



THE CREATION OF HAPPINESS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS: A SINGLE SCHOOL STUDY IN WALES

MA Education Research Methods



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Introduction

The purpose of this proposal is to illustrate how epistemology and ontology furthers our metaphysical understanding in relation to the project title. The research proposed adopts an idealism paradigm in order to analyse the formation that happiness has across a humanities faculty, in a single Welsh school. This extreme foci has been implemented because it advocates that as a phenomena educational research is reliant a set of mental and social factors that are in a state of constant change.

The scale of inquiry embedded in the title, 'The Creation of Happiness in Secondary Schools: A Single School Study in Wales', is far too broad an investigation for a single master's dissertation. Therefore, the title had to undergo several levels of abstraction to create a realistic, set of concrete components that can be measured. This process of abstraction is outlined in **Figure 1**. Upon completion of abstraction the methodological structure of the research became more assessible (see **Figure 2**).

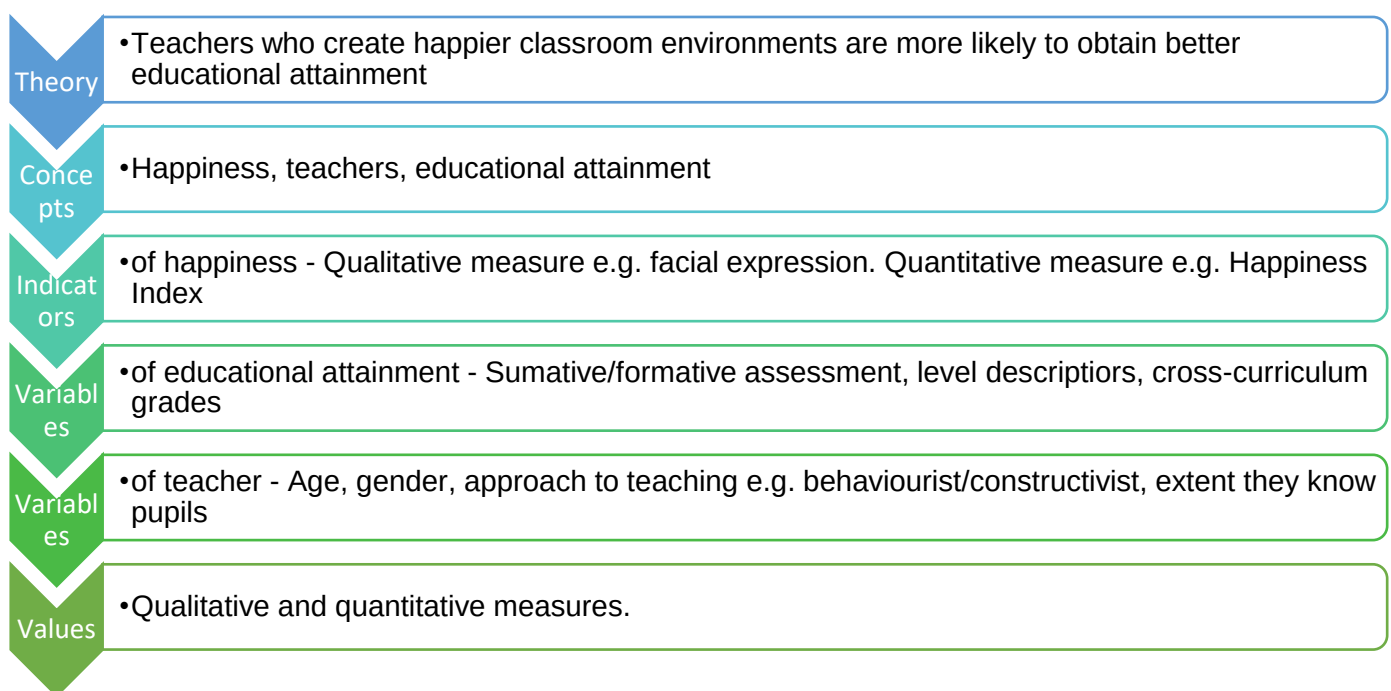


Figure 1 (above): Process of Abstraction

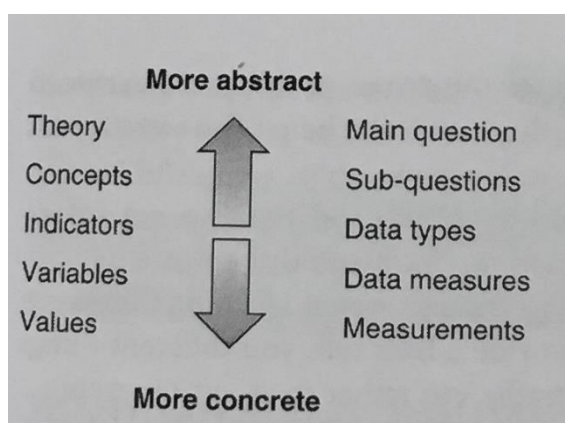


Figure 2 (left): Diagram of levels of abstraction (Walliman, 2017:77)

