

Chapter 8

Positive Emotions in Children: Current Research and Future Directions

Laura Oros

8.1 Introduction

Emotions form a dynamic and complex network of cognitive evaluations, subjective experiences, physiological changes, bodily expressions, and behavioral tendencies that are more or less specific to each situation (Fredrickson & Levenson, 1998; Frijda, Manstead, & Bem, 2000). The valence of positive emotions is pleasant, and these emotions are associated with beneficial cognitive, physiological, and behavioral changes (Fredrickson, 2002; Lucas, Diener, & Larsen, 2003; Seligman, 2005). Correlational and experimental studies have found that frequently experiencing emotions such as happiness, joy, interest, serenity, sympathy, and gratitude increases resilience and strengthens certain abilities at different developmental stages (Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2008; Cohen, Doyle, Turner, Alper, & Skoner, 2003; Consedine, Magai, & King, 2004; Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005; Froh, Yurkewicz, & Kashdan, 2008; Johnson, Waugh, & Fredrickson, 2010; Ren, Hu, Zhang, & Huang, 2010; Vaish, Carpenter, & Tomasello, 2009; Wood, Maltby, Gillett, Linley, & Joseph, 2008).

However, it is important to note that positive emotional experiences do not render individuals invulnerable to illness, interpersonal problems, or daily challenges. Instead, by fostering realistic approaches to situations and enhancing problem-solving capabilities, these experiences promote the development and strengthening of resources and abilities that are associated with positive outcomes and successful adaptation to the environment.

L. Oros (✉)

Institute of Scientific Research, Universidad de la Cuenca del Plata,
National Council of Scientific and Technical Research (CONICET),
Misiones, Argentina

Research Department, Instituto Superior
Adventista de Misiones, Misiones, Argentina
e-mail: lauraoros@gmail.com

Although studies of positive emotions have been relatively rare in Latin America, there have been attempts to operationalize and study positive emotions in Ecuador, Brazil, Venezuela, Bolivia, Peru, Chile, and Argentina. In Latin America, positive emotions and psychological well-being/happiness have primarily been studied in adolescents and adults in relation to sociocultural and economic variables (Alves de Souza & Ferreira Dela Coleta, 2009; Lacerda Teixeira Pires & Molero Alonso, 2008; Marín Romo, 2009; Reyes-García et al., 2010; Vera Noriega, Laborín Álvarez, Córdova Moreno, & Parra Armenta, 2007); resilience and protective factors (Lillo, 2006; Mustaca, Kamenetzky, & Vera-Villaruel, 2010; Salgado Levano, 2009); health and disease processes (Porro-Conforti & Andrés, 2011); academic settings (Dela Coleta & Ferreira Dela Coleta, 2006, 2007; Mascarenhas & Peluso, 2011; Trógolo & Medrano, 2011); family variables (Meier & Oros, 2012); personality (Regner, 2009a); and social behaviors (de la Vega & Oros, 2013; Regner, 2009b, 2011; Regner & Vignale, 2011), among others.

In the past 10 years, for example, there have been many studies of positive emotions and positive psychology in Argentina (Castro Solano, 2011a; Mariñelarena-Dondena & Klappenbach, 2009). This research has found that positive emotions predict assertive behaviors and reduce aggressive responses (de la Vega & Oros, 2013); enhance the ability to cope with threats (Lillo, 2006; Regner, 2009a, 2009b); make valuable contributions to psychotherapy and education (Arias, Sabatini, & Soliveres, 2011; Camacho, 2005; Chazenbalk, 2005; Moyano, 2011); and are positively related to subjective well-being (Cingolani & Méndez Quiñonez, 2007). These studies have primarily focused on adolescents and adults rather than children. The few studies of children tend to be doctoral theses and unpublished manuscripts.

Because the cognitive, affective, social, and motivational processes that lead to later health or vulnerability emerge during childhood, it is worthwhile to examine the role of positive emotions during this developmental stage. This chapter reviews Latin American studies that have investigated how positive emotions are related to other variables and proposed models for assessing and promoting these emotions.

