

A Study on Young Children's Perceptions and Experiences of Happiness

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Abstract

The purposes of this study were to analyze individual interviews about how young children perceived the meanings of happiness and when they felt happy, to understand the characteristics of their thoughts and experiences of happiness, and to make plans to promote their happiness. The subjects included 274 young children aged 3-5 at two kindergartens and one daycare center in Seoul. The findings were as follows: first, young children explained the meanings of happiness with positive emotional states such as feeling good, loving, feeling glad, liking, having fun, and excited. A considerable number, however answered that they didn't know. Secondly, young children felt happy when engaging in their favorite play, being together with their favorite person, having emotional supports, receiving presents, going to some special place, having their favorite food, their body and mind felt comfortable, and achieving what they wanted through efforts. Happiness is an essential factor for good and full life. It is necessary to provide young children with happy experiences so that they can maintain a happy life. There is a need for education to help them realize that true happiness comes from taking an interest in and making a contribution to the happiness of others beyond the pursuit of personal happiness and to increase their power of execution.

Keywords : young children's perception of happiness, happy experience of young children, analysis of interview

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Introduction

Happiness is an important topic in South Korean society these days. Policies supporting happiness are announced across the nation day after day including “Era of People’s Happiness,” “Happy Housings,” “Happy Living Zone,” and “Happy School Index.” Bookstores are filled with numerous books on happiness. Streets are lined with products and stores carrying the word “happy.”

What is happiness? “Happiness” means “the pleased state of mind based on joy and satisfaction in life” (Daum Korean language dictionary, 2014), a psychological state of feeling peacefulness, fullness, and pleasure in the mind (Kim & Kim, 2008; Shin, 2007), subjective well-being felt every day, or satisfaction with a good life or life itself (Peterson, 2006). According to Seligman (2002), happy life is pleasant life, meaningful life, or engaged life. A pleasant life involves temporary joy or satisfaction as one’s needs are met; a meaningful life involves a contribution to the lives of others through one’s knowledge and ability; and an engaged life involves the achievement of a goal through one’s commitment to pursuing it. Seligman maintained that one can lead a truly happy life when three elements, namely pleasure, meaning, and engagement, are in harmony. Happiness means that one feels that his or her life is meaningful and valuable while having joy and satisfaction. Human beings can create their own happiness through efforts (Lyubomirsky, 2008). In other words, happiness is the positive satisfaction with one’s emotions and life in daily life. One can feel happy when being passionately devoted to his or her work and doing something meaningful for both him or herself and others.

Happiness is one of the essential factors of a good and full life. Positive psychologists say that happiness exerts positive influences not only on individual lives but also families, neighbors, and even the entire society. Happy people have a high degree of satisfaction with their lives, establish good relationships with others, are flexible and more creative, and highly appreciate their own abilities (Seligman, 2002). They also overcome adversity with ease, are more satisfied with their marriage, are healthier and more productive, and live longer (Lyubomirsky, 2008; Peterson, 2006). Needless to say, human beings are supposed to pursue happiness whoever they are, and young children are no exception.

Happiness is one of the earliest emotions perceived by young children (Harter, 1983).

Personality strengths that make up the base of happiness start to develop during early childhood (Hay, Castle, Stimson, & Davies, 1999). Huebner (2004) emphasized the importance of happiness during early childhood, reporting that young children who have greater satisfaction with life tend to have more problem-solving skills, a more positive self-concept, and more pro-social behavior. Happiness during early childhood is even more important in that it has long-term effects into adulthood (Flouri, 2004). It is thus necessary for early childhood educators to explore young children's perceptions and experiences of happiness and support their happy lives based on the results.

Are children happy in South Korea today? Children in Korea are in a difficult situation for increasing workload, decreasing play time, lack of family time, and so on (Statistics Korea, 2013; Suh & Yang, 2013). Such life of children in Korea was also seen in the Happiness Index survey. Findings regarding the Happiness Index for Children show that South Korean children scored low on the index. Of eight countries (South Korea, Uganda, the U. K., Israel, Spain, Brazil, South Africa, and Algeria) surveyed, South Korea ranked seventh on the Complex Happiness Index for Children (Lee & You, 2013). The Complex Happiness Index for Children is a result of evaluation on satisfaction level towards the family and home, material goods, relationships, living area, health, use of time, school, and himself. According to "Subjective Happiness Index for South Korean Children and Adolescents," South Korea held the lowest place among 23 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) member states running subjective happiness index for six consecutive years from 2009 to 2014 (Bang Jeong Hwan Foundation of Korea, 2014). "Subjective Happiness Index for South Korean Children and Adolescents" is composed of subjective health, school satisfaction level, life satisfaction level, sense of belonging, and specific area of harmony. Those findings lead to questions about what is a happy life for young children.

