



# Educating for Joy

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**T**he disciplinary fragmentation matches with the dangerous fragmentation of the human being, the body becoming separated from his emotions, separated from the intellect, which is separated from the spiritual mind. The most obvious consequence is the loss of the joy of learning, of teaching ... the joy of simply living. My thesis is that education can bring humans back to their true nature, which is joyful. Educating for the sake of joy is possible; many experiences exist that can be reproduced. This article will highlight those offered by a system known as “integral education”. But above all, what do we mean when we speak about “joy”?

**Keywords:** education, training, joy and happiness, educating for Joy.

## 1 A “nonsense” in a world in crisis: the Joy<sup>1</sup>

Every day experts analyze the world’s crisis in terms of their science: from the economic clashes to the environmental pollution and to the loss of ethical values, we are over-informed, aggressed, often driven to despair by various data, theories and predictions, mostly catastrophic, that scientists produce in order to alert the mankind and its planet. Logically, the time has come for humans to take refuge underground, to raise food reserves in the bunker or, worse, to prepare for a mass evacuation to other

planets ... My proposal here is not to succumb to such a pessimism, not to follow only the voice of the scientific reason (although necessary), but by a real shift, to take the opportunity [1] offered by the crisis in order to include in our lives a value forgotten by the modernity, that of joy. As a journey of hope, education has to rediscover its initiatory role in the evolution of humanity.

The school system is getting every day worse, and the reforms of the educational Western systems seem to be resistant to any innovation that takes into account the “existential” dimension of the individuals, the students and the teachers; such negligence could be one of the reasons for the present malaise. In addition to that, we might also consider the increasing fragmentation of the disciplines in the schools and universities today: from 50 specializations in 1950, we moved to 8000 in 2000 [2]. In these “towers of Babel” of the knowledge, the students learn to study the reality through a magnifying glass, analyzing the world from different disciplinary angles. Therefore, by focusing their minds on separate fields of the knowledge, they risk to interpret the reality as an “unstructured” set of puzzle’s pieces. The university in particular is heading for a subdivision and fragmentation of knowledge, which becomes more esoteric and anonymous [3].

The disciplinary fragmentation matches with the dangerous fragmentation of the human being, the body becoming separated from his emotions, separated from the intellect, which is separated from the spiritual mind. The most obvious consequence is the loss of the joy of learning, of teaching ... the joy of

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## 2 Joy and Happiness

In everyday language, the word joy is associated to an emotion, a transient state. Yet, its original meaning is anything but ephemeral as the distant Sanskrit etymology takes us to the root word *yuj* (the same as *yoga*), usually translated as “union of individual soul with the universal spirit. [4]” There is here a sense of reliance (connectedness) between the earthly and the heavenly, from the human to the divine and amongst men, which gives to the joy a sacred place that is lost in time, especially in the Western culture. When the connection is restored, the joy indirectly enters in all the aspects of life and creates the feeling of *happiness* (*joie de vivre*), a feeling of exaltation experienced by the totality of the consciousness, all the dimensions of the being. From a simple state of emotion, joy becomes a state of mind, a manifestation of the reliance of the individual soul with a higher dimension. Consequently, it pervades the whole being and connects itself from top to down, from inside out, the subject and the object, the self and the others.

It is important to make a semantic distinction between *joy* and *happiness* (often confused) in order to deeply explore our field, that of education. The word *happiness*, as a state of (mainly) material wellness, is very popular today. Over the past ten years, the researches on this subject are at the core of several disciplines and domains, concerning not only the health, the medicine and the psychology, but also the economic and social sciences, including therefore the science of education. In the modern psychology in particular, the research on this subject develops increasingly in the ‘80s. To quote a few names among the best known, Veenhoven, published in 1984 the *World Database of Happiness* where he measured the level of happiness world-wide (121 cases in 32 countries) [5]. At the same time Diener, another world-renowned psychologist, establishes some correlations between the welfare and the theoretical (abstract) progress made by individuals [6]. A lit-

