to which happiness was occurring in each classroom, or to compare and evaluate whether one approach or another was better or worse at promoting children’s happiness. And yet, despite this claim, my experience of collecting data placed me in classrooms where I experienced and noticed my own emotions in response to the events unfolding before me. There were moments when I felt anxious observing a classroom, and simultaneously noticed the chaos of bells and noise leading to the raising of teachers’ voices and children being sent to time-out; there were moments when I found myself delighting in bearing witness to a group of children at play, and simultaneously find myself writing in my observation book, “ah, look at those smiles! All is well, right now.” These observations were filtered through my many years of classroom experience as both a teacher and as a student support worker, in which I noticed, over long stretches of time, repetition, and reflection, the patterns of events leading to moments of great happiness felt amongst my students and me, and those patterns of events where all good feelings broke down and my students and I were left simmering with a sense of uneasiness and unhappiness. I brought this experience with me as I stepped into each classroom to interview a teacher or conduct an observation, admiring the beauty and tidiness of the room, or wincing at the clutter and jumble of toys and long forgotten artwork heaped on top of each other.
Through detailed cross-analysis of the 146 primary documents—comprised of teacher and student interview transcripts, transcribed observation notes, and written text transcribed from children’s drawings and parent questionnaires, from all five school types and eight classroom observations—I found five core conditions and 17 descriptive facets that characterize happy classrooms. In addition, analysis identified barriers and tensions that teachers work with as they strive to promote children’s happiness at school and in learning. This analysis has been informed by my professional experience in both small and large ways. To conclude this chapter, I will identify the key findings that answer the primary research question, “What makes a happy classroom?” These key findings are written as direct assertions and are supported empirically by the rich descriptions of the conditions and facets of happy classrooms as presented, above.

First Key Finding: Positive Relationships

Happy classrooms are made through pedagogies of relationships. I found that teachers who nurtured positive relationships amongst themselves and their students, through human attributes such as humour, kindness, and curiosity, were teachers who placed the well-being of their students as the primary point of consideration for all decision-making about the instruction and programming. In addition, I found that teachers of young children who are striving to create happy classrooms place the emotional and social well-being of their students as a primary goal. Happy classrooms are made when teachers are actively working to help students learn to get along with each other.
Second Key Finding: Attending to Developmental Needs

Happy classrooms are made when they are led by a teacher, and nested within a school context, that place the developmental needs, interests, and well-being of the young child first. Inversely, the greatest tensions occur in those classrooms where teachers and schools have to negotiate increased levels of external expectations that contradict the developmental needs, interests, and well-being of young children. In this way, happy classrooms are made when the teachers know, deeply and intuitively, who young children are.

Third Key Finding: Embodied Experiences

Happy classrooms are made through pedagogies of embodiment. Pedagogies of embodiment are those practical decisions about instruction and programming designed to bring children’s physical, emotional, and spiritual senses to life. This study identified a variety of activities and experiences that brought the students to life, and generated a great sense of happiness, including: art making, outdoor exploration, free play, singing and music, sports and games, having choice and the freedom to move about the classroom, and activities involving food and eating. In addition, happy classrooms are made through activities that result in meaningful, and satisfying products that create a sense of pride and accomplishment in children. Examples of such activities include: sewing, gardening, cooking, playing real musical instruments, and finger knitting.
Fourth Key Finding: Happy Classrooms Hum

All teachers in this study used the word “hum” to describe those moments during the day when all is well, and that their students are happy. Teachers recognized children’s happiness through their smiles, bright faces, sparkly eyes, relaxed bodies, and focused engagement with their chosen activity. A humming classroom can be both loud and quiet; it is a quality of sound and energy that is characterized by a relaxed, focused, and energized engagement of children and teachers, alike. Teachers who recognize a humming classroom as a landmark of happiness hold this as a barometer to guide their decisions about instruction and programming within the daily, lived moments of teaching and learning.

Fifth Key Finding: Pedagogical Thoughtfulness

Happy classrooms are made through the pedagogical thoughtfulness of teachers. Teachers who are being pedagogically thoughtful are engaged in the cultivation of all aspects of their being as teachers: their pedagogy, their values and beliefs, their professional knowledge, their knowledge of child development, their knowledge and knowing about children, and the ways in which they think about the aims and purposes of teaching, learning, and schooling. Pedagogically thoughtful teachers engage in a practice of personal reflection that guides, shapes, and informs their thoughtfulness, in whatever format works best for them: through conversations with colleagues; through writing and art-making; through involvement in nature, domestic activities, and athletics; through
participation in spiritual practices or religious communities; and through personal and professional learning opportunities.

**Sixth Key Finding: An Ethos of Happiness**

Happy classrooms generate happiness through an upward spiral of positive experiences and feelings. This study identified key characteristic of classrooms that are infused with an ethos of happiness: a sense of open welcome to newcomers; an attention to beauty through the consideration of the learning materials, design elements, and images that surround the children; the incorporation of warm and natural materials into the classroom; a tidy and well-organized room; the creation of a calm sonic environment; structuring the day through easy rhythms of in- and out-breath activities; the cultivation of gratitude; and the cultivation of children’s spiritual dimension through a sense of wonder and awe. This finding also serves to remind us that happiness is not a sustained state of constant bliss. In happy classrooms, there are difficult and unhappy moments. This was true in all of the classrooms in all of the different school types that I observed. It is an underlying ethos of happiness that carries children through difficult moments such that their experience, as a whole, is a happy one.

**Seventh Key Finding: Possibility and Potential**

Happy classrooms are infused with an ethos of possibility and potential. Considering the classroom as a site for *the possible* is an attitude carried by the teacher, one who is passionate about children, their learning, their interests, and their unique ways of being and knowing. A happy classroom that is infused with an ethos of possibility and
potential is led by a teacher, and supported by their school community, who believes in children as capable individuals in their own right.

**Eighth Key Finding: Inexpensive Instruction**

Money does not buy a happy classroom. While this study did identify socioeconomic barriers to children’s happiness that can lead to unhappy and troubling experiences, such as hunger and neglect, these are not issues of the classroom, *per se*. Central to the making of happy classrooms are the pedagogies and practices of teachers embedded within their school community. The key findings presented here describe ways that teachers and schools can make decisions about instruction and programming that are not expensive and that can serve to mitigate, as much as possible, socioeconomic barriers faced by children outside of the school.

**Ninth Key Finding: Romancing Children into Delight**

Happy classrooms are made by romancing children into delight. Children hold the remarkable capacity for curiosity, interest, engagement, wonder, awe, and a sense of delight in learning about their world. Through my observations, I found that teachers who recognized these unique and special qualities of children, who created learning experiences that appealed to children in these ways, and who recognized in themselves their own capacity for delight, were more likely to have happy children and happy classrooms. This finding resonates strongly with my own professional experiences as a teacher and observer of young children, and with my own experience—both as a child
and an adult—of finding delight in bubbles that float in the breeze, tiny plants that grow in the forest, and in glitter that sparkles in the sunlight.

**Tenth Key Finding: Believing in Happiness as an Educational Aim**

Happy classrooms are possible. This study examined eight exemplary early primary classrooms where passionate teachers, embedded within their school context and communities, worked to promote the happiness of their students and to create happy classrooms spaces. Based on the research and analysis undertaken for this study, I can state with confidence, that happy classrooms spaces are possible wherever teachers, educators, and parent communities believe that the happiness of their students should be a fundamental aim of education.
Chapter 5

Discussion

Making Classrooms Happy

Findings from this study indicate that happy classrooms are created through pedagogies of positive relationships, embodied and active learning experiences aimed at bringing children’s senses to life, the pedagogical thoughtfulness of the teacher who is embedded within a pedagogically thoughtful school community, and that are infused with an ethos of happiness and possibility. In this way, the conditions and facets that serve to create happy classrooms are both pedagogical and practical.

Teaching young children is, by its very nature, practical. It requires thinking about classroom management, scheduling, and organization that best meet children’s developmental needs, such as how to organize children’s indoor and outdoor shoes in a crowded cloakroom, what kind of paint pots to use so the paint doesn’t dry out and become wasted, and how to arrange furniture so children can move safely and with ease through the room. But teaching is also deeply relational and value-based. Knowing one’s values as a teacher informs practical decisions. Practically, the findings from this study indicate that there are concrete strategies and activities that can be infused and planned into each and every school day; practical approaches that promote the flourishing of children throughout their experiences of learning and living in schools. This is good news.
because many of the strategies are quite simple to implement. Examples of simple strategies that contribute to lively, happy learning include singing frequently throughout the day to support transitions, or by giving each child a small piece of beeswax to mold a figurine in response to a story, thus engaging the children’s senses and supporting their language development. But strategies alone will not contribute to making classrooms happy. It is the added dimension of thinking pedagogically about children and their best interests that adds to practical approaches to promoting children’s happiness. Thus, pedagogically, the findings from this study illuminate ways to think about teaching, learning, and being in ways that orient us to young children deeply and with meaning.

This framework of conditions and facets supports ways of thinking about who we are as teachers of young children, ways of structuring our classroom programs, ways of interpreting and implementing curriculum documents in busy classroom days, and ways of thinking about our relationships with young children that is aimed at their happiness. In this way, romancing children into delight is also about the ways in which we romance ourselves, as teachers, into the delights of being a child, and into the delights of living, learning, and working with children. This discussion will first focus on the combined pedagogical and practical nature of the findings. Then, I will consider lessons of pedagogy and practice that public school teachers can learn from strong pedagogical traditions, such as Waldorf. Finally, the discussion will highlight implications of the findings for teachers, school administrators, and pre-service teacher education program, and will outline three suggestions for future research.
Happy Classrooms Hum

In this study, teachers recognized and described a happy classroom by its *hum*. The word *hum* was most often used as an indicator that “all is well” in the room. The phrase, “all is well” was used to describe a tone of energy and feelings associated with children who are engaged, active, and happy. A humming, happy classroom was described in three distinct ways: (a) on an energy level (i.e., *hum, bubbly, alive*), (b) on a sound dynamic level (i.e., *chatty, noisy, quiet*), and (c) as a landmark of recognition that children are engaged, active, and filled with liveliness.

Physical energy is a force that we can see. We see the effects of a level lifting a heavy weight; we see the motion of a ball as it rolls down a hill. In comparison, the energy of a humming classroom is felt on an intuitive, energetic body-level before its effects are seen or heard. In a similar way that happiness, itself, has its own rhythms of intensity and moderation, teachers described their recognition of a humming classroom as an energy that ebbs and flows. One teacher explained to me, “Hum is a very good thing. Hum can be gentle and rippling. It can go up and down” (MT:M:TI). Another teacher stated, “I think that you can sense energy. When you feel like everybody’s engaged and content, then that is part of the hum, too” (SI:P:TI).

I remember from my childhood a radio advertisement for the Canadian physical health initiative called ParticipACTION®. The 30-second commercial featured two qualities of children’s laughter. The first quality was of children playing indoors and laughing hysterically. The second quality was of children playing outdoors; their laughter
was robust and punctuated with “healthy” sounding conversation. The message of the commercial was, of course, to get your children out of the house and let them play with a sense of healthy freedom. To this day, I vividly remember the two qualities of laughter: one hard-edged, the other open. And, because I was a child who had the good fortune of having a mother with enough of a backbone to put a blanket over the TV every day after school and send my brothers and me outdoors to play, no options allowed, accompanied by the explicit instruction, “don’t come back until you hear the dinner bell ring,” I could relate to the healthier, more robust sounding laughter. The point I am trying to make here is that the two kinds of laughter were both loud in volume, but they each had a unique dynamic quality, a quality that communicated two very different tones and experiences.