With rising interest in happiness during early childhood, studies are being conducted on the meanings of happiness for young children. Most studies on happiness are quantitative ones dealing with happiness-related variables, and their subjects are mainly elementary school children (Shin & Choi, 2014). In recent years, some research has delved into the meaning of happiness perceived by children, including young children even though the number of studies is still small. For example, Chaplin (2009) reported that people, pets, and hobbies made children aged 8~18 the happiest; Thoilliez (2011) found that children aged 6~12 had happy

experiences when carrying out daily routines with their families and friends, celebrating special days such as birthdays and anniversaries, making high academic achievements, or behaving morally. Kim and Kang (2008a) administered picture book activities to five-year-olds and found that young children had such happiness concepts as comfort with the body and mind, positive interpersonal relationships, personal growth, and pursuit of life goals. Kim (2013) investigated the meanings of happiness perceived by five-year-olds through interviews and drawings and found that happiness meant material affluence, good mood, intimate relationships with loved ones, and rewards in daily life. Looking into happy situations and conditions with a group of five-year-olds, Hwang, Kim and Tak (2013) reported that they felt happiness in such situations as playing, forming relationships with families and friends, concentrating on things they desired, seeking variation from the defined regulations, and experiencing achievements.

Research on happiness with young children should reflect their various voices. The studies mentioned above targeted elementary school children or five-year-olds rather than younger children. Indeed, it is difficult to come across researches on happiness with three- or four-year-olds. Given that happiness is one of the fundamental human emotions that start to develop during infancy (Kim, 2010), there is a need for researches delving into the meanings of happiness from the perspective of young children with various age groups in early childhood.

Support for the happy lives of young children requires knowledge about the way they think about happiness. Huebner, Laughlin, Ash and Gilman (1998) reported that satisfaction with life for young children was entangled with family, friends, school, environment, and self-image in complex ways. One can help young children to be happy only by obtaining knowledge about when and where they feel happy doing what (Chaplin, 2009). Young children are the subjects to experience happiness, which raises a need to start with understanding what they perceive and pursue with regard to happiness in order to promote their happiness.

The first thing to do is thus to listen carefully to their stories about happiness. Their stories present a direct channel into their lives, thus helping to understand their meanings in their world (Shin, Kim, & Jo, 2011). They conceptualize their thoughts while telling their stories (Christensen & James, 2008; Mortari, 2007). When they tell stories, it means their

participation in research and further in the guidelines and decision-making to be fulfilled by their needs and rights (Grover, 2004).

This study set out to investigate the meanings of happiness and happy experiences perceived by three-, four- and five-year-olds attending a kindergarten or daycare center, to understand their lives, and to find out what early childhood educators should support for their happy lives. For these purposes, the study set the following research questions:

1. How do young children perceive the meanings of happiness?
2. When do young children feel happy?

Methodology

Subjects

The subjects include 274 three-, four- and five-year-olds attending B public kindergarten, D private kindergarten, or E daycare center in Seoul. They were interviewed individually about their thoughts on happiness. Table 1 shows the distribution of the subject children by the age and gender.

Table 1. *Distribution of the Subjects by the Age and Gender*

Age	Boy	Girl	Total
Age 3	31	33	64
Age 4	56	52	108
Age 5	51	51	102
Total	138	136	274

Procedures

The research lasted from September, 2012 to January, 2013. We, 3 investigators first explained about the research objectives and the content of individual interviews to the

concerned institutions and obtained consent for recording interviews with young children. Interviews were given at each institution two or three times per week. The free choice activity hours were used for interviews, which took place at the library or small group activity room familiar to young children. The interview questions were in the semi-structured format and the same for all the three-, four- and five-year-olds.

The interview procedures were as follows: we first visited a classroom and introduced ourselves to the young children so that we would get familiar with each other. Then we moved to the interview venue along with the children. Before starting an interview, we made small talk with them about weather, life at the kindergarten, and friends to create a comfortable atmosphere. Considerations were given during an interview so that the young children could have enough time to answer the questions as follows:

“What do you think happiness means?” “Have you ever heard people saying ‘How happy I am!’ or ‘I am happy?’” “When do you think people say they are ‘happy?’” Have you heard the expression ‘I am happy?’” “Have you ever felt ‘Ah, I am happy!’?” “Can you tell me when you felt ‘happy?’” “If your friend asks you what ‘happiness’ means, what will you say?”