tle later, Csikszentmihalyi [7] brings the research forward in defining happiness as a state which is independent from external conditions, but rather dependent on “how they are interpreted”, because they arise from the orientation of individuals to material or intangible interests [8]. We can also quote the Nobel laureate economist Daniel Kahneman, who first had the merit of bringing psychology and economics together with his concept of *National Well-Being Account* [9]. What is remarkable in his classification is the difference between the measures of well-being and those of economic performance, hence the conclusion that very little material comfort comes in the perception of happiness [10].

### 2.1 Neuroscience and Philosophy

The research on happiness concerns different disciplines and theories, such as the cognitive psychology or the neurosciences. For example, the theory of the two brains [11] point out that *the emotions* and *the feelings* of joy, [12] love and compassion are located in a specific area of the cerebral cortex, the same which is stimulated in a deep state of meditation and peace. This discovery, fundamental for the sciences of education, opens up to another level of reality, a peaceful state that can be achieved through methods like non-violence and peace education [13]. Therefore, a question maybe raised: does this sense of joy and the attitude to peace come from the same source of the human being?

Neuroscientists Beauregard and Damasio try to answer this specific question by focusing on the observation of more complex states of mind and emotions, such as the trance or the mystical experience of compassion, and achieve results that distant themselves from their predecessors. According to Beauregard (and his test case on Carmelite nuns in a state of meditation), there is no specific brain region that is activated during the mystical experience. In other words, there is no “God spot” in the brain [14]. For the purposes of this article we agree with Damasio [15] (related to the Spinoza’s immanence) when he affirms that, considering the capacity of the human being to produce, think and act on his emotions, the consciousness can spring from the meeting between emotions and the rational brain.

### 3 Philosophers of the Joy: from Spinoza to Sri Aurobindo

“Because it aims at something eternal and infinite, love fills the soul of pure joy, a joy free of sadness,” [16] says Spinoza (1632 - 1677), whose clear thought continues to inspire modern philosophers [17]. For him, philosophy is the love of truth and love is the truth of joy while its aim is to create an ethic of happiness and freedom. Spinoza gives to joy a central place, a “transition from a state of lesser perfection to a higher perfection,” [18] related to the fulfilment of the desire (*conatus*), which is the most powerful state for the human being. In his Ethics he describes joy as an *affect* (an emotion investing the whole body, object of the Spirit), as *Transitio* (because it is unstable, in becoming) and as *Love* (because a non-loving joy would stay ignorant). Joy is about, Spinoza says, “loving everything in the eternal necessity of the whole that is God,” through an ethic of love which is not the Plato’s *Eros*, but rather the *philia* of Aristotle and Epicurus, or the *agape* of Jesus or St. Paul. This brings us to the spiritual and religious traditions of humanity, while renouncing to the transcending character of the religions. For Christianity in particular, joy is a state of enlightenment that can be achieved only in a celestial dimension, the “Kingdom of Joy” where the eternal alliance between God and man is restored [19]. This confers a power to a higher reality, while according to the immanent visions of some, all reality is created by nature.

Equally in contrast with the transcendent vision, the materialist ideology brings back to the individual a complete freedom of action. From the perspective of the secular and positivist education, joy primarily rises from the freedom of learning (as the French movement “Education Nouvelle” reaffirms, for example) when the child is free to act, create, observe and to understand in working together with others. The principle of freedom has also influenced one of the few contemporary educators who has worked on the concept of joy at school, the French researcher George Snyders who sets up his approach on a materialistic vision. According to him, school is the theatre of the social change, a place where joy becomes “proportional to the efforts and the obligations” [20]. “We must struggle, hold on” [21] in order to study, for example, the masterpieces of literature; by this sacrifice, students will discover the joy of loving the style of writing and may thus

contribute to the progress of humanity.

