

Happiness

If children are to think well, they need to perceive the general principles in collections of particulars. They need to understand the connections between examples and categories. The short cartoon based on the Charlie Brown musical provides an opportunity to draw children's attention to the relationship between principles and examples.

The song

One can imagine the process by which the writers of the song constructed the lyrics. They might have made a list of the kinds of things they thought make people happy, such as sensual pleasure, achieving something, the fulfilment of appetites, personal intimacy, mastery of a skill, having choices, doing something adventurous, doing a kindness, showing love and being loved.

Then they would think of examples of these 'happiness principles' as they might apply to children in a particular culture. They would use the examples for lyrics of the song and cast aside the principles. Some of the examples that make up the lyrics for 'Happiness' are:

Pizza with sausage
Telling the time
Learning to whistle
Tying your shoe for the very first time
Playing the drum in your own school band
Walking hand in hand
Two kinds of ice cream
Knowing a secret
Climbing a tree
Happiness is five different crayons...
Catching a firefly ... Setting him free

Classroom challenges

Ask children to think of the 'principles for happiness' that seem to lie behind the lyrics of the song. Then get them to come up with more examples of the same principles or think of different principles and create examples for those.

Ask them what their own principles for happiness are. Ask them if they think some principles for happiness are better than others and what criteria they would put forward for 'better'.

After they have thought up their own examples, invite them to create questions about the concept of happiness. Allow them to choose one and help them to discuss it. Insist that they give reasons for their views and that they try to understand what other children say by asking questions.

You could also suggest that children write their own lyrics about happiness using their own examples and/or principles and perform it to the same tune as 'Happiness'.

It might be interesting to compare this home-made cartoon with an extract from the real Charlie Brown cartoon film. There is a clip at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=hKKjqzkGo3o. What differences do the images and voices make to the way children perceive this cartoon in comparison with the other one?

Happiness is ...

The second video, made in Thailand, is quite affecting. Just show it to pupils and ask them to come up with questions to discuss. Then help them to discuss their questions.