When we had questions about the children’s answers, we obtained additional specific information through follow-up questions. After completing interviews with the children, we acquired information about the children’s relationships with their families and friends and about their developmental stages from the institutions in order to increase our understanding of the interview content.

Data Collection and Analysis

We wrote down what the young children said during an interview while recording them simultaneously. After interviews were over, we compared and contrasted documented content and recorded materials, made interview transcripts, and analyzed their stories. Closely reading the transcripts, we marked any content related to happiness, made notes about it, and made a preliminary list of categories. We revised the preliminary list by reading the materials repetitively and made a list of major categories. After defining sub-categories according to the major ones, we extracted and analyzed appropriate cases for each category and then re-

analyzed the collected data according to the categories to calculate frequency and percentage. When the young children gave several answers regarding the meanings and occasions of happiness simultaneously, all of those answers were reflected and processed in a duplicate manner. We performed joint and cross checks in the process of extracting and analyzing cases in an effort to reduce interpretation errors as much as possible.

Results

Meanings of Happiness Perceived by Young Children

The most popular answer about the meanings of happiness among the young children was “I don’t know (34.2%)”, which was followed by feeling good (28.8%), others (14.4%), loving someone or something (8.5%), feeling glad (6.2%), liking someone or something (3.1%), having fun (2.0%), excited (1.4%), and feeling pleasant (1.4%) in the order. Table 2 shows the distribution of young children’s perceptions related to the meanings of happiness by gender and age.

Table 2. *Meanings of Happiness Perceived by Young Children* Including Overlapping Answers, N (%)

Meanings of happiness	Total	Gender		Age		
		Boy	Girl	Age 3	Age 4	Age 5
feeling good	84(28.8)	47(31.7)	37(25.7)	15(21.7)	25(21.7)	44(40.7)
loving someone or something	25(8.5)	12(8.1)	13(9.0)	8(11.6)	8(7.0)	9(8.3)
feeling glad	18(6.2)	10(6.8)	8(5.5)	4(5.8)	6(5.2)	8(7.4)
liking someone or something	9(3.1)	3(2.0)	6(4.2)	1(1.5)	4(3.5)	4(3.7)
having fun	6(2.0)	4(2.7)	2(1.4)	0(0.0)	5(4.3)	1(0.9)
excited	4(1.4)	1(0.7)	3(2.1)	3(4.3)	1(0.9)	0(0.0)
feeling pleasant	4(1.4)	2(1.4)	2(1.4)	1(1.5)	0(0.0)	3(2.8)
I don’t know	100(34.2)	49(33.1)	46(31.9)	28(40.6)	46(40.0)	21(19.5)
others	42(14.4)	20(13.5)	27(18.8)	9(13.0)	20(17.4)	18(16.7)
Total	292(100.0)	148(100.0)	144(100.0)	69(100.0)	115(100.0)	108(100.0)

When asked about the meanings of happiness, 34.2% of the subjects said they didn't know, and 14.4% gave answers that recalled when they were happy or that were irrelevant to the meanings of happiness. A higher percentage of "I don't know" responses was recorded high among three- and four-year-olds, which seems because the younger children were less familiar with the term happiness than the five-year-olds were and had more difficulty explaining an abstract concept. Those who explained the meaning of happiness by referring to when they were happy seemed to understand the concept of happiness but were unskilled with linguistic expressions.

The findings reveal that the young children thought of happiness in association with highly positive emotions such as feeling good, feeling glad, having fun and excited and satisfaction with their relationships with others such as loving and liking. Studying happiness, positive psychologists explain happiness as subjective well-being involving high level positive emotions, low level negative emotions and positive judgment of life (Kwon, 2008; Miller & Frisch, 2011; Seligman, 2002; Peterson, 2006). It turned out that young children perceived happiness as a positive emotion or satisfaction with life.

Investigating connections between happiness and personality strengths among young children based on the personalities of children aged 3~9 as described by their parents, Park and Peterson (2006) reported that parents believed that children's happiness was connected to their personality strengths such as love, passion, and hope. Their findings involving parents and those of the present study involving young children are in the same vein in that happiness is connected to a positive emotion and life attitude and associated with love. There are also differences; while young children explain happiness with specific emotions from daily experiences such as feeling good, feeling joyful, and having fun, parents explain children's happiness by considering internal motivations such as expectations for the future and passion for work.