#### 3.1 Ananda, the Divine Joy

So far, our exploratory journey has taken into account mainly the Western philosophical vision. In the East, which is non dualistic, the separation between being and the cosmos does not occur, and the link with the totality of reality continue to exist. In this regard, the Indian philosopher Sri Aurobindo (1872 - 1950) is an important reference because he establishes a bridge between spirituality and education. His concept of integral education is born of the experience of integral yoga, the *Purna Yoga*, which is based on *Ananda*, the divine joy.

In Sanskrit, the word *Ananda* means the joy and the radiation of *soukham*, the state of inner well-being, the highest spiritual experience “... which illuminates the present moment of bliss and is perpetuated in the following moment until its forms a continuum that could be called *joie de vivre*.” [22] It’s the *sat-chit-ananda*, the continuum “existence - awareness - bliss”, the “happiness of becoming”, the perfect expression of Lila, the “Game of the Lord” [23]. Subjacent to human nature, in ordinary life this truth is hidden: everything in the student’s work is thus to learn to live “inside” in order to awaken to the calm, joyful and powerful presence which is “in us, our Self more real”. Educator above all, Sri Aurobindo identifies in the attendance of art and poetry a way to approach this “delight of the universe” which is the true flavour of life. The final freedom will be acquired by the confrontation of “all the shocks of existence” and not by the withdrawal or a passive renunciation. Become neutral in contact with the pleasures and pain, the soul is thus led to an invariable state of rapture, the divine Joy.

The descent of spirituality in the matter is the sense of integral yoga and Mirra Alphassa, known as the “Mother” (1878 - 1973), will continue the task initiated by Sri Aurobindo, translating it into educational practices at the Ashram in Pondicherry. In her yoga, she describes the joy as immanent and transcendent at the same time, intrinsically linked to human nature, since “all existence is based on the joy of being and that without that joy of being there would be no life [24].” Here, the higher (transcendent) dimension is a fundamental aspect of the human being, living in the present (immanent) and therefore accessible to everybody through a process of continuous education. The reliance with this

joyous transcendence is possible without necessarily implying any religion or dogmatic path [25]. Recognize the joy in its dual nature of emotion and state, this is the task of the teacher.

## 4 Educating for Joy

Several happy experiences exist worldwide, in Eastern and Western schools; nevertheless I decided to cross the borders of Europe, looking for the source of “integral education”. In this paper I will limit myself to one example (among others who are also relevant) as a possible response for educating to joy. My assumption is that integral education through a transdisciplinary approach is one of essential path to inner Joy. The case studied by my research in India from 2006 to 2008 [26] is the “Free Progress”, which was created in 1960 in Pondicherry at the Sri Aurobindo International Center of Education (SAICE), currently being reintroduced in the modern multicultural schools of Auroville [27].

The educational system of “Free Progress” is still considered as one of the most original concept in terms of experimentation, based on the following principles:

- education has the task of guiding the individual in the exploration of self- discovering;
- the growth of awareness and consciousness is proposed to be the unique way for humanity to go beyond the current crisis which arose from an imbalance between a disproportionate material progress and an inadequate spiritual progress;
- the most important issue of human existence is ontological, because it concerns the ultimate aim of life.

With reference to the last principle, the notion of integral approach is intended to develop all the dimensions and aspects of the human being: the physical, the vital, the mental, the emotional and the spiritual.