8.2 Assessing Children's Positive Emotions

The comprehensive measurement of the complex phenomenon of emotion requires multiple methods to capture subjective aspects such as emotional experience, manifest aspects such as emotional expression, and physiological aspects, among other things. These methods include self-reports (e.g., questionnaires or pictorial scales), observers' reports (e.g., parents, teachers, or classmates), measures of facial expression (e.g., movement of facial muscles), and physiological measurements (e.g., blood pressure, body temperature, or increased heart rate; Lucas et al., 2003). Combining methods makes it possible to overcome the limitations associated with a particular method.

An appropriate and frequently employed measure of subjective emotional experience is self-report. Although this type of instrument is subject to distortion, it exhibits psychological and methodological value (Garrido Gutiérrez, 2000).

In general, the assessment of positive emotions has focused on the adult population, and few scales have been developed for children. In Latin America, the following

instruments have been developed to evaluate positive affect in adults: the Positive Emotion Scale (Schmidt, 2008); the Lima Happiness Scale (Alarcón, 2006) and its adaptation for elderly adults in Venezuela (Arraga Barrios & Sánchez Villarroel, 2010); an instrument that evaluates well-being based on three routes to happiness (Castro Solano, 2011b); the Humor Styles Questionnaire (Lillo, 2006); the Positive Emotions Questionnaire (Regner, 2009a, 2009b); the Subjective Well-being Scale for Brazilian Adults (Albuquerque & Tróccoli, 2004); and the Psychological Well-being Questionnaire (*Bienestar Psicológico* – BIEPS) based on the Ryff model (Castro Solano, Brenlla, & Casullo, 2002; Casullo & Castro Solano, 2000). Some of these scales can be used with adolescents, and all exhibit good psychometric properties.

The following scales, which exhibit reliability and validity, are available for assessing the positive emotions of sympathy, serenity, joy, gratitude, and personal satisfaction in children in Argentina.

The Sympathy Scale (Oros, 2006) measures children's perception of their ability to appreciate others' emotions and their interest in others' well-being. It consists of a 3-point Likert scale that can be administered to 6- to 7-year-old children.

The Child Serenity Scale (*Escala de Serenidad Infantil* – ESI; Oros, 2011a) is a brief scale based on external raters' assessment that can be used to complement other measures. This six-item Likert scale has three responses (*yes, more or less, and no*), and provides information regarding children's ability to regulate emotion and their responses to stressful events. The scale is particularly useful for obtaining information for younger children who have not yet learned to read or write. It is also suitable for use in classrooms in which instructors must provide information regarding large groups of students. Although it might seem difficult for external observers to assess children's subjective experience of positive emotions, research has found a high correlation between observers' judgments and self-reports (Lucas et al., 2003).

The Visual Analogue of Joy Scale (Oros, 2008a), which was designed for younger children with limited language abilities, has also been found to be appropriate for school-aged children (Giqueaux & Oros, 2008). Response options for this Likert scale use attractively shaped and colorful images to capture the attention of younger children. The scale responses consist of a series of drawings of children's facial expressions that are ranked along the joy-sadness dimension, and children are instructed to indicate the expression that best reflects their emotional state. There are separate versions for girls and boys. This alternative scale is appropriate for children who have difficulty understanding the words in a questionnaire and for younger children with limited attentional abilities. Greco (2010) has contributed to this scale by adding questions to explore attributions and behaviors linked to the emotional experience of joy and happiness.

The Gratitude Questionnaire (Cuello & Oros, 2011), which was designed for 10- to 13-year-old children, evaluates children's ability to recognize that another person wants to help him or her, express appreciation through thanks, and motivation to return favors that they have received. In this 16-item self-report instrument, the scale responses (*yes, sometimes, and no*) indicate the extent to which each item is consistent with the child's emotional experience.

Oros (2014) developed a Positive Emotions Questionnaire for 8- to 12-year-old children in Argentina (see Table 8.1). This 23-item Likert-type questionnaire evaluates joy, serenity, sympathy, gratitude, and personal satisfaction. The scale provides a global positive emotion score as well as scores for each emotion. Scale reliability is satisfactory, with acceptable Cronbach's alpha coefficients for global positive emotion ($\alpha=0.90$); joy ($\alpha=0.86$); serenity ($\alpha=0.75$); personal satisfaction ($\alpha=0.71$); gratitude ($\alpha=0.88$); and sympathy ($\alpha=0.64$).