Emotions are experienced and instrumental for academic achievement and personal growth. The teacher, or rather the orchestrator of these concept, bares the forefront in contributing to educations motivational benefits. In general, research suggests that emotions are a multifaceted phenomena that involve several psychological processes (Jo, 2014; Robinson, 2009; Pekrun, 2017). Pekrun, offers the rationale for this research by setting in place the notion of 'positive affect' and how it is created by various positive states (Pekrun, 2017). Thus, this investigations intent is to critically analyse 'positive affect' on pupils by analysing the dimensions of valence and activation. Therefore, the concept of positive affect requires deeper disablement of positive emotions, as has been done by Barret and Russell (see **Figure 3**).

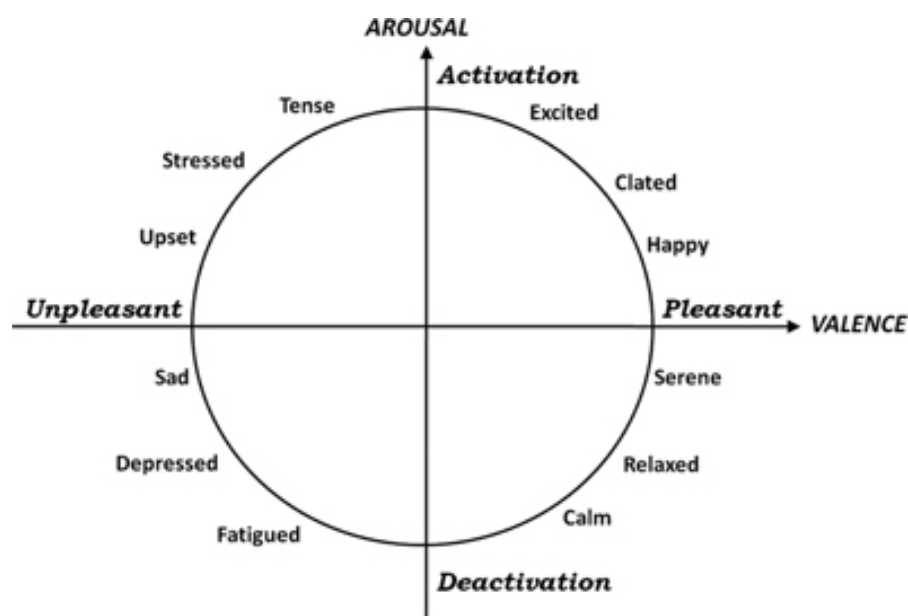


Figure 3 (above): Circumplex model of affect (Barrett and Russell, 1998)

Ken Robinson has noted the difficulty that **Figure 3** presents. Robinson, has suggested that the depth of trait emotions are intertwined with state emotions. Thus, to find a common theme to achieving a positive affect outcomes, requires an object focus (Robinson, 2009). As such, the object focus of emotions requires a methodology whereas differentiation between activity and outcome of emotion can be identified (Fridja, 1986).

Literature suggests that academic emotions differ widely between individuals (see Zeidner, 1998; Fridja, 1986; Silvia, 2010). Taxer and Frenzel add to this notion by exemplifying how emotions in different school subjects become larger as students progress in education (Taxer & Frenzel, 2015). Furthermore, the original domain of positive affect appears less common in girls (Taxer & Frenzel, 2015).

It is largely reiterated that emotions prepare us to do something (see Zeidner, 1998; Fridja, 1986; Silvia, 2010). In particular, positive emotions function us to 'broaden-and build', essentially meaning we will explore new horizons (Fredrickson, 2001). Thus, to gain access to this building of knowledge literature suggests that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation need to coexist in balance (Pekrun, 2017). Seng Hun Jo, underlines that it is this balance of self-disciplined motivation that allows pupils to access the retrieval of information (see Mood-congruent recall) (Jo, 2014). Thus, meaning emotions can have consequences on the self-regulation of ones learning (see **Figure 4**) (Pekrun, 2017).