One physical manifestation of a humming classroom is its volume and dynamic level. In musical terms, volume means the degree of loudness or softness; dynamic adds the element of the quality of the loudness of softness. In this study, a happy classroom was described as being one with a quiet volume, and a calm dynamic. This state was achieved through teachers modeling calm, quiet behaviours; by practical choices like playing soft music; and creating school-wide structures that mitigated the effects of loud and annoying sounds. In doing this, teachers also acknowledge that noisy and energized classrooms were also a marker of happy children. One teacher made this observation about the dynamic spectrum of a happy, humming class:

It’s not a quiet and it’s not lots of noise—although a lot of noise can indicate happiness as well—there’s a steady “hmmmmmm.” There’s a busy-ness and there’s activity and there’s work, and there’s all sorts of things going on. And sometimes
the hum completely drops and there’s a moment of just quiet...and then it hums again. (TC:W:TI)

A humming classroom is also reflective of a room full of children and adults who are all engaged in their actions and interactions of teaching and learning. Children who are engaged like what they are doing, are motivated by the options available, and have agency in their choices, decisions and environment. One teacher explained that she recognizes an engaged hum in her class when,

...they’re all busy and engaged. It’s loud, but that’s okay, because there are 28 kids in here. And they’ve all chosen an activity. I think choice is a big part of it, they’ve all chosen where they go and what they are doing. (LB:P:TI)

Another teacher explained the relationship between student engagement and hum this way:

Everybody’s actively engaged, there’s a busy little hum in terms of the sound, you know. The children are definitely chatting, but it’s not...it’s not anxious and it’s not loud. There is just this general chatter, and they’re talking about what they’re doing, and they’re excited about it. (JS:1:TI)

This finding that happy classrooms hum links to van Manen’s (2002) observation that tone is one of the subtle dimensions of pedagogy. Our decisions about the sounds that we create during the day, the language we use to respond to children in praise or in conflict, the kinds of activities we make available for children, and the rhythms and routines that pattern our classroom days all establish a tone that communicates, *sotto voce*, children’s fundamental experience of school. Of this, van Manen states, “Pedagogy is the ability to actively distinguish what is appropriate from what is less appropriate for children or young people” (p. 8). A classroom that hums—through the energy, dynamic,
and engagement of children—results from a teacher knowing what is right and appropriate for their students in their classroom.

Student engagement is a key characteristic of a humming classroom. Engagement is a state of being in which one is wholly involved—through one's body, mind, emotions, and social interactions—in an activity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Smithrim & Upitis, 2005). In addition, research has found that students are motivated to do things that interest them, that motivation underpins engagement, and that engagement can lead to improved outcomes, such as academic achievement (Martin, 2012; Smithrim & Upitis, 2005). Further, research points out that we are interested in learning and activities in which we are also emotionally engaged by (Pekrun & Linnenbrink-Garcia, 2012). Practically speaking, these findings point out that it is through being in-tune with students that happiness is generated. Being in-tune means both paying attention to what interests students in your classroom, and developing the capacity to step away from the actions and goings-on of a busy classroom in order to tune in to the sound quality of engaged (or not) students. Paying attention to what interests students can be as simple as asking children what they are interested in or would like to learn about at regular class meetings.

Two types of instructional approaches that appeal directly to student interest are inquiry and project-based learning. These approaches begin, first and foremost, with student interest; the teacher then plans structures and experiences that support the students as they learn and explore their topic or project. For the teacher, this planning will also include making connections to curriculum documents. This approach is very
different than making instructional decision that begin with curriculum documents and then inform students what it is they are going to learn about. The first approach begins with the student and, in doing so, is supported by a vast body of research that addresses the powerful relationships between emotions, interest, motivation, engagement, and student success. And, while it can be difficult for a teacher to step out of the action in order to listen and observe a group of children busy at work, developing this practice can provide teachers with important information about their students. Asking oneself, “what is the sound quality I hear right now? Are the bodies and faces of children bright and alive, or closed and tense? What do I need to do, here and now, to guide, redirect, or respond to this information?” It is this attunement to children, their interests, and the hum of a happy classroom that can best inform teachers about the learning and well being of their students in the day-to-day experiences of school.

Calm Classrooms are Happy Places

Calm environments were frequently associated with happy classrooms. Calmness was attributed to a quiet or low volume and dynamic in the classroom, predictable routines, tidy and organized materials, and a lack of clutter. One striking example of this was the Montessori classroom. When asked to describe her room, the Montessori teacher explained,

I think the most important thing about any Montessori classroom you will see worldwide, is that everything is child-sized. There is no space, in most Montessori classrooms, for a teacher desk or an area that is put aside for the teacher. The teacher is very much a secondary figure in the classroom. Every thing is organized. Activities and materials are colour-coded. The classroom is orderly;
the classroom is neat and tidy. It is warm and bright. This is what the classroom entails: tidy, neat, orderly, and inviting. (MT:M:TI)

During my observations, I noticed the intentional way in which the teacher moved calmly about the room, the purposefulness of her gestures as she demonstrated a new activity to a child, and the hushed and calm way that she spoke. She played quiet classical music often. Materials were attractively displayed. Children handled the materials with care at all times, and put materials away neatly when they were finished (Figure 5.1).

![Practical Life materials](image)

**Figure 5.1.** Practical Life materials.

Another example of a calm classroom environment was the Waldorf school. The school is situated in an early 20th century building, with high ceilings, tall windows, hardwood floors, and large transom windows over each door, framed in honey-coloured wood. The early primary classrooms are painted in pale, warm pastel colours, in
according to Steiner philosophy of surrounding children in a comforting, warm environment (See Figure 5.2). The classrooms had large wooden tables suitable for family-style eating. Artwork was attractively displayed. A tone of rhythm and breath was evident in the way teachers moved through the space, the way the children shifted from calm listening to energized play and back again, and in the smells of bread baking and live music filling the hallways. As the lead teacher told the daily story, the assistant teacher would prepare a bowl of small hand towels soaking in warm water and a drop of peppermint oil. At the end of the story, each child would get their own towel to wipe their hands and breathe in the minty smell; then, the teacher would walk around the circle and place a small dot of cream for the children to rub into their hands. This was remarkably soothing for me; I can well imagine how calming it was for the children.

Figure 5.2. A Waldorf Kindergarten.
What is striking about these two examples of calm classrooms is that they are calm on multiple levels: a calm sonic environment, visually attractive and cohesive, and tidy and uncluttered. In addition, the adults in the room modeled calm and purposeful manners at all times. Payne and Ross (2009) discuss the idea of *simplicity* as a means to raising calmer, happier kids. To Payne and Ross, simplicity as a framework for thinking about the many decisions that parents and teachers make with and for children does not mean simplistic. Rather, simplicity is about the kinds of decisions that an adult makes to pare down the clutter of choice, stimulation, noise, frenetic activity, and media which children are confronted with everyday in contemporary North America society. He asserts that young children are not developmentally ready to function within an over-stimulating environment, such as a cluttered classroom with a myriad of competing primary colours and layers of anchor charts and posters. He argues that, “if you give a child less and less complexity, they become more interested and this cultivates true powers of attention” (p. 67). Here, I think he is using *complexity* as a word to mean *complicated* as a contrast to *simplicity*; he is not using it as the theoretical construct of *complexity thinking*, which describes a means to understand the complex ways that human phenomenon and research interact, emerge, and co-relate (Davis & Sumara, 2006). He offers suggestions on how to pare-down environments in order to create a sense of calmness that also stimulates and enlivens. Suggestions include: reducing the number of choices of toys; taking away “conceptually fixed toys” (p. 69), such as toys based on a movie; and high-stimulation toys that beep and whir. Instead, he suggests that
parents (and teachers) should populate a space with toys and activities that will stimulate the senses, the imagination, that have a meaningful purpose, and that can connect children with nature. Both the Montessori and Waldorf classes, as described above, are examples of classroom spaces and programs that have pared down stimuli and have created environments that bring children’s senses to life, that engage children in meaningful and real work, that are tidy and uncluttered, and are, as a result, deeply calm environments that have a positive impact on children’s well-being.

Chaotic Environments and Unhappiness

The most frenetic, loud, and chaotic spaces that I observed were the public school classrooms. This was not just a function of the classroom or habits of the teacher but, rather, was due to the complex overlapping of the amplified volume level of the PA system and entry bells; announcements crackling on at unpredictable moments; the difficulty of establishing a consistent child-oriented routine due to the competing nature of gym; library, and prep time schedules, all which are negotiated with older grades with different developmental needs; the clutter of the room; the top-down Board initiative requiring teachers to display evidence of learning, thus compelling the teachers to post layer upon layer of anchor charts and success criteria on the walls; and the hard energy of an economically disadvantaged community hovering on the edge of its capacity to provide adequate care for its children. Of the many anchor charts and success criteria posters taped to the blinds covering two banks of window, effectively blocking the natural light from entering the room, one Kindergarten teacher commented, “if the
Superintendent were to come and visit, she would expect to see these on the walls” (LB:P:TI). As a researcher, I observed how this chaotic tone played itself out in the frequent misbehaviours of children, tears and meltdowns during transitions, and consequences, such as time-outs or being spoken to with a hard-edged teacher-voice, for children who broke classroom rules.

Figure 5.3. Anchor charts covering the windows.

I recognize that this description paints a grim picture of the two public school classrooms that I observed that supersedes their reality. Time-outs and annoyed voices are not uncommon responses to difficult and hard-to-manage classes. I have meted out more than my fair share of time-outs, and have spun off on a high-horse on more than a few occasions, lecturing children that, “under NO uncertain terms are you to do that ever, ever, EVER again in this classroom; do-I-make-myself-clear?” In visiting these two classrooms immediately following the many weeks that I spent marveling at the intentionally calm environments of the Froebel, independent and Waldorf classrooms, I
found myself jarred back into this chaotic reality of some public classrooms and schools. The reality is that the system that a classroom is embedded within is a larger and stronger force than any one teacher’s habits or practices. Even the most aesthetically minded and calm-mannered public school teacher still needs to learn to negotiate the reality of loud bells, hallway noises, and aesthetically impoverished furniture. As a researcher, I felt anxious during these observations; I can only imagine that if I, as a relatively well-adjusted adult struggled in that environment, then children must too.

This description is an example of Noddings (2005) observation that “Schools today...are thing-poor places” (p. 147). Noddings argues that schools have a responsibility to teach children how to be caring, responsible people. Relevant to this example is Noddings’ argument that teaching children to care for objects has moral repercussions. This is because when we live within a framework of care, we are always mindful of our impact on others. How we treat even inanimate objects communicates to children how we might—or might not—care for living beings. In fact, a British study examining the relationship between the care given to school grounds and students perceptions about the environment, found that students ‘read’ important messages that adults give about caring for the environment based on whether or not the school grounds were lovely and cared for, or unattractive, messy, and in disrepair; the study also found that children scribed their reading of the school grounds to whether or not they, themselves, felt cared for (Titman, 1994). The message here is clear: chaotic and messy places teach children that they do not need to care for their shared environment; beautiful
and tidy places teach children the value of caring for a shared environment and teach children that they are valued members of a school community.

