

## EDUCATION AND HAPPINESS

Education signifies providing tools. But tools *for what*?

The possible answers are virtually infinite. Here I'd like to suggest one that may appear simplistic: *education signifies providing tools to make people live better*.

True, this means that any argument based *only* on quantity is instantly incomplete: the idea that education is a matter of accumulating notions and skills ("the more I know the better I'll be") risks being inadequate, to say the least. Knowing the names of the world's capital cities or all about trigonometry may help to improve the wellbeing of an individual or a community, but in no way does it complete that wellbeing.

I'd even go as far to say that a type of education that seeks to provide tools for people to live better ought to be rechristened "happiness education".

Saying that, I realise that happiness may appear as something very abstract and intangible. Yet in the last few years living well and being happy have been studied by a number of economists, most notably by Amartya Sen, winner of the Nobel Prize for Economics in 1998.

These economists set out from a critique of the quantitative model of wellbeing (such as the one that measures a country's prosperity solely by its GDP) to seek other criteria to assess the wellbeing of an individual and a community.

Following the lead of their studies, we might define happiness as *the set of physiological, material, social and psychological conditions that allow a human being to feel well, grow and develop his or her potential through a sense of shared social wellbeing*. I believe it is necessary to set out from these new definitions of happiness and broaden our outlook to embrace relations, potential and sharing, and think about the tools education has to provide.

I believe that the area of food can provide many of these tools.

Discovering food with children is an increasingly common approach in schools, partly thanks to the introduction into syllabuses of food education, to school gardens, to renewed attention to differences when designing canteen menus and, more in general, to a growing culture of food quality. I think it is useful for teachers to reflect upon the potential of these experiences. In this way they will be able to exploit them to the full and transform them into meaningful opportunities as part of a more general "happiness education".

The ten tools to develop what we refer to as “happiness education” are: pleasure in doing things, competence, collaboration, time and waiting, rules, creativity and reuse, memory, curiosity, conscious choice and conviviality.

*Francesco Mele, Slow Food Italy trainer and expert in games communication*