### 4.1 The “Free Progress”

The “Free Progress” experienced a new pedagogy which was free from tests and exams in order to create an atmosphere through joyful learning [28]. The system was called “free”, because students would be given the choice to study individually with a teacher

or in a group, and choose their own subjects, while they can “progress” toward the highest expression of their inner power and knowledge. The study subjects and topics were selected according to their own interests, under the guidance of the teacher. Here the teacher embodies the role of “the one who dispels the darkness” (in Sanskrit *Guru*), in an attitude defined as being close and distant. In the traditional and experimental school of the Ashram, the “Free Progress” system is currently available from the higher secondary level students, while in Auroville some schools experience it right from the elementary grade. My investigation led me to note the dramatic positive impact of such pedagogy on students of all ages: the sooner they are free to move towards their inner interests, the more they will be able to build a confident personality, curious and open to the world. “Freedom means being able to choose. Choice means that everything is proposed and that the student decides what its nature needs for her/his progress” [29]. Therefore, it is not necessary in such context for the teacher to “pre - guide the student or require him to converge to a curriculum that does not fit his own interests.” as Sri Aurobindo affirmed [30].

The common element in such schools is the sense of wellness and the joy which are visible in the luminous eyes of the children. Students and teachers agree: “the basic culture of this method is about guiding the child to the joy of learning. It is far from any form of punishment, or the desire to get good grades, or to be “the first”. It is about learning for the joy of learning” [31]. By observing the behavioural pattern in the classroom, we can affirm that the “Free Progress” is an educational process which gives joy and satisfaction both to the student and the teacher. Some questions arise at this stage: would it be possible to achieve such a goal in our (Western) schools? And if the answer is yes, by what means? What should be the attitude to assume in the relationship between teacher and student, a fundamental basis for every educational method?

## 5 A Path for Innovation

Few preliminary indicators are needed here in order to start a process of innovation in our schools as well. The first one defines the learning path as an experience of the indefinite and the infinite, which is about “to allow the gifts of universe to enter in ourselves” [32] in a way that is not fixed beforehand, but

also implies the possibility of making mistakes, [33] incorporating uncertainty and complexity, “knowing through the unknown” [34]. The subject’s participation, defined as the binomial partnership “teacher / student”, founds the basis for this transdisciplinary methodology. Both of them are involved in the learning process, assuming that:

- nothing can be taught (the teacher is a guide, he learns with his students);
- the student is not a recipient to fill in, he has his own interests, his desires, which require to be recognized and promoted at any age;
- the spiritual dimension, as well as the mental and physical, has its place in the educational process and must be integrated into an approach that goes beyond religions. This means that the existential questions asked from the students, even the younger, must be listened;
- the time, with its rhythms, has an educational value in itself, where the slow and rapid growth is allowed.



Figure 1: Fractal.

This will naturally lead to a pedagogy that can, in an unprecedented way, be based on a new concept of education and learning process, and that can be described as fractal [35]. Concerning the learning process in particular, the fractal way of teaching will no longer follow a succession of linear and rigid

steps, but as a system complete in itself, a smooth and uninterrupted concentric spiral (as the fractal image shown in Figure 1). According to this method, the teacher will introduce the students to a general overview of the new program in order to make them sensitive to its richness and complexity. In this manner students will be able to establish a connection with the rest of the existing disciplines and further deepen the individual interest by a set of specific modules, following a program designed for each one. For this pedagogy to become “fractal”, these modules must reflect the entire program, as well as the holographic vision (in which every detail contains the vision of the whole).

### 5.1 The Joy, “emotion – guiding thread”

What happens to the role of the joy in this journey? We might ask at this point. It will serve as our pathfinder, an “emotion – as the guiding thread”. Even when ephemeral, this educational process can work with the emotion of joy, although, we leave room for its reception and allow it to follow. This is the first task for the master, a task which he can do by following the main thread of joy in himself, while he will recognize such an emotion as the expression of emotional capital defined in a variety of colours. But we must be careful, because joy contains also suffering, so it is “integral”. The state of joy is a “founding element”, “independent,” and “paradoxical” as Nicolas Go states, it can arise from anywhere, even in dramatic situations. Thus, “a joyful person is neither essentially exuberant nor over enthusiastic, and also he never detracts from the joy, including - indeed, we should say – even when in grief and sorrow, and even when in the very heart of barbarism” [36].