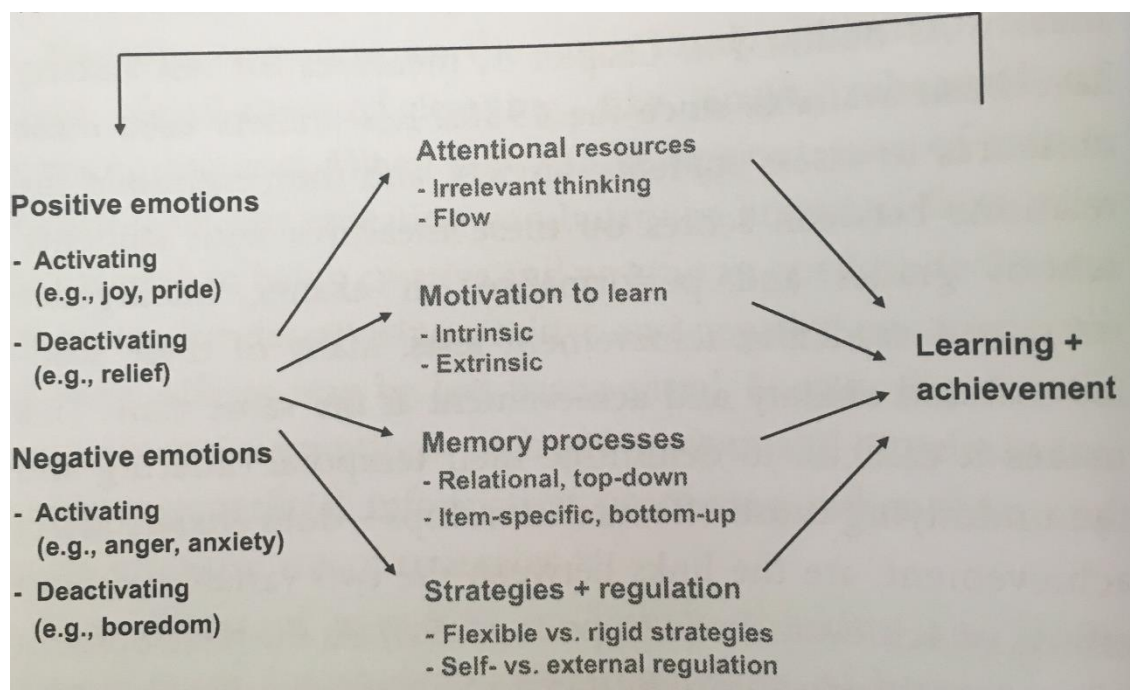


Figure 4 (above): Effects of emotions on learning and achievement (Pekrun, 2017:40)

Traditionally, emotions in education have largely had a foci on that of the student (Pekrun & Linnenbink-Garcia, 2014). Therefore, the use of positive emotions you experience as a teacher has a restricted understanding (Taxer & Frenzel, 2015). Pekrun and Linnenbink-Garcia, have highlighted that the truthfulness of this concept means that producing the highest quality of lessons and learning environments is restrained by one's own experienced perception of how to promote positive affect (Pekrun & Linnenbink-Garcia, 2014). Therefore, an array of literature has deemed that this omission on the teachers part means emotions derived by teachers are contagious and can have a profound effect on the emotions experienced by others (see Zeidner, 1998; Fridja, 1986; Silvia, 2010).

To conclude, the ultimate sentiment that supports this study is that only a few studies have found null relations between positive emotions and achievement (see Linnenbrink, 2007; Pekrun et al, 2009).

1.2 Aims and Objectives

Based on the critical review of educational literature and the process of abstraction the following research question and aims appear appropriate:

Research Question: **How is happiness be stimulated, across a humanities faculty, to enhance the learning experience?**

Aims:

- To **identify** how students define and value happiness.
- To **examine** the extent that teachers can stimulate happiness.
- To **outline** how situational demands influences the context of happiness in education.
- To **investigate** if happiness in secondary schools is genuine or regulated.

In order to meet the aims set, the following objectives have been established:

- Conduct a secondary **literature review** into emotional-educational connections.
- Generate and evaluate 150 **questionnaires** through the use of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).
- Part-take and analyse a series of pupil **focus groups**.
- Carry forth 9 structured **participant observations**, 3 for each humanities subject (Geography, History, Religious Education), for one mixed ability class of each year at KS3.
- Analyse a vast range of school **secondary data**.
- Engage with pupils on a deep psychological level through **participant research**.

1.3 Location of Study

The area of study will encompass a single school within South Wales (see **Figure 5**). The school that will be investigated does not need to be established at this point, this relates to the ideology that it will not add to the significant framing of this research proposal. The exact school under enquiry will be determined at later stage, during ethical consideration.