The Occasions of Happiness Perceived by Young Children

Young children said they felt happy when engaging in their favorite play (30.9%), being together with their favorite person (25.9%), having emotional supports (9.3%), receiving presents (8.6%), going to some special place (7.4%), having their favorite food (5.6%), their

body and mind felt comfortable (5.2%), and achieving what they wanted through efforts (3.4%). Table 3 shows the distribution of occasions of happiness perceived by young children by the gender and age.

Table 3. *Occasions of Happiness Perceived by Young Children*
Including Overlapping Answers, N (%)

Occasions of happiness	Total	Gender		Age		
		Boy	Girl	Age 3	Age 4	Age 5
engaging in their favorite play	100(30.9)	45(29.4)	55(32.2)	22(28.6)	30(25.6)	48(36.9)
being together with their favorite person	84(25.9)	36(23.6)	48(28.1)	22(28.6)	27(23.1)	35(26.9)
having emotional supports	30(9.3)	14(9.2)	16(9.3)	7(9.1)	12(10.3)	11(8.5)
receiving presents	28(8.6)	19(12.4)	9(5.3)	4(5.2)	13(11.1)	11(8.5)
going to some special place	24(7.4)	10(6.5)	14(8.2)	7(9.1)	12(10.3)	5(3.9)
having their favorite food	18(5.6)	6(3.9)	12(7.0)	7(9.1)	5(4.3)	6(4.6)
their body and mind felt comfortable	17(5.2)	10(6.5)	7(4.1)	5(6.5)	6(5.1)	6(4.6)
achieving what they wanted through efforts	11(3.4)	7(4.6)	4(2.3)	2(2.6)	6(5.1)	3(2.3)
others	12(3.7)	6(3.9)	6(3.5)	1(1.2)	6(5.1)	5(3.8)
Total	324(100.0)	153(100.0)	171(100.0)	77(100.0)	117(100.0)	130(100.0)

When Engaging in Their Favorite Play

The biggest number of young children said they felt happy when engaging in their favorite play. They had fun and experienced happiness while engaging in play in which they were able to take leading part.

When I play I am happy and excited (Age 3, Boy)

I like to play with my friends in preschool (Age 3, Girl)

I had a thought that I am happy when I play with my favorite car block. (Age 4, Boy)

It was fun to play with friends at role-play center and block-play center. It is fun and happy whenever I play with friends. (Age 4, Girl)

Because friends play with me, I felt happy when I played with them. I am so happy to plays blocks with Lego with friends. (Age 5, Boy)

I am happy on Saturday and Sunday. I can play on Saturday and Sunday. I can go outside and play in the playground. If I meet a friend there, I can even play with the friend. (Age 5, Girl)

I was happy when I played with the water on the sponge with friends on the fieldtrip. When I played in the water I felt happy to ride down the slide, “shoong~”. And when I played with Daddy in the playground, I felt happy because it was fun playing Finding Daddy. (Age 5, Girl)

They said they felt good, pleasant, and happy when doing their favorite play such as role play, block play, play on the playground, and play with their friends. When doing the play of their desire, they were joyful and free. After play was over, they experienced such positive emotions as a sense of completeness, satisfaction, and achievement (Fattore, Mason, & Watson, 2009). They said “It was great,” “I had fun and was happy,” or “I felt I was happy” when talking about their favorite play. They expressed happiness through leading, voluntary play.

As for differences according to age, there were more five-year-olds (36.9%) that said they were happy when engaging in their favorite play, mentioning their specific play experiences than three- and four-year-olds (28.6% and 25.6%, respectively). The former age group was in the developmental stage of forming autonomy and initiative and felt greater happiness when planning, practicing, and experiencing play themselves. The findings seem to reflect the realistic demand of five-year-olds in response to decreasing play time as excessive private education spreads to young children in recent years (Suh & Yang, 2013).

When Being Together with Their Favorite Person

The second most popular experience of happiness was when children could be together with their favorite person. Young children felt happy when being with family members including parents and siblings and friends.