At this stage, we could imagine an ideal new path in education, where the presence of a “joy – emotion” could be the starting point toward a “Joy – state of mind”. The central moment of this process is represented by the relationship between the teacher and the student which, based on mutual respect, which will be developed in four main steps:

1. Acknowledging
2. Resonating
3. Revealing
4. Joy as awakening

### **1) Acknowledging in order to reveal (“entering in oneself while opening to the other”)**

To be emotionally touched means to be open to “move inside” and change our inner attitude. To arrive at this, we should return to the school of emotional intelligence,[37] to that of the intelligence of the heart, [38] while the heart is the only place where the necessary link with joy can be restored. We must first recognize the role of “joy – emotion” in the fluidity of the learning process, because it plays on the learner’s abilities to memorize, retain information, concentrate and focus the attention. The master as well as the student should first recognize it in themselves: it would mean teaching and communicating with joy and pleasure. This reminds us of the indispensable place of Eros in education, an ensemble of desires, pleasures and love of transmitting knowledge to the students, which will enable us to “overcome the enjoyment attached to power, for the sake of the fulfilment of the joy of giving as Edgar Morin says [39 ].

Then there will be the joy of acknowledging when students, for example, will be in contact with the Arts (Sri Aurobindo, Georges Snyder, Nicolas Go, etc.). They will create their own masterpiece (Steiner) or they will be amazed by Nature (Ecole Nouvelle, constructivism, etc.); or moved by sharing with others (education for peace, conflict prevention). In this triangle between the attitude, the mastery of the subject and the discipline, the teacher will have to adopt a transpersonal posture, which is “the domain of Art, if not as much as that of Science” [40]. During this initial phase, he will spot out the attitudes of students, their tendencies, passions, difficulties, mistakes, but without judging or evaluating them in close grids. One must recognize in order to know: the progress through acquiring knowledge will reveal itself in the educational process and, in case when an assessment (without giving notes!) is necessary, it could be mutually realized in this dialogue between students and teacher.

Often remaining in the background, while engaged in his own activities in the classroom (of the primary school), the task of the master would be to stimulate curiosity in the students: he is also reading, writing or painting and using other materials. While letting himself being guided and he will rely on his own intuition, according to an inspiration comparable to the state of enlightenment of the artists [Ramirez [41]. The sense of perception also plays a role as

an important tool in this process, as the manas of Indian psychology, centralizing and coordinating actions of mind, such as telepathy, clairvoyance, listening capacity and intuition. These tools enable the master to awaken the others, according to the concept of teacher’s role described also by Krishna-murti. Acknowledging in order to reveal to oneself and opening to others is founded on the attitude of seeing, observing, not judging, and encouraging the awakening of curiosity.

### **2) Resonating (“to hear with the ear of the other”)**

Resonance is a phenomenon to be understood as not only physical hearing, but also intellectual, emotional, that pervades the mind and it must be upheld in the entire being. Thanks to this resonance, the teacher will understand if the activity chosen by the student experience any joy. This implies that, to put it in the words of professors of the Free Progress school, the teacher is first connected to his own “presence”, in tune with himself, and that he is fully aware about his own truth before he is able to hear the other, “hearing with the ear of another [42]”.

Empathy, a value on which all the methods of education for peace and non- violence, are based, is the key to understanding what other people experience and establishing harmonious relations. It demands that one listens to oneself with one’s entire being, in full spirit, which requires emptying one’s mind. When this condition is met, one succeeds in capturing directly what appears before oneself, that which can never be heard by the ear or understood by the mind. When one connects to this sensation it causes joy, a joy which is no more of the realm of emotions but that of the being itself. It is the joy which “can be conceived and experienced in the present. (...) It is a resonance, an ethic, the source of all creation .... ” [43].