Teaching children to care for objects begins with modeling our own careful treatment of objects in our home and schools. The Montessori classroom is an example of the benefits to children of a tidy, cared-for room. One day, the teacher explained to me the significance of the beautiful blue jug on the hand-washing table (Figure 5.4). She said,

There is a mirror there, and a beautiful basin, and a beautiful jug. I tell the children that another Montessori teacher gave them to me as a gift, and that I treasure it, and that I really want to share it with them. I will watch the children: they will be washing their hands, and watching in the mirror, and it is a very inner moment for them. It’s a long, careful process that takes time. (MT:M:TI)
While it is true that schools populated with many children can be noisy and energetic places, they do not have to be messy, chaotic, and unattractive. Like having a tidy or untidy home, a messy and chaotic school environment is, ultimately, a result of the habits of the adults who are in a position of leadership. Admittedly, teachers who have to manage increased levels of administrative complication, and high numbers of students, have less time to tidy-up their rooms and keep papers and artwork organized. However, the Waldorf and Montessori classrooms serve as examples of the value of a beautiful classroom that contributes to positive student experience. During my observations, I asked the Waldorf teacher how she decides what to bring into her room. She explained that she evaluates the usefulness of an object or learning material based on whether it is beautiful, useful, and will add value to her students’ learning. And, for everything she brings in to the room, she takes one thing out. This heuristic is a very simple and practical way for classroom teachers, who work in busy and chaotic environments, to gain control over their own environments, in a way that contributes to the creation of a happy, lovely, and well-organized classroom space. In addition, this heuristic serves to locate all decision making about instructional materials in the best interest of children. Asking ourselves, “in what way will this thing benefit my students, and what message will it give them about learning, school, and themselves?” is an important point of pedagogical reflection that keeps kids at the centre.

One point of consideration about the phrases, “neat and tidy” vs. “messy and disorganized,” is that a tidy classroom does not mean a classroom that is showcase
perfect. A classroom filled with many children, all who are engaged in the act of producing art work, science experiments, growing plants, dressing and undressing in the cloakroom to go outside and explore, can lead to mess and untidiness. I think of the example of the Grade 1 public school classroom where the teacher used his desk as a place to pile artwork. This classroom demonstrated an aliveness of student learning: children’s paintings were hung on display boards, games and toys were tucked in bins on the shelves, and the walls were covered with evidence of word explorations and environmental text. This was not a tidy classroom in the same way the Montessori classroom was. But what was evident was a level of care and attention given to the student learning and materials: the teacher drew beautiful chalk drawings on the black board, the children were taught to place the bins and toys neatly on the shelves (as opposed to stacking them in disarray), and the words on the walls were there for a purpose and were displayed in such a way that unnecessary information did not distract children’s attention. Rather than communicating chaos, this classroom communicated a sense of aliveness that was reflected in the children’s bright, smiling faces as they worked and played.

**Money Does Not Buy a Happy Classroom**

The above discussion, contrasting the difference between calm and chaotic environments, highlights an important consideration in the cultivation of happy classroom spaces. Happy classrooms, and the promotion of children’s happiness at school and in learning, are not dependent upon how much money is available to a teacher.
Unquestionably, children who go to an economically advantaged school have the increased chance that their basic needs will be met at home (i.e., nutrition, health, and emotional care) and the increased opportunities for rich learning experiences outside of the school day than the child who goes to a less economically advantaged school; such advantages do contribute to a child’s sense of well-being. However, this does not mean that an economically advantaged school will be a happier place and an economically challenged school an unhappier place. The conditions that contribute to the cultivation of a happy classroom and promote children’s happiness and flourishing are not conditions that money can buy. They are conditions set in place by a pedagogically thoughtful teacher who works within a pedagogically thoughtful system that puts children’s developmental capacity and emotional needs first. Buying a hand bell and turning off the PA system in order to welcome, rather than warn, children into school are not expensive undertakings. Taking the time to welcome each child with a smile and direct eye contact each morning requires no financial outlay. All this takes is a commitment to creating a welcoming environment that communicates to children their value and importance. One public school Grade 1 teacher I interviewed told me that she equates the word *sparkly* with *happiness*, and that, for her, sharing a bright and smiling face with her students is an important part of creating a happy environment. This teacher taught in a low socioeconomic community with children who had many emotional and social needs; yet, when I visited her classroom, it felt very alive, bright, and sparkly.
Thus, what allows, or prohibits, teachers to make choices about creating happy classroom environment is not about money, but is about the attitudes, values, and beliefs of the teacher that children’s happiness is of central importance. These choices are, in turn, supported—or prohibited—by the context within which they are embedded, and the values that school and school board administration place on the quality and tone of children’s experiences at school. It is this dimension of pedagogical thoughtfulness—at the teacher, school, and system level—that locates children at the very epi-centre of the educational equation: children come first.

**Strong Pedagogy and Happiness**

The most welcoming, calm, inviting, beautiful, and lively classrooms were found in the schools with strong pedagogical traditions. By strong pedagogical tradition, I mean a thread of pedagogy that is centered and guided by the writings and beliefs of a founding pedagogue; places considerations of the child and their development in advance of considerations of curriculum—in fact, practical decisions about curriculum are informed by knowledge of the child; is supported by a larger network of other schools, teachers, and communities that subscribe to this philosophy in greater and lesser degrees; and, finally, is kept fresh and alive in small and unique ways in each individual setting. Waldorf, Froebel, and Montessori are three examples of strong pedagogical traditions. This notion is illustrated by Figure 5.5, which depicts the entry foyer at the Froebel school; everyone who walks through the front door of the school is greeted by the fireplace, the honey-coloured wood, framed images of young children,
and the friendly face of a staff member. These elements commingle to represent Froebel’s pedagogic principles of family and unity in a way that is warm, inviting and communicates that the school is a special place to be. A Kindergarten student took the photograph of the foyer because it is her favourite place in the school (GH:F:SP). The independent school I observed is also an example of a strong pedagogical tradition, though one that is embedded within the Ontario Ministry of Education (OME) curriculum framework: the school began in the early 1970s by a group of parents who wanted to educate their children in a warm, nurturing, creative, and home-like environment. The warm feeling of home and a creative vibe continues to resonate through this school.

![Entry foyer at the Froebel school.](image)

*Figure 5.5. Entry foyer at the Froebel school.*

Teachers from all school contexts in this study were all committed to children and their happiness. And they all spoke with eloquence and thoughtfulness about children, about their work with children, and about their beliefs and values that shape who they are.
as teachers. When asked to describe what pedagogy means to them, five participants answered with the following:

The key philosophy is to draw out the creative, self-active child. The child is where you start and end with Froebel. (WH:Froebel:TI)

In Waldorf pedagogy, two core elements are: “Everything in the right time,” and “Meeting children where they are at. (SM:Waldorf:TI)

I think pedagogy means the voice of the child. Understanding what intrinsically motivates a child. (MT:Montessori:TI)

Every child comes in at their own level, so you take them where they are and the move them on. (JS:Independent:TI)

To me, pedagogy is about understanding what’s going on with the children and then being able to apply strategies so that you can move them a little bit further. (SC:Public:TI)

Children are at the centre of all of these descriptions of pedagogy. It is interesting to note the slight shift in the locus of attention and intention between the first three descriptions and the final two. In the first three—Froebel, Waldorf, and Montessori—the locus of attention is on the child, and the locus of intention is to meet the child on their terms, and in their own time and space. In the latter two—Independent and public, which are under the umbrella of the OME curriculum expectations—the locus of attention is also on the child, but the locus of intention is to act in response to an external force, such as learning expectations found within curriculum documents, that moves the child along a specific path of learning.

van Manen (1991) points out that pedagogy is concerned with both method and philosophy. Good teachers are always learning skills and strategies to promote children’s learning (or their happiness). They might attend a workshop to learn a new approach to
guided reading, or enroll in an art class to develop their creative juices. To add depth to method, good teachers learn to think philosophically about the many perspectives on how to best educate children. But, van Manen argues, neither method nor philosophy can tell us what to do in the moments of being with children. van Manen states, “the essence of pedagogy manifests itself in the practical moment of a concrete situation” (p. 47). In other words, van Manen defines pedagogy as being a relational knowing of who children are, and practical knowing of how to respond to them in the moments they need us. He further argues that, to know children, teachers must learn to orient themselves to children and to see them, fully, for themselves. He states, “To see a child is to see possibility, someone in the process of becoming” (1991, p. 1).

van Manen’s argument that it is through the act of seeing children that orients us to them loops us back to the finding that the most inviting classrooms were the ones rooted in a strong pedagogical tradition. Each of the five definitions of pedagogy is articulated with thoughtful and elegant language; children are at the attentional centre of each. But the presence of curriculum documents and learning expectations hovers just to the side of the definitions as offered by the public and the independent teachers, shifting our intention into a slightly more linear trajectory, pushing the child towards clearly articulated learning goals. This is not a bad thing, but it does shift our attention away from children, just a little bit. My experience of the chaotic environment in the public school Kindergarten classroom is an example of what can happen when a large system loses sight of children; my experience of being welcomed and invited into the strong
pedagogical traditions of the Waldorf, Froebel, and Montessori provide an exemplary reminder of what can happen when we keep our attention and intention on children, full stop.

**Generating Happiness**

![Grade 1 student drawing](image)

*Figure 5.6. Grade 1 student drawing about feeling loved.*

In their drawings and scribed responses, student participants in this study indicated that play makes them happy and that play is what they like to most at school. Students identified a variety of types of play, including indoor and outdoor play, high energy games, imaginative play in the dress-up centre, story time, and playing with friends. Student participants also identified participation in the arts, quiet reading, and traditional academic learning as activities that bring them pleasure and happiness. In response to the questionnaire, parents identified a wide variety of activities that make
their children happy at school, and when not at school. Play, playing with friends, being outdoors, and reading stories were amongst the most consistently identified activities that children enjoy; to a lesser degree, parents also indicated that traditional academic activities, such as math and “homework,” were enjoyable to children and brought them a sense of happiness. In addition, parents indicated that experiences of positive feelings, both at school and when not at school, make their children happy. Experiences of positive feelings included feeling loved, feeling valued, being allowed to be themselves, and receiving positive attention from parents and teachers (Figure 5.6).

This finding indicates three important considerations for children and their happiness. The first consideration is that, for children, play is an activity that generates happiness. The specific type of play might vary, but the act of being engaged in play is something that children strongly identify as being a satisfying, enjoyable, and happy activity. The second consideration is that, for children, feeling happy transcends the content of their activities. Children can find happiness while engaged in traditional school activities and seatwork, while engaged in still or high-energy activities, and while engaged indoors or outdoors, in play, and with friends. The common ingredient in all of the activities that parents and children listed is that children like to do them and that they are associated with positive feelings. This brings us to the third consideration, which is that it is the teacher’s pedagogical responsibility to know their students as deeply as they can within the time frames of a school year. As pointed out earlier, knowing children comes from the intentional practices of listening to children speak and talk about their
interests, of stepping out of the action in order to observe students at work, play, and in social interactions, and by being oriented to what it is to be a child.