Table 8.1 Children's positive emotions questionnaire (Oros, 2012)

Please respond to the statements below by marking an X to indicate your response: *Yes, More or less, or No*. There are no right or wrong answers, but it is important to be honest. Thank you very much!

	Yes	More	No
	or less		
1. I am a happy person [Soy una persona alegre]			
2. I am grateful to people for what they do for me [Estoy agradecido/a con varias personas por lo que hacen por mí]			
3. Most days of the week I feel calm [La mayor parte de los días me siento en paz]			
4. I appreciate it when others help me [Valoro cuando los demás me ayudan]			
5. I tend to be a calm person [Soy bastante tranquilo/a]			
6. I feel very sad when I see someone get hurt [Me pongo muy mal si veo que alguien se lastima]			
7. If I see a boy or girl cry, I feel like crying too [Si veo llorar a un/a nene/a me dan ganas de llorar a mi también]			
8. I love myself very much [Me quiero mucho a mí mismo]			
9. I can solve my problems without getting upset [Soluciono mis problemas con mucha tranquilidad]			
10. I like to return favors [Me gusta devolver favores]			
11. When someone is alone and bored, I want to go over and play with him [Cuando alguien está solo y aburrido me dan ganas de acercarme y jugar con él/ella]			
12. I have a lot of fun doing the things I do [Me divierto mucho con las cosas que hago]			
13. I am very happy [Soy muy feliz]			
14. I almost always feel calm and relaxed [Casi siempre estoy relajado/a]			
15. Whenever I can, I return the favors I receive [Siempre que puedo, devuelvo los favores que recibo]			
16. I feel that I am valuable person [Siento que soy muy valioso/a]			
17. Even when I have problems, I can stay calm [Aunque tenga problemas, igual mantengo la calma]			
18. I almost always have a good time [Casi siempre la paso bien]			
19. I don't get too upset when I can't do something I want to do [Me quedo tranquilo/a aunque no pueda hacer lo que me gusta]			
20. I feel that I am important [Siento que soy importante]			
21. I feel like hugging or comforting someone who is crying [Si alguien está llorando me dan ganas de abrazarlo o consolarlo]			
22. I like to say thank-you to people [Me gusta agradecerle a la gente]			
23. I'm almost always in a good mood [Casi siempre estoy contento/a]			

The Positive Affect and Negative Affect Schedule – Child version (PANAS-C) provides another instrument to assess children’s positive affect that has been validated in Argentina (Schulz de Begle, Lemos, & Richaud de Minzi, 2009). This instrument provides independent measures of positive and negative affect based on the original scale for adults developed by Watson, Clark, and Tellegen (1988) and adapted for children by Laurent et al. (1999).

Giacomoni and Hutz (2008) developed a scale that evaluated life satisfaction in 7- to 12-year-old children. The 6-factor, 50-item Likert scale assesses life satisfaction in the areas of Self, Self-Other Comparisons, Nonviolence, Family, Friendship, and School; responses to the 5-point scale assess the extent to which each item is consistent with the child’s emotional experience.

All of the above scales exhibit good psychometric properties and are consistent with existing theoretical models. However, it should be noted that although self-report measures are frequently used, responses to these instruments might be influenced by factors such as social desirability, a tendency to select response extremes, memory, and motivation. Moreover, because some aspects of emotional experiences might not be accessible to consciousness, information from self-report measures should be combined with information from other methods (Garrido Gutiérrez, 2000).

8.3 Correlates of Positive Emotions in Childhood

8.3.1 *Positive Emotions and Social Behaviors*

Positive emotions might enhance the social interactions of children who frequently experience serenity, sympathy, or happiness. In Argentina, most studies investigating the contribution of positive emotions to children’s lives have focused on high-impact factors such as prosocial conduct, aggressive behavior, assertive behavior, and peer acceptance and rejection. Findings have indicated that positive emotions have a salogenic function during childhood.