- I am happy now, because I am with my friends, so I am happy. (Age 3, Boy)
- I'm happy when I am with Mommy and Daddy. (Age 3, Girl)
- Playing, cuddling, and eating with my family. When I went to Busan, went out with family for a meal, went to a restaurant and played with daddy. (Age 3, Girl)
- When Grandfather and Grandmother visit my house. Since I like Grandfather and Grandmother. (Age 4, Boy)
- I am happy when I am with Mommy, Daddy, and friends. I feel happy as long as I am with them. (Age 4, Girl)
- When my Mom and Dad don't go to work, I am happy when all three of us are together. (Age 5, Boy)
- When a friend asks what happiness is, I would say, "it's you because being with you is happy." (Age 5, Girl)
- With Mom, Dad, and, Brother, we went to the park, rode a bicycle, and sat down on the grass. I was feeling the grass with my family, I felt happy. (Age 5, Girl)

They felt happiness when being with their families and friends in the same space and time. They perceived happiness in connection to their intimate relationships with their parents, families, and friends (Chaplin, 2009; Kim, 2013). They especially granted huge significance to being with their parents and felt happy when they were with their parents. Family plays a vital role in the happy lives of young children. In the Happiness Index for Children, young children of South Korean ranked low and exhibited very low satisfaction in the family index, which has something to do with the rising number of double-income families, increasing work hours (Lee, 2014), and gradually decreasing time spent with the family in South Korea (Statistics Korea, 2013).

When Having Emotional Support

Young children said they felt happy when having emotional support such as affection, intimacy, praise, and encouragement from their parents and teachers.

When Mommy and Daddy cuddle or give me a piggyback ride, and hold my hands. I feel great when they hug me. (Age 3, Boy)

I felt great and excited when I went to the mountain and got a compliment for not crying. (Age 3, Girl)

I feel good when Mommy complimented me and put a sticker after I cleaned up well. (Age 4, Boy)

When Mom and Dad says "I love you" at home, I feel good and delighted. After laundry, when I help mom to fold the laundry, mom says "Thank you", then I feel good. (Age 4, Girl)

I am happy when I kiss my Mom and Dad. (Age 5, Boy)

I feel great when my teacher pats me on the head after I clean up my toys. (Age 5, Girl)

They felt happiness in a situation of intimacy and affection such as when their mothers hugged them or said they loved them and their mothers or fathers gave them a kiss. They also felt happiness when they were praised by their teachers and parents. Love, interest, and social recognition and support from important others are closely connected to happiness (Park & Lee, 2013). Positive evaluation from others influences the formation of self-concept and promotion of self-efficacy, thus raising the level of satisfaction with overall life (Juang & Sibereisen, 1999; Park & Kim, 2006). Young children felt greater happiness when having social and emotional exchanges with other members of society to which they belonged.

A very small number of young children said they were happy when giving emotional support to their parents or friends. They felt happy when their mothers and fathers made a happy facial expression when they did what their mothers or fathers liked and also when they did a good deed or said something nice to someone. Happiness scientists maintain that both those who give emotional support and those who receive them feel happy when sympathizing with others' situations or emotions and giving them emotional support such as kindness and praise (Ben-Shahar, 2007; Lyubomirsky, 2008). It is inspiring that there are young children that feel happy by doing altruistic deeds even though the number is small.

When Receiving Presents

Young children said they were happy when receiving presents from their parents or

relatives. They perceived the joy and pleasure they felt when having what they wanted in their hands as happiness.

When it snows, Santa comes, and I can get present so I like it. (Age 3, Girl)

People say they are happy when they buy something for others. I feel good when they buy me my favorite toy or a top. (Age 4, Boy)

I am very happy and excited when I buy a dress from E-Mart (Age 4, Girl)

Last time in Lotte-Mart, Mom told me to buy a big Gundam but I didn't buy it. However, she took out an auto bicycle when we arrived home so I was so delighted. That is a Lego. It's putting blocks together with the instruction sheet, and there are even people. I was happy that time. (Age 5, Boy)

When I get a gift from Mom. When I get marbles, necklaces stickers and bags. (Age 5, Girl)

They felt happiness when receiving objects with which they could experience fun and pleasure and which they could make active use of during play such as toys, and also things they liked or found useful such as clothes and accessories. Boys (12.4%) felt greater happiness due to presents than girls (5.3%), which indicates that boys feel more happiness through material things than girls. According to Lyubomirsky (2008), environmental changes that are better than the present time give people a sense of satisfaction and happiness, but it is temporary. It is necessary to help young children realize that happiness caused by circumstances is only temporary and experience a more lasting source of true happiness.

When Going to Some Special Place

A place is not quite the same thing as a space. Human experiences turn unknown space into a "place" and meaningless physical space into an intimate "place." (Lim, 2011). Young children mentioned special places when talking about their happy experiences.