It is clear from research that emotions play a powerful role in learning; in particular, the research on brain connectivity indicating that emotions and cognition are filtered through the same cortical hubs (Pessoa, 2008; Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007). As an example to illustrate how the interconnected relationship between nonconscious thought and emotion affects learning and decision making, Immordino-Yang and Faeth (2010) describe the Iowa Gambling Task (IGT). In the IGT, a study participant has the chance to win an amount of money, which is based on the cards she draws from four sets of decks. Unbeknownst to the participant, some of the decks are rigged: the wins are larger, but so are the losses. As the participant becomes aware that the decks are biased, his or her palms begin to sweat in microscopic amounts, which indicates that the participant is experiencing a nonconscious emotional response in anticipation of what the next card might read. This nonconscious emotional response is a precursor to learning because it begins to trigger a feedback loop of both positive and negative body sensations, feelings, and thoughts. Over time, the participant learns which decks to draw from and which decks to avoid. Immordino-Yang and Faeth further explain that the participant has “learned” which decks to avoid and which decks to draw from as a result of the nonconscious feedback loop. Immordino-Yang and Faeth state, “the learner’s emotional reaction to the outcome of his efforts consciously or nonconsciously
shapes his future behaviour, either inciting him to behave in the same way the next time or to be wary of situations that are similar” (p. 75).

These findings as described both in this study and the example of the IGT test, remind me of the Austrian study which conceptualizes the relationship between positive school experience and affective well-being as being a generative “upward spiral” of happiness (Stiglbauer, Gnambs, Gamsjäger, & Batinic, 2013). In this study, children and parents have clearly indicated the kinds of activities and experiences that make them happy, with play, the outdoors, positive time with friends, and active learning being at the top of the list. In this way, happiness as a philosophical aim becomes deeply intertwined with the generation of happiness as an instructional intent. Planning children’s learning that appeals directly to their interests is not a difficult thing to do and is one that generates a cycle of positive emotions and experiences that becomes its own upward spiral of happiness.

*Hands-on, Minds-on* is a phrase currently in vogue in Ontario public schools. The teachers I interviewed used this phrase; I have also noticed its use in schools in my visits as a Faculty Advisor with pre-service teachers on their practicum. This phrase is an excellent heuristic for teachers who are thinking about instruction that actively engages students in their learning. It reminds teachers that engaging children’s bodies contributes to the engagement of their minds. And yet, findings from this study indicate that engaging the hands and minds of children is only half of the equation. Children’s hearts and spirits need to also be engaged. In this way, the heuristic becomes: “hands-on,
minds-on, hearts-on and spirits-on.” While this extended phrase is slightly more cumbersome, it reminds us that children’s happiness is multi-dimensional, and that the characteristics of classrooms that promote children’s happiness are characteristics that honour the whole child. As a phrase, it echoes the Waldorf motto, which is “Educating the heart, hands, and mind.” Educating the whole child, then, includes planning active, body-based learning experiences; engaging children in cognitive tasks that are relevant, of interest, and at their developmental level; promoting positive relationships, positive feelings, and the use of positive and appreciative feedback; and nurturing spiritual dimensions through practices as simple as the cultivation of gratitude, a sense of wonder and curiosity, and to delight in the magic of learning and the world.

**Implications for Teaching Professionals**

Findings from this study provide classroom-based examples of Nel Noddings’ assertion that happiness should be a fundamental aim of education. Findings from this study describe ways in which teachers recognize their own happiness and the happiness of their students. And, findings from this study increase our understanding of core pedagogical conditions that promote children’s happiness at school and in learning. The creation of happy classrooms is, most immediately, the responsibility of the classroom teacher. However, the creation of happy classrooms is also the responsibility of all of the adults, staff, and families who are invested in the lives of children and involved with the school and surrounding community. Teachers, staff, and families are nested within the context of their community and school system; the work that they do and the way they do
it is informed by their training, and opportunities for professional and personal learning. Implications are described for teachers because they were the school-based adult participants in the study. I also suggest implications for school and school board administration, and teacher education programs.

**Implications for Teachers**

The classrooms described in this study represented a variety of pedagogical approaches and philosophies. Teachers worked within their contexts to provide the highest possible quality educational experiences. Teachers did a variety of things, each day, to promote the happiness of their students. These ranged from addressing basic physical needs, such as having children eat a snack first thing upon arrival to make up for any lack of breakfast at home, to giving children ample time for play, to frequent visits to a nearby forest to explore the outdoors. In each of the classrooms, children were engaged, active, and happy. Because the five core conditions and 17 facets of happy classrooms were themes I developed by analyzing across the data, each individual condition and facet was more or less evident in each classroom. The presence or absence of each condition and facet was dependent upon the school context as well as the values and beliefs about children, curriculum, and learning that each teacher brought to their practice.

Many Canadian provincial ministries of education are reintroducing play back into early primary education programs. The research described in this dissertation demonstrates how play can be used in a variety of school contexts to address multiple
dimensions of learning. This was evidenced by teachers who scheduled play as a means to promote curricular learning; by teachers who allowed children to play freely with the confidence that their learning would emerge; and by teachers and children who engaged playfully in their way of being together. The multiple school contexts addressed in this dissertation provide a breadth of examples on how play might be addressed for, as, and in learning, and, in doing so, lift children’s experience of school out of an overweight of seatwork driven by the pressures of a narrow interpretation of curriculum and instruction.

Findings from this study have many practical implications for teachers. In addition to play, findings from this study highlight the importance of singing as a means to communicate instruction, support transitions, promote language development, and lift children’s spirits. There are many resources for teacher to develop their repertoire of singing and music activities. YouTube is a particularly useful resource for teachers who might not be musically trained, as it provides visual, auditory, and textual information. At the time of this writing, I typed the keyword “Kindergarten Songs” into the YouTube search bar, which resulted in 109,000 hits. While it would take some digging, with a strong critical filter about child development, to find examples that work and are appropriate, this is still a remarkable resource for teachers to turn to.

Another practical implication is that findings from this study highlight the kinds of learning materials that contribute to the making of happy classrooms. Consider, for example, the kinds of items that are listed on the regular school year start-up materials list. When I taught, the materials listed were fairly typical: glue sticks, markers, pencils,
and boxes of crayons. Over time, and as I grew more experienced, I had to push my administration to add materials that were more appropriate for young children’s development: fat, triangular pencils to support fine motor development, scribblers that combined blank pages with clearly-marked interlined pages, and the investment in reading materials over computers and technology. Findings from this study have illuminated even more materials that appeal directly to children’s developmental age and interest, such as the square and round beeswax crayons used in Waldorf classrooms, and the small pieces of moldable beeswax that children can sculpt into figurines in response to a story.

A further implication for teachers is not just in the practical suggestions for single strategies, but also how to plan for the larger spans of time that shape a school year. For example, this study identified that play, friendships, the arts, the outdoors, and experiencing positive feelings are happiness generating activities and experiences for children. Knowing this can inform the teacher who believes in happiness as an aim on how to plan the rhythm and arcs of a school year. Suggestions include (a) daily free play with two extended sessions each week in order to allow children time to delve into deeper complexity of discovery and learning, (b) school garden projects where children have the opportunity to actively contribute to the planning, cultivation, care, and harvesting of the gardens, (c) at least one or two emotionally compelling, engaging, and multi-sensory experiences outside of the classroom each term, such as a field trip to a local conservation area, to learn about endangered wildlife, a trip to a local gallery to create exciting pieces
of art, or the involvement in creating and performing a school-wide theatrical production, (d) building a partnership with senior citizens in a local care facility to promote intergenerational understanding and to share and read stories weekly, (e) providing children with a wide range of learning experiences throughout the year in order to attract and engage all students, (f) welcoming families into the classroom for a variety of reasons so that children might see positive working relationships between their parents and teachers and to create strong home/school connections, (g) shifting from a deficiency model of reporting and communicating about children and their development to one that is appreciative, positive, and, at all times, caring, and (h) creating learning and activity centres that push beyond standard issue literacy centres but, rather, engender creative and imaginative thinking, engage children’s senses and bodies, and appeal to their sense of delight. Examples of such centres could include: (a) a light table, over which children could explore coloured glass and liquids, (b) sparkly fabric in dress-up centres, (c) a take-apart table, with tools suitable for small hands, to dismantle simple machines and electronic devices (with the plugs cut off for safety, of course!), and (d) an imagination centre, with recycled materials ready to be re-purposed into an art project. Inspiration for such centres can be drawn from the Waldorf practice of handwork (e.g., finger knitting in Kindergarten) and the Practical Life materials of a Montessori classroom, which engage children in satisfying, home-like tasks.

While the above suggestions are quite commonplace in many schools, this research points out that such experiences contribute not only to children’s subject-based
learning but also to their happiness. The two are intertwined. It is through the conscious and intentional practice of thinking about the small and large-scale aspects of classroom programming as a means to generating student happiness that can shift teachers away from a narrow palette of learning experiences to ones that are rich, wide, and varied.

Public educators are embedded in a context that provides limited opportunity to learn about and see other ways of creating and cultivating inspired classrooms. Many Canadian educators are deeply committed to learning and growing in their professional practice. The research described in this study can provide examples in the form of lessons to be learned from rich pedagogical traditions, such as Waldorf, Froebel, and Montessori. While a public school teacher cannot reproduce a Waldorf classroom, as part of what makes a Waldorf classroom come to life is that it is embedded within a tradition and community, a public school teacher can be inspired by the many ideas offered. For example, a public school teacher could easily learn the structures of a Gift play circle, or a Partner play activity, and implement these on a daily and weekly basis in their classroom. A public school teacher could easily infuse the idea of rhythm and breath into the day and, in applying this one graceful and simple idea, radically alter the experience of their students and themselves in ways that would generate happiness.

Finally, this research highlights the significance of Palmer’s (2007) assertion that who we are shapes how we teach, and the ways that we relate to and with our students. Teaching is, truly, a human endeavor, acted and enacted through relationships. In this study, teacher participants recognized the relationship between their own happiness and
the happiness of their students; teacher participants also recognized the relationship between their thoughts and feelings, both happy and unhappy. Being and becoming happy is no small undertaking: it requires a personal commitment to self-reflection, awareness, and growth. Such a commitment as this is the responsibility of the thoughtful teacher, one who is committed to promoting the happiness and flourishing of their students. While the purpose of this research was not to describe how to be happy, this research does point out the significance of developing personal habits of mind and self-awareness that promote personal well-being and, in turn, contribute to student happiness. Practicing mindfulness, creating opportunities for intentional breath in the classroom, doing daily yoga with kids, saying a daily blessing in gratitude before each day’s snack—all of these examples are ways that teachers can attend to their own and their students’ social, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

**Implications for School and School Board Administration**

The research described in this dissertation highlights the ways in which children’s happiness is connected to the positive relationships that they develop and sustain with peers and adults. Learning to get along with others is a life-long journey; this is as true for the 55-year-old as it is for the 5-year-old. Getting along with others requires the very human endeavor of developing qualities of character such as empathy, kindness, thoughtfulness, resilience, and humour. Vanier (1998) reminds us that, “it takes a time to grow to a maturity of heart.” (p. 58). I would add that it takes a time to grow to a maturity of pedagogy. As such, findings from this study can be used by school and school board
administration to provide an evidence-based rationale to bolster their commitment to programs that teach children how to get along with others, how to be a positive member of their school community, and to grow and learn as teachers and pedagogues. Further, findings from this research can be utilized as a compelling argument to provide funding for initiatives aimed at the promotion of students’ emotional, physical and spiritual well-being. Examples of initiatives include ensuring that there is adequate funding for the hiring of elementary school counselors, providing funding for the development of context-specific anti-bullying programs at the elementary and secondary, supporting the development and implementation of programs that promote children’s moral, ethical, and character development, and finally, reimagining what is fundamental in the education of young children. The research in this dissertation provides evidence that aiming for children’s happiness, everyday, is not merely a fluffy sentiment to be passed off in social conversation. School and School Board Administration can provide leadership in the way they speak as public administrators, by the images and language that populate their webpages, and by ensuring that children’s well-being—and the lively, engaging, and rich programs and activities through which children come to life at school—are not shunted aside for a narrow range of learning experiences that provide a more easy-to-measure evidence of student and school success.