Isen (2000, 2001) found that positive affect elicited flexible and creative thought patterns that facilitated the identification of a broader range of behavioral options for a particular situation. Based on these findings, Richaud de Minzi and Oros (2009) investigated the extent to which school-age children who frequently experienced positive emotions exhibited greater cognitive flexibility in generating solutions to peer interaction problems. They found that experiencing sympathy and serenity reduced the likelihood of aggressive solutions and that serenity enhanced assertive responses.

These findings were confirmed by de la Vega and Oros (2013), who examined the influence of sympathy and gratitude on social behavior in children and 14- to 18-year-old adolescents. They found that, as sympathy and gratitude increased,

assertive behaviors increased and aggressive behaviors diminished. However, passive social behaviors (e.g., the inability to express desires, opinions and preferences, defeatist attitudes, and avoidance behaviors) were not influenced by these emotions.

Positive emotionality is also associated with prosocial behaviors in children in Argentina. Hendrie and Lemos (2011) investigated the extent to which sympathy was associated with prosocial behavior in 6- to 7-year-old children. Assessment of prosocial behavior was based on children's self-reports and teachers' observations. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) found that both child and teacher evaluations were significantly higher for children with higher levels of sympathy and that the sympathy scale dimensions of appreciating others' emotions and tendency to help were both significant, although (as predicted) the latter exhibited a stronger effect.

Serenity is another positive emotion that has been associated with prosocial behaviors in childhood. Cuello and Oros (2012) examined the influence of this emotion on prosocial and aggressive behaviors in 9- to 13-year-old children. They found that serenity was associated with prosocial behaviors. Children who were calmer were more likely to engage in positive behaviors (e.g., consoling a sad person, helping others with chores, lending toys, sharing candy, and visiting friends). Serenity also appeared to reduce children's physical and verbal aggressiveness. Calmer children were less likely to kick, hit, bite or push others and less likely to engage in lying, mockery or insults.

Giqueaux and Oros (2008) tested the hypothesis that children with higher positive emotionality would be more likely to display appropriate social behaviors and less likely to be rejected by peers than children with lower positive emotionality in a sample of 11- to 15-year-old children. They found that, although the positive emotions of joy and sympathy did not significantly contribute to peer acceptance, they were associated with lower levels of peer rejection. Peers perceived children who were happy and pleasant rather than sad as friendly, sociable, trustworthy, and good company.

In summary, experiencing positive emotions appears to enhance children's social lives by reducing aggressive behavior, facilitating assertive responses to interpersonal problems, enhancing prosocial behaviors, and reducing the risk of social rejection.

8.3.2 Positive Emotions and Coping with Stress

According to Fredrickson (2005), positive emotions promote the ability to establish and strengthen psychological resources for coping with stress. Richaud de Minzi and Oros (2009) tested this hypothesis in a sample of 8- to 11-year-old children in Argentina. Although five positive emotions (joy, personal satisfaction, gratitude, serenity, and sympathy) were assessed, only sympathy predicted successful

stress management. More empathetic children exhibited a greater tendency to positively reinterpret stressful situations, seek outside help to solve a problem, obtain emotional support, and effectively resolve problematic situations. Higher levels of sympathy also reduced the likelihood of disruptive behaviors associated with the loss of emotional control (e.g., hitting, crying, shouting, throwing things, and other violent behaviors), which supported earlier findings that sympathy reduces aggressive behavior.

Oros (2012) found that personal satisfaction also significantly predicted the ability to cope with stress. Children who expressed greater satisfaction with themselves and were proud of their achievements and abilities exhibited higher levels of effective problem solving, were more likely to seek help, and displayed less helplessness.

Serenity is another positive emotion that has been associated with children's stress management abilities. An experimental study (Oros, 2008b) demonstrated that training in physical and mental relaxation techniques promoted serenity and significantly reduced disruptive behaviors linked to stress (e.g., hitting and punching), reduced helplessness, and fostered adaptive responses to stressful interpersonal situations.

These results indicate that children with positive emotionality display cognitive and behavioral patterns that diminish stress and/or resolve conflict in appropriate ways.

