

## Education and Happiness

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### 摘要

不快樂，何以堪？今日的學子花上近二十年的光景求學，如果不能換來快樂，那麼佔取了他生命中那麼多年的教育又有什麼價值？筆者認為教育主要的價值應在於解放個人的思想和開拓他的視野，使他變成一個豁達開朗、有思想有感情的人道主義者。

I agree with my economist friend Prof. Yew Kwang Ng, a noted welfare economist, that happiness should really be the ends of all human activities and endeavours, be they consumption, investment, or otherwise (see his forthcoming article on happiness in *Pacific Economic Review*). Education is the most important activity in the life of the modern man, to the extent that formal education easily accounts for 19 years of his life: with 3 years in pre-school education, 6 years in the primary school, 7 years in the secondary school, and 3 years in the university. Education in many countries may be the biggest or the second biggest item of public spending. Many parents want to give their children the best education that they can afford, and the cost of providing such education may easily become the biggest single item of spending for the family after the cost of shelter. If education does not buy happiness, what is it for?

Yet happiness should not be identified with utility, or what I call “utilitarian utility.” One can, of course, define utility in any way one wants, and one could use utility as a synonym for happiness. But consider the utility afforded by the great means of transport that we have today. We can travel to New York in fifteen hours. We can use high-speed elevators to climb fifty stories in hardly more than twenty seconds. These are amazing achievements. But we cannot say therefore that the modern man is therefore happier than his ancestors who have to take two months going to New York or two minutes climbing seven stories. The wonderful gadgets that we have today can allow us to do much more than before, but if what we do does not make us happy, then notwithstanding the undoubted utility of these gadgets, we make little progress in happiness.

Some people say that education equips us with skills and knowledge. With skills and knowledge we can stay competitive. If we are competitive we can outperform our competitors and we can make a buck. This is true. But making a buck does not necessarily bring happiness. Without decrying the need to make a buck and to be equipped with knowledge and job skills, education must not merely have such a narrow objective.

Some people say that education makes us into responsible citizens and into upright people. But does learning to be responsible and upright bring utility? Does learning to be responsible and upright bring happiness?

What does responsibility and being “upright” mean? Does it mean doing things that other people want? Can it mean doing things that we want?

Education must not be the beginning of enslavement. Too many people are “educated” but actually enslaved. Enslavement only destroys happiness. That is why we see young students committing suicide and leading a very empty, unhappy life.

Education must be liberating. Education must not enslave. That is why all education must be liberal education (we call it liberal arts education at Lingnan University).

The hallmark of liberal education is BRIGHT, and being BRIGHT brings happiness and certainly a rich and satisfying life.

B is to be bold. To be bold is to be ready to overcome limits that we often set for ourselves but which may not actually exist. To be bold makes us realize that life can offer much more than we think is possible.

R is to be responsible. To be responsible is to take charge of our own lives. We make our own choices and readily take the consequences of our choices. We try our best to be independent, to live on our own toil, to make decisions based on our knowledge of the consequences. We know the logic of give and take, and will not run away from our consequences.

I is to be inquisitive. To be inquisitive is to admit our lack of knowledge and therefore humbly seek the truth.

G is to be a generalist. To be a generalist is to be open-minded and to learn about different aspects of the world.

H is to be a humanist. To be a humanist is to be concerned about other human beings living on the same planet. Humanists are happy because to be humanistic is a natural instinct that is within all of us.

T is to be tolerant. To be tolerant is to respect the traditions and beliefs of other cultures and to respect other peoples’ choices. This way we can live harmoniously. Living harmoniously makes us happier.

I pray that Lingnan students will be up to the test and will be BRIGHT. I am sure many of them already are BRIGHT. But they certainly can be even BRIGHTer and BRIGHTer still.