Implications for Teacher Education Programs

The way in which future teachers are educated shape how they will teach; and in turn, how children in their classrooms will learn. Education programs send strong
messages about what is and is not valued by the words, programs, and opportunities that are afforded teacher candidates. For example, the words *information technology* appears with remarkable frequency in education: on webpages, conference titles, workshops, and course syllabi. As a body of educators, we now believe that if we are not using technology, then we are not doing our jobs. Whether or not technology is used well, or whether or not it is used with any sense of creativity or innovation is beside the point. Imagine if a pre-service teacher education program made the decision to switch every reference to *information technology* in its web of communication with the words *the arts* or *the outdoors* or *pedagogy*, how differently pre-service teacher educators would see their landscape of teaching. A pre-service teacher education program that simply trains teacher candidates to be in-service to curriculum, reducing pedagogy to a tool-kit of instructional strategy, the use of an interactive white board, and a three-step lesson plan in the classroom, but neglects to orient candidates to children and their unique ways of being in the world, reduces the schooling of children to being a nothing more than the acquisition of a series of tasks and skills. Accordingly, the pedagogical framework of conditions and facets of happy classrooms developed through this research and described in this dissertation can be used as a ground from which to develop pre-service teacher education courses that focus on pedagogy as being the multi-dimensional, relational, practical, and orientational construct that it is. The many different rich, creative, and practical examples described in this dissertation can be a compass for teacher education.
candidates—and their instructors—who are looking to cultivate a depth of pedagogical thinking and feeling that is responsive, first and foremost, to children.

**Implications for Future Research**

**Research on Children’s Perspectives**

With this study, my aim was to gain as broad a perspective as possible on the topic of happiness in education. Thus, I sought the perspectives of teachers, parents, and children, from multiple school contexts. This best intention is one of the limitations of this study. In trying to be broad, I was hampered by the realities of being a single researcher working through various phases and stages of this study, all under a self-imposed timeline and financial limitations. In describing the key findings of this research, I have largely centered on the teacher interview transcripts and my classroom observation notes as evidence-based examples. Parental data were utilized to a lesser degree; children’s data even less. This calls for future research focused exclusively on children’s perceptions of what makes them happy at school and in learning. A future study might utilize Howard, Miles and Parker’s (2008) Revised Apperception Procedure (RAP). In their study, which explored children’s perceptions of play, Howard, Miles and Parker invited young children to take photographs of their learning environments. The children were then asked to sort these photographs into two “mailboxes,” one labeled *Play*, and the other labeled *Not Play*. By using images directly from the children’s experiences, and by inviting the children to communicate their ideas in a playful and game-like way, the researchers learned that children identified play activities as being ones that did not
involve an adult, occurred on the floor, where there was a representation of positive affect in the photograph (such as a smiling child), and if the materials involved where more play-like than academic (Howard & McInnes, 2013). This procedure could be easily adapted to elicit children’s perspectives on what makes a happy classroom. Such a future study would involve having children take photographs of their classroom and school, and then have children sort the photographs into mailboxes labeled, Happy and Not Happy. As findings from the Howard, Miles and Parker RAP study enhanced understandings about play, I anticipate that applying a modified RAP method to a study on children’s perceptions of happiness at school would deeply enhance our understandings of their experiences and ways of knowing.

**Research on School Acoustics and Happiness**

Each of the core conditions of happy classrooms has the potential to warrant a focused study. To me, the finding richest with potential for further exploration is the finding that sounds shape feelings and experiences. My brief review of literature on classroom acoustics identified that there was a large body research produced in the late 1990s and early 2000s that focused on the physical properties of classroom acoustics, and the impact of noise on children’s hearing, listening, and academic success. Inversely, there were only a smaller number of studies, all of which were quantitative, investigating the effect of noise on children’s feelings. These studies largely focused on children’s experience of being annoyed by sounds external to the school, such as traffic noise (Shield & Dockrell, 2003). Future research would involve a mixed methods study.
exploring the relationship between classroom noises and children’s happiness and well-being. Research into this topic would contribute an important, affective/acoustical dimension to what is currently a robust and growing body of research exploring the relationship between school architecture and children’s experience of learning and schooling.

**Research in the International Context**

Early in my Ph.D., when I was brainstorming the different ways I could focus my research question (i.e., “What makes a happy classroom?”) one of the supporting questions I considered asking was, “What makes a happy classroom…and where in the world are they?” At the time, I chose not follow this line of questioning. However, this question remains valuable and of interest to me. Thus, the third direction for further research is an international study exploring exemplar schools around the world that explicitly focus on the well-being of their students. An example of a school worth researching is Ackworth School, in West Yorkshire, England. Ackworth School is a Quaker, co-educational day school. The school’s website homepage features a photograph of two children playing the harp; underneath this photo is a welcome message from the Head of School. This message reads, “The information given on this site is a small snapshot into the life of a truly remarkable, happy and vibrant school…” (Bell, 2011). In my experience of trolling about countless school webpages, it is a rare occurrence for the word “happiness” to appear so prominently in the first few lines describing the tone and ethos of the school. Another school worth exploring is
Wellington College in Berkshire, England, the first school in England to introduce a well-being and happiness curriculum by one of its teachers, Ian Morris (2009). A third school system worth investigating is the phenomenon of the Train Platform Schools in India. The Train Platform Schools are open air, free classes that are held on train platforms for young children who are homeless and have been forced into child prostitution due to their extreme poverty. The primary mission statement for the schools is to, “provide all children with a joyful and creative school atmosphere that incorporates education and skills relevant to a meaningful and dignified existence” (Ruchika Social Service Organization, 2009). Investigating these three very different international school contexts would provide important perspectives on the questions of what it is children need, fundamentally, in order to flourish and grow into their future.
Conclusion

Figure 5.7. Year-end adventure to the meadow.

As a teacher, the capstone experience that I planned with my students at the end of each school year was an adventure to a meadow in the centre of a small, coastal island not too far from the school where I taught. This trip became such a popular and anticipated experience amongst the families within the school community that children would begin to ask me about it right at the beginning of the school year...ten months early! (Figure 5.7).

The day would begin at 7:45 am, long before the school was open, with hot oatmeal and juice for my students, and steaming coffee for their parents. We would then climb on to a yellow school bus, the children excited and boisterous, carrying knapsack with the day’s provisions, wearing sunhats, and slathered with the first round of sunscreen. We would travel through the city, the children marveling at the soaring
construction cranes building shiny new condominiums as we drove past downtown
construction sights, their faces pressed up against the glass windows; the well-dressed
business people crowded on street corners, laughing in delight at the flat-noses of the
children as the bus rumbled by, an incongruous sight in an urban financial centre,
remembering when they, too, had been children and pressed their noses against glass
windows. The children would grow silent as we soared over two spans of large bridges,
the mountains rising ahead, thick, green, and dark. The bus would deposit us at the ferry
terminal, the parents and I gathering children protectively together, like the wings of a
mother hen. Every step to the ferry was an opportunity for the children to play: passing
through the turnstile, zooming up the escalator, tracing the direction arrows down the
long, long corridor, crossing the plank onto the ferry itself—thanking the attendant as we
went by—and finally arriving on the ferry deck. The short ferry ride was an opportunity
to snack on grapes, have a bathroom break, and watch the wingtips of the seagulls as they
rode warm air currents against the blue, blue sky, flying tandem with the ferry.

Once on the island, we would have yet another washroom break and then begin
our hike to the meadow. The hike would take us past huge coastal ferns, nurse logs giving
life to new growth, small gummy-bear fungi growing in shady pockets, the neon-bright
orange startling against the many shades of green and brown. We would stop at the
salmon ladder for a rest, each student amazed by the discovery that salmon can leap up
such steep rocks and against such a strong current to lay their eggs; we would drop sticks
into the stream on one side of the bridge and race to the other side to see whose would
appear first. And finally, we would arrive at the meadow: a large grassy field nestled against the forest and the mountain. We would unpack our bags for lunch under the shade of the broad leaf maple, proud of our accomplishment of the long journey.

While eating, I would read the children a story or two, my voice accompanied by the sound of the wind, the rustle of the leaves, and the satisfied “mmms” of children eating. I would also present each child with a gift that I had been making all year: a memory book of each child’s artwork and writing, two pieces for each month. The children, and especially the parents, would exclaim at this evidence of learning, growth, and development. There was usually a little tear or two, most often mine, because we had all grown quite close, as close as you can with 24 kids and all of their parents. While this trip was a celebration, it was also an ending. And then, when our tummies were settled, we would rouse ourselves and play games: silly games with balloons, games of tag and chase, and games where we hid and found each other amidst the trees and tall grasses. And then, it would be time to go home. The trip home was a little more subdued, especially once we climbed back aboard the bus, the children’s heads lolling heavily as they struggled to not fall asleep on the big, green seats. The principal was always there to greet us as we drove up to the school, his big smile telling us that he was both happy that we had a great day, and intensely relieved that no child fell overboard or was swept away at the salmon ladder. And then, without much fanfare, children would disperse, one by one, into the waiting arms of their parents, and drift home.
Alison Gopnik (2009) reminds us that we cannot protect children from the perils of the future, but we can provide them with memories of picnics and leafy playgrounds. I have written about this earlier, but feel it warrants repetition here. She says,

There is a kind of immunity about a happy childhood, not an immunity from the disasters and catastrophes that may, that almost certainly do, lie ahead, but an intrinsic immunity. Change and transience are at the heart of the human condition. But as parents we can at least give our children a happy childhood, a gift that is as certain, as unchanging, as rock solid, as any human good. (p. 201)

I think it is not just parents who are responsible for giving children the gift of a happy childhood, but teachers, caregivers, support workers, principals, playground attendants, counselors, and all who have committed to doing work that attends to the lives of children. Teachers, especially, because children spend the most amount of their time, outside of their families, with their teacher. Annie Dillard reminds us: “how we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives” (1989, p. 32). This is simple fact. Knowing this, then, why wouldn’t we aspire, as teachers, to ensure that our students’ daily experience of school and learning is a happy one?

Providing my students with a happy memory of their year with me was the underlying reason for the adventure to the meadow; findings from this study point out the conditions of happiness that this trip set in place. During the adventure, we ate good food, we marveled at amazing sights, we spent time in the outdoors, and we delighted in the magic of the forest and nature. We also engaged in story telling and singing, and played energetic games that had a strong component of laughter. Children spent their day with a freedom of movement rarely afforded in small classrooms, and they spent their day in the
good company of their friends, their teacher, and their parents. We went on a journey that took us away from school and back; a journey not unlike the journeys that we all undertake as we seek to bring happiness into our lives, regardless of our age. While I was fortunate to teach in a community where parents could afford the trip fee to rent the bus, and where many of the children had a parent who could join us for the day, I recognize that this is not the case for every child in every school. However, these factors need not be a deterrent. School boards have funds that can provide money to rent buses in disadvantaged communities, many schools have a neighborhood park within a short walk that can serve as a destination, and I think that being organized enough throughout the school year to quietly tuck one or two pieces of student work away a month in order to make a memory book is, simply, part of being a good teacher of young children.