8.3.3 Positive Emotions and Family Context

The quality of parent-child interactions has a significant impact on children's mental health because the emotional bond between parents and children can facilitate or hinder children's emotional development (Kerns, Abraham, Schlegelmilch, & Morgan, 2007; Richaud de Minzi, 2010; Sroufe, 2000).

Two unpublished studies have found that the development and expression of positive emotions in childhood was primarily influenced by children's attachment to their parents. Greco (2010) found that 7- to 8-year-old children's joy was significantly associated with their attachment to their mothers. Securely attached children with mothers who were sensitive and responsive displayed more happiness than insecurely attached children whose mothers were less responsive to their needs. These findings confirm the effect of maternal behavior on children's positive emotional development.

Another study of children and adolescents revealed that certain child-rearing practices interfere with children's expression of positive emotions (Meier & Oros, 2012); children with mothers who exhibited a pathological level of control in relationships displayed significantly lower levels of calmness, life satisfaction, and gratitude. The experience of gratitude in children and adolescence was also lower in individuals whose mothers exhibited a highly permissive parenting style. The combination of pathological control, rejection, and father's permissiveness had negative impact on children's positive emotional experience, particularly with regard to calmness.

Two earlier studies demonstrated that family life strongly affects children's experience of happiness and gratitude. Oros and Greco (2009) investigated the most common sources of happiness in 6- to 11-year-old children and found that they attributed happiness to features of their immediate family environment, in particular feelings of being protected, cared for, and loved. Similarly, Oros and Schulz (2010) found that 8- to 10-year-old children were primarily grateful for having a family, siblings, and/or grandparents.

8.3.4 Positive Emotions and Sociodemographic Characteristics

8.3.4.1 Socioeconomic Differences

Oros and Greco (2009) noted that, although both middle-class and working-class children exhibited high levels of joy, there were significant differences between two groups that favored middle-class children. However, it was not possible to identify the source of this difference because many factors are related to positive moods. Some of these are shared among different socioeconomic groups, while others (e.g., strong family bonds, available resources, and good nutrition) are more likely to occur in environments unaffected by poverty (Greco, Ison, & Oros, 2011; Oros & Greco, 2009). The authors also found qualitative differences between the groups in the sources of children's happiness, although these differences were not as marked.

Oros and Schulz (2010) found differences between middle-class and at-risk children in attributions of gratitude. At-risk children were more likely to value material goods such as toys and school supplies, basic necessities such as food and parental employment, the ability to go to school, the ability to play, parental indulgence or the ability to make their own decisions, and prosocial behaviors such as assistance and favors (whether given or received). Although these differences were modest, middle-class children were more likely to value relationships with family members and friends as well as pets.

8.3.4.2 Gender Differences

Studies of children in Argentina indicate that girls tend to be more sympathetic (Giqueaux, 2009; Hendrie & Lemos, 2011; Oros, 2010) and happier than boys (Giqueaux, 2009; Oros, 2010). However, the evidence is less consistent with respect to serenity. Oros found that girls scored higher on this factor while Cuello and Oros (2012) found similar levels of serenity in boys and girls. These inconsistencies might be due to age disparities in the study samples (7- to 11-year-olds and 9- to 13-year-olds, respectively) or to methodological differences. The former study measured children's serenity using teacher reports while the latter study used self-report. Previous research has found significant gender differences in socioemotional variables (e.g., prosociality) for data from external informants but not for self-report data, indicating that these differences deserve further study.

Oros and Greco (2009) and Oros and Schulz (2010) found that gender differences in attributions of happiness and gratitude were significant only for happiness. Boys more often mentioned play and sports activities as the source of their happiness, while girls based happiness on family ties, in particular feelings of being loved, cared for, and protected by significant adults, as well as the ability to attend school.

8.3.4.3 Age Differences

Currently there is insufficient evidence to determine the extent to which age influences children's experience of positive emotions. Hendrie and Lemos (2011) did not find differences in sympathy between 6-year-olds and 7-year-olds. However, because the age differences investigated were modest, this finding is not surprising. Giqueaux (2009), who compared 10- to 12-year-old children and 13- to 16-year-old children, found that younger children had higher sympathy scores.