However, the region of investigation has been narrowed down to South Wales, this is because it is accessible for the researcher, myself. It is important to note that the research has a focus within Wales because of its changing emphasis towards pupil wellbeing, as has been expressed by the Donaldson report (Donaldson, 2015).



Figure 5 (above): Map of Wales (Wales, 2018)

1.4 Projected Outcome of Research

By implementing the interdisciplinary research design that follows, in the sequent sections, which combines notions of education, philosophy and sociology, my pedagogical self-awareness and self-knowledge of classroom practise will improve (Silvia, 2010). It would be misleading to make any assumptions about the possible outcomes of the research. Therefore, at this stage the argument in favour of the research is that it is simply worth putting to the test (Stenhouse, 1975).

Methodologies

The underlying ideology contained within this study follow systematic notions of inductive reasoning via an interpretivism approach (Hodges, 2001). This method was deemed appropriate because of its preconceived notion that by studying a number of pupils an eventual generalization in relation to the topic, in question, will reveal an answer. To strengthen the significance of this inductive reasoning methodology I will combine my own personal experiences in education. By framing the research in this way, the subjective, personal assumptions one might bare, will have a reality check against objective and calculative notions (Kerlinger, 1970). By articulating the research methods through this cohesive style, additional realms of social reality, majorly concerned within the nominalist-realist debate, will provide a deeper context to the study (Hodges, 2001).

To address the complex phenomena, in question, methods will need to be critiqued holistically. The most realistic means of doing this, for a study of this scale, is to opt for a mixed methods, concurrent triangulation approach (Walliman, 2017). This means that the multiple methods selected will cross-check the reoccurrences of various data outcomes. The real strength of validity in this investigation is derived from triangulation. Hereby, the complexity of human behaviour, in this example what causes of happiness, will be approached from more than one standpoint, by making use of both quantitative, and qualitative data (Campbell and Fiske, 1959).

The initial method proposed in this study is primary questionnaires (quantitative). The cognitive selection of questionnaires is to provide structured, numerical data on the background of pupil's positive affect in comparison to secondary theological ideologies. The bulk of this questionnaire design will be highly structure, derived from closed questions (for example dichotomous, multiple choice and ranking questions). This is so the results can enable comparisons to be made across the entire sample (Cohen et al, 2007). Although, answers may be limited this doesn't discredit the worthwhileness of the questionnaire from its original purpose. It must be reiterated that the questionnaire participant's directive is not to qualify or explain their answers, as this can partake later during the focus group sessions if required.

The questionnaire sample will be formally structured across the same 150 participants that will partake in all of the alternative methods proposed. The questionnaires will be distributed face-to-face in hope to achieve a higher completed return rate (Cohen et al, 2007). Azzara, has set forth a format on how to achieve all the key considerations an effective questionnaire will deliberate (Azzara, 2010). This guidance will be followed whilst constructing the initial pilot questionnaire and then redrafted to improve the validity of the final results. However, Walliman has provided an overlying notion on how to create an effective questionnaire, recommending that the questions are easy to interpret, short, precise and are not misleading to the participant (Walliman, 2017:112). Gillham, has described that closed questionnaire answers can lead to uninformed responses, due to participant opting to answer the question, even if they don't have an opinion or understand the question (Gillham, 2008). Therefore, it is key to ensure enough time has been allocated to trial the original questionnaire, as has been set forth by the estimated time span, meaning the necessary changes can be implemented (see **Appendix 1**). By using this process to amend the questionnaire validity and reliability of the collated results will be more significant (Azzara, 2010). In addition to the standardised ethical considerations in the sequent section, Cohen, has proposed that the questionnaire will have to be designed in a way where it is evident that it will not harm the

participant and that they can identify their questionnaire so it can be withdrawn from the data set if requested (Cohen et al, 2007).

The second method of data collection is cognitive mapping (Qualitative). Though acquiring this data I hope to seek patterns to responses that would have otherwise been omitted from the data set had the participants not been fully involved in the research process. The worthwhileness of involving the participants in the research is best demonstrated by Arnstein (2007) Ladder of citizen participation (**Figure 6**).