I was happy when I visited aquarium in Yeosu. I wanted to touch the white dolphin, the shark, and the seal. We also took the pictures. (Age 3, Boy)

I was happy when I went to the zoo with Mom and Dad. (Age 3, Girl)

- I am happy to go to the amusement park with Mom and Dad. (Age 4, Boy)
- I was happy when I went to the museum. (Age 4, Girl)
- It was fun putting up a tent on campground and sleeping there. (Age 5, Boy)
- Going to the amusement park was so happy. I saw Safari, Penguin, and rode a merry-go-round, it was very fun. (Age 5, Girl)

Young children had happy experiences at destinations of field trips such as amusement parks, museums, and galleries and also destinations of travel they visited with their families. Places hold personal and cultural significance reflecting individual experiences and views of certain environments rather than physical ones (Relph, 1976). Young children want attractive places where they can act freely, be protected, and have their curiosity stirred (Chawla, 1986). They felt happiness at places where they were able to have self-directed experiences, fulfill their needs for interest and fun, and share pleasant experiences with their families.

When Having Their Favorite Food

Young children said they felt happy when having their favorite food. Enjoying food with loved ones not only meets the basic needs but also brings affection and psychological stability (Weinstein, 2007).

- Eating, it's small Dduckboke. Grandmother made me a Dduckboke. (Age 3, Boy)
- I am happy, when I eat whipped cream cake on a birthday. (Age 3, Girl)
- The happiness is Mom giving me delicious food. When Mom gives chocolate or these kinds of things, this is happiness. (Age 3, Girl)
- When I eat bread and sweet potato at home, I am happy because it's delicious. (Age 4, Boy)
- I feel good, when I eat deep-fried sugar glazed sweet potato wedges with mom at home. (Age 4, Girl)

I am happy when I enjoyed food on a picnic. (Age 5, Boy)

I am happy, when I eat ice cream and drink with Seoyeon (older sister) and Sungyoon (older brother).
(Age 5, Girl)

There were more three-year-olds(9.1%) that said they were happy when having their favorite food than four- and five-year-olds(4.3% and 4.6%, respectively), which shows that the younger they were, the more need they had to meet their basic needs and have affection and psychological stability through food. When under stress, one can have sweets such as chocolate and feel happy thanks to the secretion of serotonin (Hart, 2008). The young children's favorite foods were sweet such as fresh cream cake, deep-fried sugar-glazed sweet potato wedges, and ice cream.

When Their Body and Mind Feel Comfortable

Young children said they were happy when their body and mind felt comfortable. Feeling comfortable means "having no worries regarding body and mind and feeling relaxed and fine." (Daum Korean language dictionary, 2014) the young children felt happiness in a state of body and mind well-being, one of the basic human needs.

Sleeping time at kindergarten is happy. (Age 3, Girl)

When I sleep. Sleeping is the most comfortable and nice. (Age 4, Boy)

When I lie down, I feel like I am happy. (Age 5, Boy)

When Mom and Dad do not fight, I think I am happy. And when I do not argue with my friends, I feel happy. (Age 4, Girl)

I am happy, when I feel heartwarming. (Age 5, Girl)

They called it a happy state to feel comfortable and satisfied physically. They said they felt happy when taking a physical and psychological break such as sleeping, lying down, and resting, which points to the physical and psychological fatigue that modern young children are

dealing with.

They also said they were happy when their mind was comfortable. They were happy when their mothers and fathers were not fighting each other, they were not fighting with their friends, and their heart was warm. Young children experience such negative emotions as anxiety and worry when having conflicts in their relationships with their parents and friends. It is especially necessary to pay more attention to those who mentioned conflicts between parents in their answers. Parents have enormous influence on the lives of young children, and conflicts between parents have negative effects on their psychological well-being (Min, 2009; Rubin, Burgess, Dwyer, & Hasting, 2003). Young children's dependence on their parents has risen due to the trend toward nuclear families. Young children experience a high level of stress and anger and other negative emotions during conflicts between their parents, and those emotions increase their subjective depression and problematic behavior (Davies & Forman, 2002; Yang & Chung, 2010). Ensuring stable relationships among family members as well as meeting their physical needs is essential to the happiness of young children.

When Achieving What They Wanted through Efforts

Young children recalled a happy experience when achieving something through efforts.' They felt rewarded and took pride in themselves for making efforts and having a good result.