Findings from this study point us in promising directions on how we might make happy classrooms. They are made through experiences of positive relationships, through learning experiences that engage children’s bodies and bring their senses to life, that are shaped by a teacher who is thoughtful about their pedagogy and how they respond to students in the here and now of learning, and that are infused with an ethos of happiness and possibility. Happy classrooms are also made through simple and practical means. Smiling, with bright eyes, an open face, and friendly greetings, goes a long way to lifting the spirits of children who might feel a little tenuous about saying good-bye to their parent in the morning. Music, movement, and art making are experiences that children associate with happiness, as does time spent outdoors and playing with friends. The
simple act of replacing synthetic crayons with the rich, sensory experience of beeswax crayons, singing children through their transitions, and de-cluttering piles of old and unused manipulatives can transform a chaotic classroom into a calm and happy one. Shifting one’s thinking about balanced learning from routines—where 100 minutes of literacy is followed by 100 minutes of numeracy—to the more holistic and graceful notion of rhythm—where the class breathes in a story and then breathes out in play time—is an inspired way to approach curriculum and instruction, especially for public educators. And happy classrooms are made through the intentional act of romancing children into delight. Children delight in the magic of learning and the natural world; they delight in the intrigue of imaginary creatures found in stories and forests, and that come to life when everyone has left, keeping the classroom safe until the next day.

The National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2007) makes the observation that the future of any society “depends on its ability to foster the health and well-being of the next generation” (p. 1). They point out that an investment in children and families pays off immensely through the next generation’s productivity and caring citizenship. Failure to do so puts the future of society at risk. I conclude that it is teachers, supported by the context of their school communities, who hold an immense degree of responsibility in their contribution to the future by creating classrooms that are happy and, in doing so, promote their students’ happiness. And I conclude that happy classrooms happen when we place children and their happiness first, ahead of all other considerations, in our daily pedagogical and practical decisions. Happy classrooms, filled
with engaged students who are delighting in their moments of learning, are possible, everywhere. It is up to us to believe in and to enable this possibility.
References


London, Canada: The Althouse Press.


# Appendix A

## Data Collection Table

*Grade, School and Data Type, Phase, and Participant Count*

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<th>Grade</th>
<th>Total</th>
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*Note.* *The Froebel school was organized into two family groupings: Kindergarten, which comprised JK to Gr. 2, and School, which comprised Gr. 3 to Gr. 8. I observed the Kindergarten.*
## Appendix B

### Study Timelines Table

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<td>Phase 2: Classroom Observations</td>
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<td>Data Analysis</td>
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## Appendix C

### Primary Documents Table

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*One public school teacher did not respond with a description of the photos; the Froebel teacher was unable to respond with a description due to a personal matter that arose during the study period.

‡ One Montessori student was interviewed over two short interviews; thus, two transcripts for the one student.

◊ Eight Froebel students were interviewed; these were transcribed as one document.
Appendix D

General Research Ethics Board (GREB) Study Clearance Letter

September 2, 2011

Mr. Scott Hughes, Ph.D. Candidate
Faculty of Education
Duncan McArthur Hall
Queen’s University
511 Union Street
Kingston, ON K7M 5R7

GREB Ref #: GEDUC-570-11; Romeo # 6006238
Title: “GEDUC-570-11 Promoting Children’s Happiness in the Early Years of School”

Dear Mr. Hughes,

The General Research Ethics Board (GREB), by means of a delegated board review, has cleared your proposal entitled “GEDUC-570-11 Promoting Children’s Happiness in the Early Years of School” for ethical compliance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (TCPS) and Queen’s ethics policies. In accordance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (article D.1.6) and Senate Terms of Reference (article G), your project has been cleared for one year. At the end of each year, the GREB will ask if your project has been completed and if not, what changes have occurred or will occur in the next year.

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the GREB, with a copy to your unit REB, of any adverse event(s) that occur during this one year period (access this form at [https://eservices.queensu.ca/romeo_researcher](https://eservices.queensu.ca/romeo_researcher) and click Events - GREB Adverse Event Report). An adverse event includes, but is not limited to, a complaint, a change or unexpected event that alters the level of risk for the researcher or participants or situation that requires a substantial change in approach to a participant(s). You are also advised that all adverse events must be reported to the GREB within 48 hours.

You are also reminded that all changes that might affect human participants must be cleared by the GREB. For example you must report changes to the level of risk, applicant characteristics, and implementations of new procedures. To make an amendment, access the application at [https://eservices.queensu.ca/romeo_researcher](https://eservices.queensu.ca/romeo_researcher) and click Events - GREB Amendment to Approved Study Form. These changes will automatically be sent to the Ethics Coordinator, Gall Irving, at the Office of Research Services of [irvingg@queensu.ca](mailto:irvingg@queensu.ca) for further review and clearance by the GREB or GREB Chair.

On behalf of the General Research Ethics Board, I wish you continued success in your research.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

Joan Stevenson, PhD
Professor and Chair
General Research Ethics Board

cc: Dr. Rena Uptis, Faculty Supervisor
    Dr. Lesly Wade-Woolley, Chair, Unit REB
    Celina Caswell, c/o Graduate Studies and Bureau of Research
Appendix E

Teacher Interview Guide

Questions of the Teacher
1. Please tell me about your teaching background and experiences.
2. Why do you teach?

Questions of Happiness
1. Please tell me about something that makes you really happy.
2. How do you know when you are happy?
3. What specific feelings, thoughts, or senses do you experience when you are really happy? The kind of responses that tell you *ah, I am happy*.
4. What other words do you think of when you think of happiness?
5. What does happiness mean to you?

Questions of Pedagogy
1. Think of someone in your life who has really influenced you as a teacher of young children. Tell me about them. What is that you really emulate about them?
2. What does pedagogy mean to you?
3. I am going to ask you a question, and I would like you to answer without thinking too hard. Ready? What do you think is the most important thing for your students to learn at school? Why?
4. Fundamentally, how do you think children in the early primary grades should experience school?
5. I am wondering if you might be able to articulate your beliefs about teaching. Start with “I believe...”
6. I am wondering if you are able to articulate your beliefs about children and learning. Start with “I believe...”
7. What do you love about teaching young children?
8. What makes you tense or causes you internal conflict about teaching young children?
9. Do you think happiness should be a fundamental aim of education? Why or why not?

Questions of Happiness in the Classroom
1. Please describe your classroom space.
2. Please describe the shape of an average day in your classroom.
3. Is there a favourite area of your classroom that you really love? Please describe it.
4. Is there a favourite area of your classroom that students really love? Please describe it.
5. Describe an ideal, happy classroom. What does it look like, sound like, feel like, and smell like?
6. How similar or dissimilar is this to your own classroom?
7. When are your students particularly happy? Please describe this or these times.
8. How do you know your students are happy?
9. What different words do you use to describe a happy classroom?
10. What different words do you use to describe happy children learning?
11. Choose one thing that you do to promote your students’ happiness. Please describe it.
12. Please choose another and describe it.
13. What makes your students unhappy?
14. How do you help students when they are unhappy?
15. Think of things that get in the way of supporting your students happiness. What are they?
16. How do you deal with these barriers?

Questions of Curriculum and Learning
1. Please tell me about your curriculum.
2. What does curriculum mean to you? What different curriculums do you work with?
3. What subjects are emphasized in your curriculum? Are there any curricular outcomes that focus on children’s happiness and well-being?
4. If you could wave a magic wand and write early primary curriculum the way you think it ought to be, what would you emphasize?
5. What would you change and what would you keep? Why?
6. Let’s change the word curriculum to school. If you could create the perfect school for young children, what would you change and what would you keep? Why?

Happiness Story
When we first spoke, I asked you to think of a story that reflects a particularly happy experience with children at school. Please share that story.

Photography
I am now going to give you a camera. I would like you to take two photographs. The first is to represent what happiness means to you in the classroom. The second is to represent what you think happiness means to children. These photographs can be in your classroom, or in another location at the school. When we are done, I am going to email these photos to you. I would like you to think about them, and write a brief description of what you took, why you took it, and what it means. Please send that description back to me, either as a word document, or directly in the email. Thanks!

Closing
Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. Before we finish, is there anything that I forgot to ask that you would like to share, or anything else that you think is important?

Thank you very much for your participation today.
Appendix F

Parent Questionnaire

Promoting Happiness: A Research Study
Scott Hughes, Principal Investigator
Queen’s University, Faculty of Education

Your name: ______________________
Your child’s name: ______________
School/Teacher: _________________

What makes your child happy at school?

What makes your child happy when they are not at school?

When you think of a happy classroom, what comes to mind?

Do you think happiness should be a fundamental aim of education?

Yes No

Why or why not?

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Appendix G

Student Interview Guide

Introduction
Hi. My name is Scott and I am a student, too. Before I became a student, I was a teacher in a classroom, just like yours. I am really curious about what you think makes a happy classroom and what makes you happy at school. Thanks for agreeing to answer my questions.

Here is what we are going to do today. To begin, I am going to ask you some questions, which you can answer. Whatever you answer is absolutely right. There are no wrong answers! After a few questions, I am going to give you a camera so you can take some photographs of the classroom. Then we are going to load the photographs on to my laptop so we can talk about them. The last thing I would like you to do is to tell me the story of your drawing we did the other day.

Ready? Great, let’s begin.

1. What do you love about school?
2. I wonder what you like to do when you are at school?
3. I wonder what you like to do when you are not at school?
4. Think of a time when you woke up and you couldn’t wait to get to school. What was going to happen that day?
5. Is there a particular place in the classroom that you think is very happy?
6. Okay, now I would like you to take some photographs. Here is a camera for you to use. Have you used a camera before? I would like you to show me your classroom, and all the things that you like to do, and places where you like to work and play and that you think are happy. You can take a photograph of these places. Okay, let’s go!
7. Let’s look at the photographs. I wonder why you took this photo? Please describe what the photograph is of....
8. Now, let’s look at your drawing. Please tell me the story of your drawing.
9. Just a few more questions. What’s the best thing about school?
10. How do you know when other people are happy?
11. Okay, before we finish, have I forgotten to ask you anything about happiness at school? Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

Thank you for being such a great participant, and for helping me learn about what makes you happy at school.
Appendix H

Teacher Exit Interview Guide

Length of interview: Approximately 30 minutes

Examples of key phrases to prompt the discussion:

- When we first spoke, you discussed [X]. Could you please tell me more about that?

- During our informal conversations in the past number of days, you mentioned [X]. Could you please tell me more about that?

- During my observations, I noticed [X].
  - Could you please tell me more about that?
  - Why do think that happens?
  - What do you think it means?

- During my informal conversations with students, a number of students mentioned [X].
  - Why do you think they talked about this?
  - What do you think this means to students?
  - What does this mean to you?
  - Generally, how do you respond to this?

- I would like to explore the idea of teaching to the whole child.
  - What do you think that means?
  - How do you do that?
  - How does your school community support that?
  - What barriers inhibit your ability to teach to the whole child?

- The photographs you took were of [X] and you explained that they represented [X]. Could you tell me more about that?