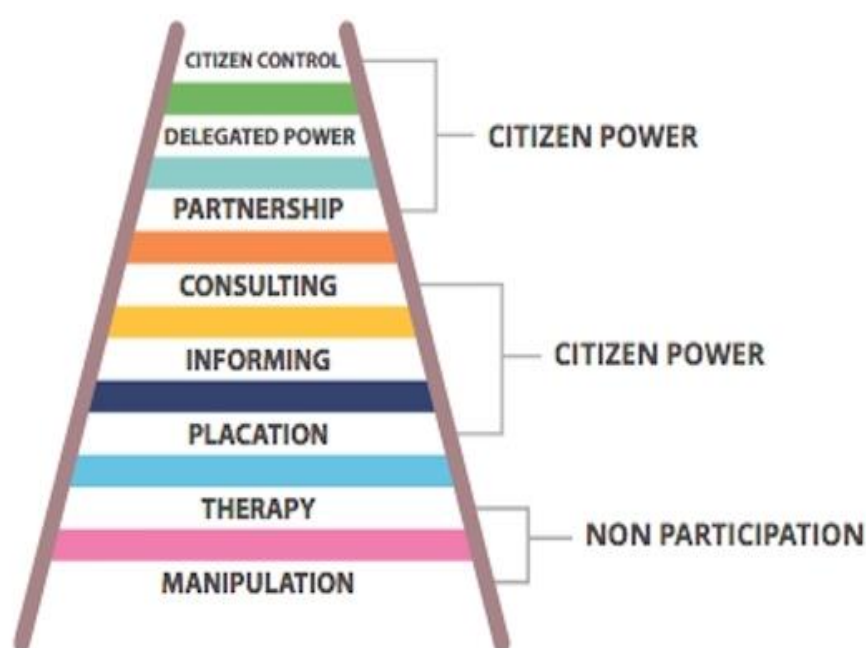


Figure 6 (above): Ladder of citizen participation (Arnstein, 2007)

Hereby, involving the participants in the study will improve the validity of the research. Hall, suggests this is the case because the participants will feel more involved in the research consequently making them realise that research is about addressing issues that involves them (Hall, 2005). Furthermore, this should help with the focus group method as any power differentials can be identified and balanced out before these take place. In particular, this style method, within an educational realm, is becoming increasingly important as it enables the participants to become their own self-assessor of what makes them happy, thus, allowing them to self-regulate their own learning capacity (Jobes, 1997). The sample for this method is identical to that of the questionnaire.

The third method opted for is participant observations. The underlying rationale for this method is to provide clarity between what people state in their questionnaires and how people react in reality (Robson, 2002). In particular, the observations will be critiquing several strands of the classroom; physical, human, interactional and programme settings. As

such the most effective way of formulating these observations will be through a semi structured approach. Hereby, a set of comparative natures in the classroom that could have an impact on happiness will be set prior to the observations. These notions will be recorded via event and instantaneous sampling. However, due to the dynamics of education these comparative natures might change throughout the observations, particularly as the same 3 classes will be observed 9 times. The sample for these observations is framed by 'group type', whereby the same individuals will be selected as alternative methods, chosen based upon their distinctive criteria (a mixed ability class from years 7, 8 and 9). The main ethical considerations concerning the observations could either be a result from the presence of myself or digital recording equipment. Both of which could initiate reliability and validity issues in terms of the Hawthorne and halo effects (to be discussed in sequent section).

The final method deemed appropriate is focus groups. The rationale for opting for focus groups rather than interviews is because they provide the participants with greater authority, thus, they are more likely to speak out in their own words (Morgan, 1988). Thus, providing greater coverage and reliability of the topic in question than single interviews would. There will be three focus group sessions, one for each year at KS3 (7, 8 and 9). There will only be a single focus group dialogue with each group, as these single session will provide sufficient enough data to explain the outcomes of the behaviours observed in lessons. The focus groups will be comprised of ideally six members, this will allow an effective intra-group dynamics. However, there will be a recruitment of 8 member just to ensure a sufficient amount of participants turn up on the day (Morgan, 1988).

The reliability and validity of focus groups is a foci that will need to be under constant scrutiny. The main threats here being subconscious biasness and the tendency to ask leading questions. Thus, a solution will be to pose questions through a semi-structure, open-ended approach, by doing so the tendency for myself to seek answer that support my preconceived notions will be avoided. Furthermore, to strengthen the reliability, the focus groups will take place in a relaxed, friendly, face-to-face environment. The ideology supporting this is that the participants will disclose information that they might not have been so readily forthcoming with in an alternative surrounding (Miller & Cannell, 1997). The focus group sampling technique will be stratified according to the pupils target grades, this simply differs to the other methods (sampled via grouped by type) because it is not possible to sample 150 participants via focus groups, in the set time scale (Walliman, 2007).