I am delighted and good when I am in first place in the race. (Age 3, Boy)

I was happy when I scored a goal in a soccer game. (Age 4, Boy)

When I was in line skating, it was fun skating fast. There is an In Line Skating Rink in Seoksu Sports Park. So I practiced everyday, even though I fell on my hips several times, it was fun. Mom says if I practice constantly, I would do great. (Age 4, Girl)

Today we are going to do hula hoops in kindergarten, and since I have been practicing a lot, I will do great. So today is the happiest day. (Age 5, Girl)

They had happy feelings, expecting to improve their skills through hard practice, which was in line with the findings of Hwang, Kim and Tak (2013) that young children perceived feeling satisfied by overcoming difficulty like "happiness after suffering and enduring

hardship” as a happy situation rather than unconditional comfort. According to Lyubomirsky (2008), “intentional activities,” which include intentional acts, thoughts, and strategies, are very important activities capable of explaining as much as 40% of individual differences in happiness. Those findings indicate that young children feel happy in the process of constantly building and exerting their talents and attaining their goals, which means that their happiness can be increased through “intentional activities.”

There were a small number of young children that said they were happy when engaging in an anti-social and delinquent behavior. They would feel happy, for instance, when bullying their friends, not going to the daycare center or kindergarten, and playing games on the computer. Even though they were small in number, they needed attention and guidance as they found happiness in temporary pleasure, anti-social behavior, or avoidance.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study, researchers conducted individual interviews with three-, four-, and five-year-olds and investigated their thoughts of happiness. The purposes of the study were to examine the meanings and occasions of happiness perceived by young children and provide basic data for educational programs designed to reinforce and expand their understanding of happiness and promote their happiness. The meanings and experiences of happiness perceived by the children were discussed as follows:

They understood the meanings of happiness from a subjective perspective including positive emotions and satisfaction with relationships with others. They understood the meanings of happiness as feeling good, loving, feeling glad, liking, having fun, excited, and feeling pleasant, which was in line with the findings of Kim and Kang (2008b), who reported that young children defined happiness as a state of positive emotion and satisfaction they perceived subjectively in daily life. Their response also aligned with the findings of Kim (2013), who reported that young children perceived feeling good as happiness. Young children perceived “subjective well-being” as happiness rather than external conditions, which is similar to the views of positive psychologists (Kwon, 2008; Peterson, 2006; Seligman, 2002). Early childhood educators thus need to figure out when young children feel

happiness and provide them with support to promote their happiness based on what they have found out.

There were also many young children that said they had no idea of the meaning of happiness or mentioned their happy experiences, which indicates that young children have a difficult time explaining the abstract meaning of happiness and can only describe their specific happy experiences. It is essential to observe their lives and listen to their voices in their stories and drawings in order to understand the meanings of happiness that they perceive.

Young children thought they were happy when engaging in their favorite play, being together with their favorite person, having emotional supports, receiving presents, going to some special place, having their favorite dish, their body and mind felt comfortable, and achieving what they wanted through efforts in a descending order. First, they felt happiness when engaging in their favorite play, which is in line with the findings of Hwang, Kim and Tak (2013), reporting that young children felt happiness when playing. Activities such as play make young children happy. Play brings them fun and freedom beyond the limitations of daily life and enhances their capabilities (Fattore, Manson & Watson, 2009). Park (2000) reported that full happiness experienced during childhood through play would be the source of positive force throughout life. Play makes important learning instruments for young children (Isenberg, & Quisenberry, 2002). They said they were happy when engaging in their favorite play, which means that happy education and learning is possible. It is thus needed to create an environment in which young children can engage in enough play voluntarily and to carefully observe the happiness they experience during play.

Young children also said they were happy when being together with their loved ones such as families and friends, which supports the findings that young children experienced happiness in their relationships with their families, friends, and teachers (Chaplin, 2009; Kim, 2013; Thoilliez, 2011). It is thus imperative to provide them with a variety of experiences so that they can form positive relationships with families and friends and feel enough interest and affection through mutual exchanges with them to increased their happiness.

Young children said they felt happy when receiving emotional support such as affection, intimacy, and encouragement from their parents and teachers. People deal with a life crisis well when receiving a great deal of social and emotional support and have psychological well-being and positive thoughts when their negative emotions decline (Cohen & Wills, 1985;

Kook, 2001). Emotional support such as parental love influence happiness even into adulthood (Sillick & Schutte, 2006). The present study found that young children felt happiness when receiving love, attention, and support from others. Most young children recalled that they were happy when receiving emotional support from others rather than giving them to others. There is a need for educational activities to have them share happiness with others in mutually beneficial relationships so that their happiness can increase (Hong, Ra, Jang, Kim, & Jeun, 2013). Parents and teachers should express more love and interest in young children and encourage them to offer emotional support to others, thus helping them experience a high level of happiness.