Thank you for your participation in this study.
Appendix I

Final Code List

**ACADEMICS**
1. academics: anchor charts
2. academics: board/ministry expectations
3. academics: calendar wall
4. academics: focus
5. academics: literacy
6. academics: math
7. academics: posters
8. academics: pressures
9. academics: seat work
10. academics: word wall

**ACTIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCES**
11. active experiences: concrete materials
12. active experiences: having experience
13. active experiences: having fun
14. active experiences: sensory experiences

**HANDS-ON ACTIVITIES**
15. active hands: art
16. active hands: domestic occupation
17. active hands: dress-up and dolls
18. active hands: field trip
19. active hands: gifts
20. active hands: occupations
21. active hands: partner play

**ACTIVE LEARNING**
22. active learning: active play
23. active learning: activity time
24. active learning: hands-on

**ASSESSMENT**
25. assess: assessment
26. assess: assessment for learning
27. assess: grades as being detrimental to the child
28. assess: report cards

**BALANCE**
29. bal: balance in the day
30. bal: balancing multiple needs
BARRIERS
  31. barriers: curricular push
  32. barriers: external restrictions
  33. barriers: interruptions
  34. barriers: large classes
  35. barriers: not enough money
  36. barriers: not enough time
  37. barriers: parents and entitlement
  38. barriers: small space
  39. barriers: socio/economic

CARPET ACTIVITY
  40. carpet: carpet time
  41. carpet: circle time

CLASSROOM AS HOME
  42. class home: like family
  43. class home: like home

CLASSROOM AESTHETICS
  44. cm aesthetics: bold primary colours
  45. cm aesthetics: decorations
  46. cm aesthetics: design that works
  47. cm aesthetics: soft pastel colours
  48. cm aesthetics: valuing beauty
  49. cm aesthetics: wall displays

CLASSROOM DESCRIPTION
  50. cm description: general description

CLASSROOM FURNITURE
  51. cm furniture: furniture
  52. cm furniture: sink

CLASSROOM LIGHT
  53. cm light: natural light
  54. cm light: natural light blocked

NATURAL TEXTURES
  55. cm natural: materials, natural
  56. cm natural: plants
  57. cm natural: wooden features

CLASSROOM ORGANIZATION
  58. cm org: cluttered
  59. cm org: storage, awkward
  60. cm org: tidy and uncluttered
CLASSROOM SMELLS
61. cm smells: smells

CONCEPTIONS OF HAPPINESS, DEFINING HAPPINESS
62. con hap def: being happy
63. con hap def: definition of happiness
64. con hap def: happy isn't easy
65. con hap def: life balance
66. con hap def: little things matter
67. con hap def: synonyms

CONCEPTIONS OF HAPPINESS: CALM ENERGY
68. con hap en calm: happiness is living peacefully
69. con hap en calm: happiness is quiet and calm and ease

CONCEPTIONS OF HAPPINESS: GENERATIVE
70. con hap en gen: happiness is creativity

CONCEPTIONS OF HAPPINESS: BEING LIGHT
71. con hap en light: happiness feels a levity/lightness

CONCEPTIONS OF HAPPINESS: LIVELY ENERGY
72. con hap en lively: being inside alive energy
73. con hap en lively: happiness is exciting
74. con hap en lively: happiness is joyful
75. con hap en lively: humour

CONCEPTIONS OF HAPPINESS: A FEELING
76. con hap feel: happiness is a feeling
77. con hap feel: happiness is feeling centered
78. con hap feel: happiness is feeling complete
79. con hap feel: happiness is feeling content
80. con hap feel: happiness is feeling safe
81. con hap feel: having positive feelings about self

CONCEPTIONS OF HAPPINESS: HEALTH & PLEASURE
82. con hap health: happiness is comfort
83. con hap health: happiness is physical health
84. con hap health: happiness is the outdoors

CONCEPTIONS OF HAPPINESS: HABITS OF MIND
85. con hap mind: calming the mind
86. con hap mind: habits of mind

CONCEPTIONS OF HAPPINESS: BEING PRESENT
87. con hap present: being present in the moment

CONCEPTIONS OF HAPPINESS: PRIDE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT
88. con hap pride: pride & accomplishment
CONCEPTIONS OF HAPPINESS: RECOGNITION OF
89. con hap rec: recognizing happiness
90. con hap rec: recognizing kids’ happiness
91. con hap rec: smile
92. con hap rec: teacher recognition of happy moments
93. con hap rec: vibe

CONCEPTIONS OF HAPPINESS: RELATIONSHIPS
94. con hap rel: happiness is care
95. con hap rel: happiness is family
96. con hap rel: happiness is feeling connected
97. con hap rel: happiness is love
98. con hap rel: happiness is relationships

CONCEPTIONS OF PEDAGOGY
99. concept ped: being pedagogically thoughtful
100. concept ped: definition of pedagogy
101. concept ped: pedagogical philosophy
102. concept ped: pedagogy as being self aware
103. concept ped: pedagogy as guideline
104. concept ped: pedagogy draws out the child
105. concept ped: pedagogy is about children
106. concept ped: pedagogy is about development
107. concept ped: pedagogy is in response to children’s needs

CONCEPTIONS OF BEING A TEACHER
108. concept teach: alignment with beliefs
109. concept teach: being flexible
110. concept teach: care for self
111. concept teach: enabling constraints
112. concept teach: firm teaching style
113. concept teach: great teaching
114. concept teach: having energy and enthusiasm
115. concept teach: having freedom
116. concept teach: having patience
117. concept teach: influences in becoming
118. concept teach: loving it
119. concept teach: multiple roles of teachers
120. concept teach: rewards of
121. concept teach: teacher as guide
122. concept teach: teacher as loving authority
123. concept teach: teacher as role model
124. concept teach: teaching as self discovery

CULTIVATING GOOD PEOPLE
125. cul gp: cultivating character
126. cul gp: cultivating community
127. cul gp: cultivating respect
CULTIVATING POTENTIAL
  128. cul pot: cultivating creativity
  129. cul pot: curiosity
  130. cult pot: positive classroom environment

CURRICULUM
  131. curr: as frustration
  132. curr: as tension
  133. curr: curriculum
  134. curr: hidden

CREATING SPACE FOR DELIGHT
  135. delight: magic and wonder
  136. delight: imaginative character

DEVELOPMENT
  137. development: age appropriate activities
  138. development: balance
  139. development: brains
  140. development: child
  141. development: emotional
  142. development: intellectual
  143. development: physical
  144. development: social
  145. development: the idea of 'uprightness'

EXTERNAL FORCES: GOALS AND SYSTEMS
  146. external forces: program goals
  147. external forces: program structure

FOOD
  148. food: bread making
  149. food: eating and food
  150. food: eating as family time

HAPPY KIDS BEING ACADEMIC
  151. happy kids aca: favourite activity, computers
  152. happy kids aca: favourite activity, math
  153. happy kids aca: favourite activity, reading
  154. happy kids aca: favourite activity, science
  155. happy kids aca: favourite activity, writing

HAPPY KIDS BEING CREATIVE
  156. happy kids create: favourite activity, art
  157. happy kids create: favourite activity, dress up & house
  158. happy kids create: favourite activity, music
  159. happy kids create: favourite activity, pretend & imagination
  160. happy kids create: favourite activity, stories
HAPPY KIDS BEING HANDS-ON
  161. happy kids hands: favourite activity, construction
  162. happy kids hands: favourite activity, handwork
  163. happy kids hands: favourite activity, sand

HAPPY KIDS BEING INDEPENDENT
  164. happy kids ind: being independent
  165. happy kids ind: feeling proud
  166. happy kids ind: having ownership
  167. happy kids ind: having responsibility

HAPPY KIDS LEARN
  168. happy kids learn: kids being bored
  169. happy kids learn: taking risks

HAPPY KIDS BEING PHYSICAL
  170. happy kids phys: games
  171. happy kids phys: gym

HAPPY KIDS AT PLAY
  172. happy kids play: favourite activity, centres
  173. happy kids play: favourite activity, recess
  174. happy kids play: favourite activity, play
  175. happy kids play: kids love being active

HAPPY KIDS BEING RELATIONAL
  176. happy kids rel: belonging
  177. happy kids rel: kids loving school
  178. happy kids rel: with friends
  179. happy kids: success

HOME SCHOOL - HOME SCHOOL CONNECTIONS
  180. home school: educating parents
  181. home school: home school connection
  182. home school: parent buy-in to the philosophy
  183. home school: teacher parent communication

KIDS' SPACE
  184. kids’ space: children’s space
  185. kids’ space: favourite place
  186. kids’ space: happy classroom place
  187. kids’ space: place of comfort

CHILDREN HAVING TIME TO BE CHILDREN
  188. kids & time: being rushed
  189. kids & time: having time to be children
  190. kids & time: having time to develop
  191. kids & time: having time to work/play
  192. kids & time: slowing down
KIDS KNOW WHAT THEY NEED
  193. knk knowing: having choice
  194. knk knowing: kids as self-aware
  195. knk knowing: kids know what they need
  196. knk knowing: self interests
  197. knk knowing: self regulation

KNOWING KIDS: LEARNING
  198. knk learn: kids learning
  199. knk learn: learning as a journey
  200. knk learning: always learning
  201. knk learning: what kids learn

KNOWING WHAT KIDS LOVE
  202. knk love: hearing their name
  203. knk love: honouring kids’ birthdays
  204. knk love: show and tell

KNOWING KIDS NEEDS
  205. knk needs: kids need simplicity
  206. knk needs: kids need to talk

KNOWING KIDS: OBSERVATION
  207. knk obs: observing children
  208. knk obs: seeing kids

BEING KID ORIENTED
  209. knk orient: being kid oriented
  210. knk orient: being present to children
  211. knk orient: keeping kids at the centre
  212. knk orient: knowing children
  213. knk orient: passion for children
  214. knk orient: talking like an adult to kids
  215. knk orient: valuing children
  216. knk orient: respecting gender

KNOWING KIDS POTENTIALITY
  217. knk potent: becoming an individual
  218. knk potent: learning to learn
  219. knk potent: positive future
  220. knk potent: potential

METHODS: AIM
  221. methods aim: happiness as an aim
  222. methods aim: positive response to study

METHODS: EXIT INTERVIEW
  223. methods exit interview: happy classrooms
  224. methods first interview: photo, student perspective
METHODS: FIRST INTERVIEW
225. methods first interview: anecdote of happiness
226. methods first interview: photo, teacher perspective
227. methods first interview: positive memory of learning

METHODS: FUNDAMENTAL
228. methods fundamental: fundamental experiences
229. methods fundamental: most important thing to learn

METHODS: HERMENEUTIC
230. methods hermeneutic: conversation windows
231. methods hermeneutic: sound studies

METHODS: JUICY
232. methods juicy: juicy anecdote
233. methods juicy: juicy quotation

KIDS’ MOVEMENT
234. move: dancing
235. move: kids having still bodies
236. move: kids skipping
237. move: movement

MUSIC AND SINGING
238. music & sing: music
239. music & sing: singing
240. music & sing: singing for transitions and routines
241. music: & sing: lack of singing

OUTDOOR LEARNING
242. outdoor learning: lack of
243. outdoor learning: morning, recess, lunch time
244. outdoor learning: naturalized school yard
245. outdoor learning: positive experiences