In terms of the qualitative data (Participant observation, cognitive mapping, focus groups) validity will be addressed through honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data collated (Jobes, 1997). Furthermore, with the majority of this investigation being supported through

qualitative evidence it transpires that the most rational approach to validity is through an 'interpretive approach' (Walliman, 2007). This will add validity through approaching the participant critically by engaging with them to catch their true meaning, interpretations, terms and intentions.

Issues concerning validity could arise at the designing stage of the proposal. Consequently, the threats here will be minimalized by choosing an appropriate timescale, ensuring adequate resources are obtained before the research is undertaken and avoiding a bias self-indulged analysis. A caution that will strengthen the validity of the research outcomes is that prior assumptions about what is going on in the institution, the school itself, will be critiqued through taking seriously the conceived notions of those concerned within the research, the pupils. It is this studies recommendation that this institutional analysis, the pupils will contribute to, will take place via the focus groups. By taking this precaution the research lends itself to be fully triangulated.

The overall sampling population required to add significance to the data collection is predicted to be accumulated through a 'networking' style approach (Walliman, 2007). In order for this approach to work I will need to gather access to the sample through a gatekeeper. The main issue here that could become a potential issue is that the headteacher 'may suggest that researchers observe certain teachers whom they want information about' (Walford, 2001:45). Therefore, a pre-planned, detailed structure must be indicated to the gatekeeper before requesting the use of their sample. In doing so, the gatekeeper should be unable to influence the researcher into enquiring 'guilt knowledge' affinities.

Data Analysis

It is important to note that all the data collected is ephemeral. Thus, it will have to be treated with caution when discussed in relation to the entire discipline of educational research.

The quantitative data collected will be analysed via user-friendly computer statistical packages, mainly the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. The primary purpose of quantitative findings analysis will be to identify and compare any significances the data may present. These significances will be identified in relation to their variation to the parameter of the population, or Gaussian curve of normal frequency distribution (Walliman, 2017). Due to the projected nature of the research the expected results will formulate statistics that are parametric. To critique the data in its most significant form these parametric tests will require the variables to be univariable, using measures of central tendency and dispersion, and bivariable, using correlation coefficients, analysed (Miller & Cannell, 1997). This data will then be presented via an array of charts and tables. Cohen, has distinguished that one issue within the logistics of the questionnaire could be that the answers are reactionary offensive,

misguided or bias (Cohen et al, 2007). Therefore, to eliminate these issues to the highest attainable level I have chosen a relatively large sample size so any abnormalities in the data can be easily identified. Furthermore, the sampling technique chosen, discussed in the prior section, will provide scope to engage with all abnormalities on a deeper level, via a separate method.

The qualitative data collated will be analysed through Mile and Huberman three concurrent flows of action; data reduction, data display and conclusion verification (Miles & Huberman, 1994:10-12). By compiling the data in this format any corruptible, bias data should become identifiable, for discussion in relation to why it is an outlier in comparison to the rest of the data set. Therefore, the initial step will be to organize and code the information through typologies and taxonomies (Walliman, 2017). Two different collections of codes will be generated to enable the investigation to become fully reflexive of wider educational contexts. Thus, the information will be coded into a systematic retrieval of text, and, secondly, in a format that enables devised theory generation. By analysing the data in this manner it will create a series of links that can be collated through different matrices and networks (Walliman, 2017). In particular, it is anticipated that the focus groups and participant observations will lead to a conceptually ordered display, similar of that to **Figure 7**. A problem concerning the reliability of the focus groups is the group dynamics (Cohen et al, 2007). If this is not carefully managed certain members of the group could be denied a voice or become inoperative due to a disagreement in opinions. Ultimately, meaning the reliability of results will not be true to the sample under investigation.

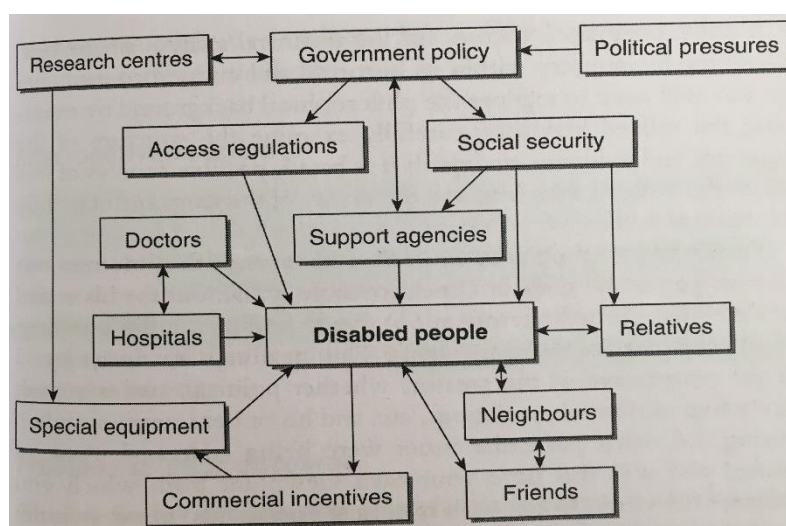


Figure 7 (above): Conceptually ordered display (Walliman 2017:159)