Young children said they were happy when receiving presents. Lyubomirsky (2008) proposed the influences of circumstances, an external condition, as one of the elements of happiness. Young children associated happiness with external circumstances related to material, which is in line with the findings of Kim (2013), who reported that young children felt happiness through material things such as good toys and pretty clothes and supports the findings of Fattore, Manson and Watson (2009) reporting that material things and economic support were elements of happiness. However, the influence of circumstances due to "hedonic adaptation" was only 10% (Lyubomirsky, 2008), and a material and economic level no longer affects happiness beyond a certain point (Seligman, 2002; Vaillant, 2002), which highlights the need to help young children develop their talents and strengths through meaningful and valuable things rather than material conditions and have the right meanings and attitudes of happiness.

Young children said they were happy when visiting special places such as amusement parks, destinations of field trips, and travel destinations. They regarded places where they experienced self-directedness and felt satisfied through meaningful exchanges with others as happy places. This is similar to the Shin's (2013) findings that young children could experience happiness at places for outdoor adventure activities and exploring activities, places where they could share their feelings with others, and places where they could exchange with their peers. It is thus important to provide them with various activities and places in which they can meet their needs and demands, share their experiences with others, and feel satisfied.

Young children felt happiness when having their favorite food. Eating food not only meets the physiological and psychological needs, but also offers opportunities for communication

and solidarity (Kang, 2008; Weinstein, 2007). Young children met their basic need for food and got emotional satisfaction through food. They usually mentioned sweets such as cake and ice cream. Foods of high sugar content activate the secretion of serotonin called the happiness hormone (Hart, 2008). Young children knew that sweet foods cause physical changes such as the secretion of the happiness hormone and increased happiness through experiences.

Young children felt happy when their body and mind were comfortable. Among the basic human needs are the satisfaction of physical needs and psychological well-being (Maslow, 2009). They must be fulfilled first in order for a person to feel satisfied with life. Young children especially said they were happy when taking a break, which reflects their desire for resting as they feel exhausted due to excessive private education. They felt anxious when they had conflicts with their peers or when their parents had conflicts with each other, and they felt happy when those conflicts were resolved. Given the finding that parental conflicts caused high psychological anxiety in young children (Davies & Forman, 2002; Rubin, Burgess, Dwyer, & Hasting, 2003), harmonious relationships among the family members are very critical to the enhancement of happiness in young children. Considering that Physical and mental well-being are one of the fundamental conditions for happiness, it is important to coordinate the busy lives of modern young children and offer them proper breaks. It is also important to provide support for couples and their children in a time of psychological crisis.

Young children felt happiness in the process of making efforts to complete a task, such as a physical activity or exercise, and devoting themselves to it. Seligman (2002) reported that “engaged life” was one of the three conditions for happy life. His argument that people feel happy when taking part in and concentrating passionately to attain a goal supports the findings of the present study that young children felt happy when making personal achievements. There should be plans to help young children make personal achievements through voluntary attempts, practice, patience and efforts in order to promote their happiness. In addition, there were a small number of children that felt happy when having delinquent experiences such as bullying their friends, playing games on the computer, and skipping a day at the educational institution for young children. Given that childhood happiness influences even adulthood (Flouri, 2004), it is required to correct their wrong thoughts of happiness through desirable happiness education.

Young children found happiness in their lives and experiences instead of external

conditions. Happiness is a valuable personal capability conducive to the coexistence of individuals and society and can be developed as much as one likes, which makes it worthwhile to discuss happiness in the objectives and content of early childhood education (Lee 2009; Hong et al., 2013). The findings of the present study will offer useful information for planning and implementing educational environments, activities, programs, and special events to promote a happy life, happy family, and happy educational institution for young children.

The study makes the following proposals for further research. First, a significant number of children aged between three and four did not know the answer to the meaning of happiness in this research. However, considering these children answered the follow-up questions regarding happy situation, it seems rather difficulty in linguistic expressions than not knowing the concept of happiness. Therefore, a research tool should be developed assisting children to explain the meaning of happiness without difficulty. In addition, given that 40% of the children who did not know the meaning of happiness were age group of 3-4 year old, not to mention boys have shown a slightly higher rate than girls, future research on statistical significance regarding age and gender difference is necessary. Secondly, studies on happiness that young children experience at educational institutions will help us find support measures and develop programs for their happiness. Thirdly, qualitative research on the perceptions and experiences of happiness among young children growing up in various areas, cultures, and environments will promote the understanding of and support for happy life for more young children. Finally, it is recommended to develop, implement and establish high quality educational programs to promote happiness for young children.

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