PLAY
246. play: complexity
247. play: creative
248. play: free and choice
249. play: gift play
250. play: kids need play
251. play: outdoor play
252. play: play-based learning
253. play: play = happiness
254. play: play as learning
255. play: play time
256. play: playfulness in learning
257. play: pretend and imaginative
258. play: role play
259. play: violent
HAPPY KIDS: BEING
   260. rec kid hap being: kids being happy

HAPPY KIDS: CALM
   261. rec kid hap calm: happy kids being calm
   262. rec kid hap calm: happy kids being peaceful
   263. rec kid hap calm: happy kids content

HAPPY KIDS, ENGAGED
   264. rec kid hap engaged: being creative and imaginative
   265. rec kid hap engaged: happy kids being engaged
   266. rec kid hap engaged: kids being attentive

HAPPY KIDS: LOUD
   267. rec kid hap loud: happy kids being loud

RECOGNIZING KIDS' HAPPINESS
   268. rec kid hap rec: happy kids' bodies
   269. rec kid hap rec: happy kids' faces
   270. rec kid hap rec: kids recognizing happiness

RELATIONAL ATTRIBUTES
   271. rel att: being nice
   272. rel att: care
   273. rel att: circles
   274. rel att: comfort
   275. rel att: compassion
   276. rel att: getting along
   277. rel att: gratitude
   278. rel att: humour
   279. rel att: love
   280. rel att: respect
   281. rel att: safety
   282. rel att: simplicity
   283. rel att: welcome

POSITIVE FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS
   284. rel family: positive family time

RELATIONSHIPS AND FRIENDS
   285. rel friends: being good friends
   286. rel friends: making friends
   287. rel friends: sharing with friends

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TEACHER AND STUDENT HAPPINESS
   288. rel happiness: relationships
   289. rel happiness: teacher and student well-being
RELATIONSHIPS INVOLVING THE TEACHER
290. rel teacher: positive teacher parent relationships
291. rel teacher: positive teacher student relationships
292. rel teacher: positive teacher talk
293. rel teacher: small groups

RHYTHMS AND ROUTINES
294. rhythm: breath
295. rhythm: line-ups
296. rhythm: quiet time
297. rhythm: rhythm
298. rhythm: routines
299. rhythm: seasons
300. rhythm: tidy-up
301. rhythm: weather

RULES
302. rules: classroom rules
303. rules: consequences
304. rules: fairness

SOUNDS: ENVIRONMENT
305. sounds environment: sonic environment

SOUNDS: GENTLE
306. sounds gentle: bread timer
307. sounds gentle: music playing in background
308. sounds gentle: tinkle of bells

SOUNDS: PEOPLE
309. sounds people: chatting
310. sounds people: golden silence
311. sounds people: laughter
312. sounds people: quiet hallway
313. sounds people: teacher voice

SOUNDS: TECHNOLOGY
314. sounds technology: computer hum
315. sounds technology: harsh sound of bells
316. sounds technology: PA system

SPIRITUALITY
317. spirit: blessings
318. spirit: explicit spiritual talk
319. spirit: ritual
320. spirit: unity

STEP IN OUT - STEPPING IN STEPPING OUT
321. step in out: control
322. step in out: kids' freedom
323. step in out: stepping in stepping out
STORIES
324. stories: reading is calming
325. stories: story telling

TENSIONS
326. tensions - tensions in teaching

TONE: CALM
327. tone calm: calm
328. tone calm: hush
329. tone calm: no talking
330. tone calm: peaceful
331. tone calm: quiet

TONE: CHAOS
332. tone chaos: chaos

TONE: ENERGIZED
333. tone energized: bubbly
334. tone energized: alive
335. tone energized: chatty
336. tone energized: energetic
337. tone energized: noisy

TONE: HUM
338. tone hum: happy classrooms hum

TONE: SCATTERED
339. tone scattered: restless
340. tone scattered: scattered
341. tone scattered: silly

UNHAPPINESS: EXPERIENCES OF
342. unhappy ex: being hungry
343. unhappy ex: negative talk
344. unhappy ex: danger

UNHAPPINESS: FEELINGS ASSOCIATED WITH
345. unhappy feel: anxiety
346. unhappy feel: unhappiness

UNHAPPINESS: RELATIONSHIPS
347. unhappy rel: kids in conflict
348. unhappy rel: negative friendships
Appendix J

Analytic Query for Kids Need to Play

First, in order to get a sense of the language, vocabulary, and ways in which play was described in the data, I isolated and read through the 23 codes, along with their associated quotations, that explicitly contained the word “play.” Two examples are: “play: complexity of” and “play: play=happiness.” Due to the detailed nature of the codes generated during the first, descriptive pass at the data, I noticed that the word “play” was generally associated with curricular learning, with learning experiences, and with feelings.

Second, I created three code families based on this observation. The three code families were (a) “Play,” containing 18 codes relating to different ways children play (e.g., “play: play time”), (b) “Happy kids play,” containing 12 codes related to children’s favourite play activities, as reported by children, parents, and teachers (e.g., “happy kids create: favourite activity, dress up & house”), and (c) “Happy kids learn,” containing six codes relating to children’s learning and feelings (e.g., “happy kids learn: kids taking risks”). The reason for choosing to categorize codes into these three families (i.e., “play,” “happy kids play,” and “happy kids learn”) was to take advantage of the analytic tools of ATLAS.ti, which will search for and retrieve quotations that contain overlapping and co-occurring codes and code families.

Third, using the ATLAS.ti query tool, I ran two queries to retrieve quotations that demonstrate the relationship between children’s play, learning, and happiness. The first query was the Boolean AND query between each code family; the second query was a proximity CO-OCCUR query between each code family. In ATLAS.ti, the Boolean AND query tool will retrieve quotations that occur commonly between one code family AND the second (imagine a Venn diagram in which the overlapping circle is coloured); the proximity CO-OCCUR tool will retrieve the portions of the quotations that are imbedded in and between the identified code families (think of a series of boxes nestled within each other). This process yielded 39 quotations, which include quotations found in teacher, student, and parent data, and classroom observation notes. I ended this analytic process by reading through all 39 quotations. This final, interpretive pass through the quotations identified the ways in which participants conceptualized play, and the ways in which they described the relationship between play, learning, and children’s happiness.
Appendix K

Analytic Query for Stepping In Stepping Out

The questions guiding this query were (a) how do teachers describe and conceptualize the idea of knowing when and when not to be directly involved in children’s experience and learning?, and (b) why is this idea of stepping in and out important?

To answer these questions, I reread through all of the codes and code categories. I noticed the following patterns amongst the codes: that codes described actions (e.g., having control), attitudes (e.g., passion for children), and knowledge or knowing about children (e.g., kids need to talk). I created three code families that represented these three patterns (i.e., stepping in stepping out; being kid oriented; knowing kids). Then, using the co-occurrence tool, I identified lists of codes that co-occur with each family. Finally, using the query tool, I ran a variety of queries amongst the families to identify salient quotations as examples. This analysis identified the following two themes: (a) stepping in and stepping out, and (b) being pedagogically thoughtful.
Appendix L

Analytic Query for Sounds Shape Feelings and Experiences

For this query, I asked the questions, (a) What are the different kinds of sounds identified, and (b) What sounds contribute to happy or unhappy feelings in the classroom? To answer this, I first read through all of the descriptive codes. I noticed that they were gathered into four distinct categories: Gentle Sounds, Unsettling Sounds, People Sounds, and Sonic Environment. I created a code family for each of these categories; I also created an additional family called Classroom Sounds, and populated it with the codes from each of the four categories (e.g., harsh sound of bells, chatting, computer hum). I then read through the 97 quotations that were linked to the family Classroom Sounds to identify resonant words and ideas. I then ran two co-occurrence queries, one comparing the code families Unsettling Sounds and Unhappiness; and one comparing Classroom Sounds and Children’s Happiness.

In reading through all of the quotations identified through the analytic query, I noticed that there were two main data types that made note of classroom sounds: teacher interview transcripts, and classroom observation notes. In addition, eight of the 66 parent questionnaires contained reference to specific types of sounds: laughter, singing, and music. The interview transcripts provided a breadth of perspective on how classroom sounds contribute to a happy or unhappy environment; the observation notes add the hermeneutic dimension of my own experience, feelings, and noticings in relation to the different sonic environments that I observed. Sounds were described through two categories: (a) Classroom Sounds, and (b) Sonic Backdrop.
Appendix M

Analytic Query for *Rhythms and Routines*

In order to get a sense of the ways in which rhythms and routines were described in the data, I asked the following two questions: (a) how are the two ideas described by participants, and (b) what is the relationship between rhythm, routine, and children’s happiness? To answer these questions, I created two new code families: *rhythm* and *routine* (see Table 5.1). I populated each code family with descriptive codes that were linked to quotations referring explicitly to either rhythm or routine; some codes were assigned to both. For example, the code *line-ups* was assigned to the family *routines* but not *rhythm*. This is because participants discussed the reality of daily line-ups in terms of being a daily routine, but not discussed as being a description of rhythm. I then read through all quotations associated with each family in order to get a sense of the characteristic language and tone used to describe each idea. Next, I used the Query Tool to retrieve all codes that co-occur with routines, and all that co-occur with rhythm. Finally, I ran a comparative co-occurrence between the two families in order to identify salient quotations. This analysis revealed the following four patterns across the data and across the school types. Rhythm, routines, and their relationship to children’s happiness were described in the following ways: (a) context specific language, (b) function, (c) tone, and (d) predictability=happy kids.

### Codes and Families related to Rhythms and Routines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Cycle Analysis</th>
<th>Fourth Cycle Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Code</strong></td>
<td><strong>Rhythm Family Contains these codes:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>routines (123)</td>
<td>rhythm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rhythm (27)</td>
<td>breath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>breath (23)</td>
<td>singing: transitions &amp; routines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>singing: transitions &amp; routines (21)</td>
<td>quiet time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quiet time (18)</td>
<td>seasons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>seasons (16)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tidy-up (11)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>line-ups (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The number of quotations that are linked to each code are indicated in parentheses.
Appendix N

Analytic Query for Romancing Children into Delight

First, in order to focus my query into the data, I asked the following two analytic questions, (a) In what ways do teachers cultivate romance in their classrooms? and (b) How is the idea of “fun” associated with happiness and learning? These questions guided my decision to focus on the three codes from the ATLAS.ti code manager that described qualities of delight and fun as discussed by participants.

Second, I created a code family titled Romancing Delight by combining the three codes that were directly responsive to the analytic questions. The three codes were: active experiences: having fun, delight: magic and wonder, and delight: magical creature. While three codes might seem like a small number in relation to the original code list of 391 codes, these three codes were linked to a total of 100 quotations associated with delightful experiences. It is not my intention to claim any statistical significance of this number; rather, it is my intention to point out that the theme of romancing children into delight is well grounded in the data. As a point of comparison, another code family with three codes (Happy kids being relational) is associated with 74 quotations, which is similar in number to the code family Romancing Delight.

Finally, I ran two queries on the code family Romancing Delight. In the first query, I retrieved and read through all 100 quotations to get a sense of the patterns, ideas, and vocabulary that the participants used to discuss the theme of delight. In the second query, I choose to do a straightforward retrieval of the quotations that co-occur between the three codes assigned to the family Romancing Delight. I choose to do this in order to identify a shorter list of quotations that more densely reflect the connections between delight, pleasure, and having fun. This process identified nine quotations suitable for reporting on.