The essential fragment of data analysis lies in the hermeneutics of this study. Due to the complex nature of this investigation it seems appropriate that hermeneutics is approached

through symbolic interaction (Walliman, 2017). Blumer, has shown the appropriateness of this style analysis by demonstrating how symbolic interaction goes beyond just analysing discourse and critiques interaction and meaning; that is, your interaction with the environment is key in the formation to yourselves and self-understanding (Blumer, 1969). However, this single symbolic method isn't the only relevant approach to this investigation as it is highly likely the study will cross into different realms of hermeneutics, such as but not limited to, semiotics. The wider the approaches adopted to interpret the information collated should provide a deeper understanding of the study and eliminate any oversight the Hawthorn and Halo effects could implicate.

Ethics

The overall ethical ideology of this investigation follows a notion set forth by Cavan, 'while truth is good, respect for human dignity is better' (Cavan, 1977:810). To ensure this creed of 'human dignity' is maintained all ethical concerns, involved in the research in question, will be minimised by sustaining a research alliance between myself and the University of Wales Trinity of Saint David. Furthermore, to this alliance, research will be conducted following both BERA and ERIC ethical guidelines for educational research (BERA, 2011) (Graham et al, 2013). In addition, to these research alliances, the most important consideration is my own positionality. Hereby, I will need to maintain a researchers neutral perspective throughout, rather than opting for a personal teacher's standpoint. This is essential to prevent the data collected conflicting with ethical moral principles.

To effectively uphold the sensitive nature of this project my own research practice will need to be continuously under scrutiny. To ensure a sensitive nature is adopted, it is essential that the project gains reasonably informed consent off the participants (see '**Example consent form and letter of introduction' in appendix 1**'). Due to the sample of the participants being aged under 18, consent will be obtained in a written format off the participants parents/guardians. This structure to consent follows guidelines, of which have been set by the, US department of Health, Education and Welfare (1971). By framing the research though reasonably informed consent, the purpose, foreseeable risks and benefits, rights to partake and withdraw become transparent to the participants. This ethical ideology is reflected by Fine and Sandstrom notion that;

'children should be told as much as possible, even if some of them cannot understand the full explanation. Their age should not diminish their rights, although their level of understanding must be taken into account in the explanation that are shared with them' (Fine and Sandstrom 1988:18).

In terms of participant observation, issues could arise in terms of the Hawthorn and Halo effects. It is impossible to fully prevent these effects, therefore, the possibility of bias is imminent. However, to reduce the bias nature of participant observations, during the research, I will act as a passive observer. This means the classroom should mimic as close to a 'business as usual' manner as possible. Therefore, making the research outcomes more reliable (Walford, 2001). In addition, the participant observations will be carried out multiple times to avoid 'problems of reactivity' (Lee 1993:143), wherein the research could influence the attitude of those being researched. Thus, preventing the research methodologies from adversely influencing the projects outcomes.

The key ethical consideration concerning the focus groups is to ensure equality and avoidance of prejudice and harassment (Morgan, 1988). Therefore, the focus groups, in question, will need to be designed to prevent a power differential. Secondly, ethical issues could arise from how the focus groups will be transcribed. Due to the nature of, over simplification of transcripts, the focus groups will be digitally audio recorded. This ascends ethical concerns in terms of 'own interpretation, ignoring vocal inflections, repetitions, asides, and subtleties of humour' (Walliman 2017:51). Ultimately, this means the data could lose some of its original meaning. The most recognized way to minimise these risks is by pre planning the questions and identify the themes under scrutiny prior to the focus groups (Cohen et al, 2007). Hence, why the focus groups proposed will be carried out through a semi structured format. The final ethical barrier created by conducting focus groups could be a result from misuse of language. Hereby, I will need to be cautious not to be 'patronizing or disparaging and avoid bias, stereotyping' ideologies (Walliman 2017:49).