### **3) Revealing**

At this stage, a closer relationship could be established with the student to understand if the activities in which he is engaged, reveal his true nature. It is for this reason that the previous step – that of resonance - is fundamental: the teacher will use here not only his capacity as a psychologist and educationalist, but he will apply also his intuition. Thus, he will not encourage his students to choose activities that

peremptory or permanent, but he will rather lead the students' curiosity towards creative activities. The joy one experiences that causes self-discovery, the teacher will never forget to incorporate not only the successes but also their difficulties. These difficulties are not considered as failures, but seen as challenges during their educational growth.

If there is no joy for learning, doing or studying, this will reflect immediately in the student's behaviour and the teacher will then intervene the process to discuss with the students. Otherwise, if the students feel that they are in resonance with their real nature, the joy will automatically reflect. The joy as the guiding emotion is not a superficial one, it is not an excitement but rather an appeasing force.

#### 4) Joy as Awakening

For the master to rediscover his role as a consciousness raiser, the first step would be to raise his own consciousness. In a perpetual mood of creation, he will be a seeker of truth, not necessarily a perfect yogi, but a being that never hides from himself, as mentioned by Auroville teachers. In this education system, acts are as important as their as their behaviour, because, "being an educator, it is finally showing the way by what we do, what one is" [44]. This signifies that one remains in the attitude of humbleness, and that "one knows that one does not know." He knows that while he discovers himself, he is also in the learning process, as Jacotot, the "ignorant Master" of Jacques Rancière [45]. Far from being trivial, this is about a radical change in the approach to teaching which can transform our way of thinking not only about the education but also about the world.

The aim is to gradually reveal the joy, it must be stimulated through activities that involve all dimensions of being: the physical body (through relaxation and movement in consciousness), the mental being (by the concentration, the stimulation of imagination and creativity) the spiritual being (by the opening of the heart, silence of mind and meditation). It is a journey discovering of the higher Self that "educating for joy" offers, which corresponds more to the choice of "secular spirituality" (Barbier, Compte Sponville), rather than a religious one. This will be about "a practice of wisdom which goes beyond reason, and accomplishes itself in Art, Laughter and in the Sacred, and questions itself on the possibility

of a singular joy" as reflected in the wonderful words of Nicolas Go [46]. It is the joy that emerges from the realm of emotions and becomes aspiration of the being to unite with the Absolute.

Different from the "joy – emotion", the "Joy – state of mind" will be recognized from its durability and its autonomy, independent from external causes that determine it. It is for teachers and students, to open up to the inner dimension that is broader than the domain of psychology, because it contains the whole, in the process of awakening. The Joy of Awakening is the ultimate aim of education: its nature is transcendent and immanent at the same time, becoming thus *trans-immanent*. It is the integral part of the living, of the body, of the matter, of the reality and it travels not only through all these and goes beyond the Nature, but also surpasses the boundaries, while connecting to the wider a wider dimension.

Guided by the transdisciplinary approach, we could now recognize the nature of the subject in its "joyous essence", non-fragmented, the One with the Whole. The Joy finally finds its original meaning, a union between individuals and also between the individual and the dimension of the Absolute. The word education rediscovers its lost meaning, it "leads", it "nourishes", and it "brings out" what is best in us. Applied through participatory processes in schools, with the engaged involvement of all parents and teachers, "educating for joy" will have the task to guide present and future generations. It will highlight what they conceal most valuable in their being, the joy of living life fully.

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- [35] Therefore, Professor Joel de Rosnay evoked the image in a 1996 interview to the magazine *Vers l’Education Nouvelle* (Towards New Education), No. 477-478, where he first mentioned the concept of “fractal education”. The father of the fractal is the mathematician Benoit Mandelbrot who described the irregular structures created by following specific rules, in a homothetic process. In the philosophical field, the program FractalKey developed by Aurosoorya, also uses the image of the fractal ([www.aurosoorya.com](http://www.aurosoorya.com) and [www.fractalkey.com](http://www.fractalkey.com), accessed: November, 14, 2012).
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