The principle of anonymity within this study cannot be assured to the participants. The nature of this face-to-face led research requires myself to question and be critical of the participants to identify if there are any abnormal results. However, confidentiality within the study is highly achievable, with myself reluctant to breach confidentiality for reasons of illegality (Wiles, 2008). Therefore, to prevent any ethical uncertainties the study will relay an emphasis on the importance of setting boundaries during the analysis stage of the investigation. Hereby, the data will critiqued following a deletion of identifiers and micro-aggregation (Walford, 2001). To ensure confidentiality is maintained the storing and transmitting of data will follow guidelines set out in the Data Protection Act (1998). The utmost relevant consideration from this act is that access, to the data, must be limited to myself. Furthermore, all the data obtained will be stored on an encrypted hard drive, of which will be locked away in a secure location, and later disposed of in such a way it will be completely indecipherable (Data Protection Act, 1998).

Conclusion and Contingency Plan

To summarise, the methodologies and data analysis proposed should present a worth while putting to the test piece of research. Upon completion, the research should further multiple academic fields, including but not limited to; psychology, sociology and education. If the outcome of the research is significant it could further teaching pedagogy towards creating the most effective learning environments, of which, following current theoretical assumptions, should improve grade outcomes. The research and data analysis will disseminate with fellow UWTSD peers, via a digital report, submitted to Turn-It-In. If the outcomes of the investigative topic are limited, then the final analysis and discussion of data will have softer concluding statements and will present an argument for why the research was necessary. The main limitation to the research proposed is provoked by the limited time period for the collated content to be thoroughly scrutinized (as can be seen by the timescale in **Appendix 1**). Secondly, the study is restrained by the fact that it is approaching the topic, in question, via investigating a single school case study. Therefore, it must be adjourned that the research is ephemeral and might not reflect alternative schools approaches to happiness.

If the project proposed encounters substantial problems there is a contingency plan in place. This follows a very similar mixed methodology to the one already proposed, but it critiques the relationship between happiness and it effects on participants, rather than reviewing how participants, themselves, conceive happiness.

Appendix 1

Contained within the appendix should be the following documents:

1. Bibliography
2. Time span of research
3. All resources required for proposed research
4. Example first draft consent form and letter of introduction

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Time span of research (Start date 1/9/2018)

Task	Deadline	Additional Notes	Completed?
Background research and ethical consent	1/10/2018		
Review of secondary data	1/12/2018	Mainly comprised of recently published articles	
Apply for research approval off school/pupils of study	1/1/2019	Written consent to be obtained of pupils parents	
Carry forth 9 structured participant observations	1/3/2019	Observations will last roughly 60 minutes each and will be video recorded for future analysis	
Design and pilot initial questionnaire	1/4/2019	Once piloted necessary changes will be made	
Carry out final draft questionnaire	1/5/2019	Questionnaire will be targeted at KS3 pupils	
Analyse current primary data and collate it against secondary data	1/6/2019	This will grant an insight into areas where deeper investigation can be targeted during the focus group sessions	
Plan focus groups	1/6/2019	This will follow a semi-structured format	
Carry out focus group interviews	1/7/2019		
Write up of results	15/7/2019	Including the use of SPSS for validation and significance of quantitative results	
Conclusion and final report published	1/9/2019	To be digitally submitted	

The only resources, and costing anticipated, for this investigation includes printing (paper) and transport to reach the location under inquiry.

Example consent form and letter of introduction



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Tel / Rhif Ffôn: Cardiff (029) 2079 2751

Website – www.easternhigh.org.uk

Student Name:

Your child is being asked to partake in a research study involving happiness in secondary schools in Wales. This form has important information about the reason for doing this study and that if you have any concerns you can withdraw consent for your child partaking in the research.

Study Title: The Creation of Happiness in Secondary Schools: A Single School Study in Wales

What will my child be asked to do if my child is in this study?

Your child will be asked to explain the background of why they enjoy particular subject more than others. This research will be approached through the use of your child sharing their opinions via a questionnaire and group interview. Participation will not exceed three hours over the course of three weeks.

The second element of the research involves myself video recording your child as they carry out mainstream classroom activities. I will keep these recording in a locked, safe location, of which only I will have access to. Of course, I will only video record your child if you provide consent.

What are the possible risks or discomforts to my child?

This research bares, to the best of my knowledge, no physical or emotion risk to your child as their everyday educational timetable will not be disrupted.

If you have any questions about your child's rights as a participant in this research, you can contact the school directly using the address at the top of this letter.

Initial one of the following to indicate your choice:

_____ (initial) I agree to...

_____ (initial) I do not agree to...

Parent/Legal Guardian's Name (printed) and Signature

Date