Oros and Greco (2009) and Oros and Schulz (2010) found that younger children were more likely to attribute happiness to toys, free-time, visits, being cared for, and the opportunity to play, while older children were more likely to attribute happiness to emotional relationships with parents and siblings and the ownership of useful material objects.

The studies in Argentina described above have revealed that the development and expression of positive emotions during childhood is based on social factors such as children's attachment to significant others and social environments, as well as personal factors such as gender and age. Overall, positive emotional experiences during childhood are associated with fewer aggressive behaviors, more prosocial behaviors, less peer rejection, and better stress management.

These results provide empirical evidence for Fredrickson's (2002) model, which proposes that children's experience of positive emotions contributes to the development of personal resources that promote health and well-being. Figure 8.1 presents a model that illustrates and synthesizes these findings.

8.4 Interventions to Foster Positive Emotions

Because the research presented above demonstrates that positive emotional experiences contribute to an individual's personal resources, designing interventions to establish and strengthen these emotional experiences early in life should benefit health and well-being.

Although intervention strategies might primarily focus on vulnerable populations, they would also be relevant for individuals who do not appear to be at risk. Interventions that benefit all individuals should be developed in addition to interventions designed to solve or prevent problems because all individuals might benefit from improving their abilities and achieving their potential (Salmurri, 2004). An adult or child need not have been affected by poverty, domestic violence,

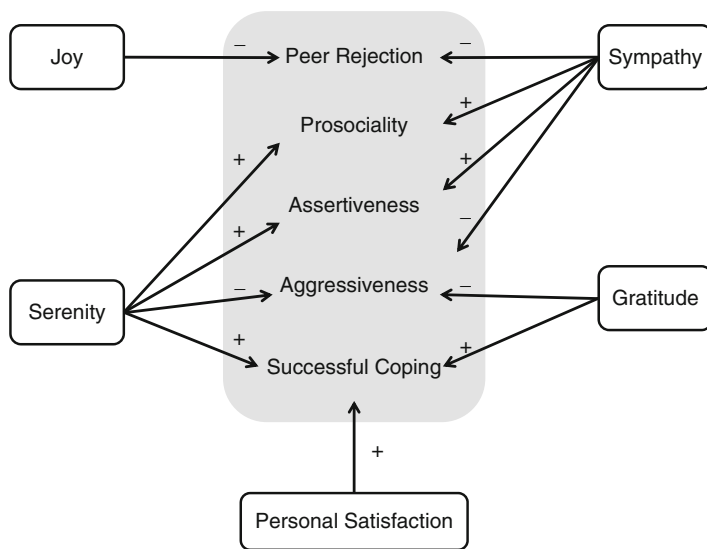


Fig. 8.1 The impact of positive emotions on social behaviors and stress management during childhood

or abandonment to be able to benefit from psychological or educational intervention programs that foster optimal emotional experiences.

To determine the benefits of these intervention programs, it is important to determine the extent to which it is possible to change individuals' emotional experience. Affective responses are limited to a certain extent due to hereditary factors that influence central nervous system functioning, and the genotype establishes the range of emotional experiences for each individual. However, environmental factors can modify emotional experience within the individual's range and maximize an individual's positive emotionality (Lyubomirsky, 2007; Watson, 2005). Moreover, efforts that promote positive emotionality are beneficial despite the phenomenon of hedonic adaptation (Vázquez & Hervás, 2008).

Childhood is a stage of high cerebral plasticity in which cognitive and emotional patterns continue to be established. Interventions should focus on this developmental stage because with the onset of puberty, neural pruning processes identify learning and affective structures that have been used and eliminate connections that have not been sufficiently stimulated (Richaud de Minzi, 2007; Zárte Arguedas, 2011). Psychologists should thus propose and investigate different practices and methods for cultivating and strengthening positive emotionality at earlier stages of development. However, little is known regarding the optimal methods for promoting positive emotionality at different developmental stages. Empirical evidence regarding the optimal frequency, duration, and modality of interventions at different ages is needed because intervention strategies that are effective for individuals at one stage might not be appropriate for individuals at another stage.

Currently, spontaneous initiatives for promoting positive emotions, values, and prosocial behaviors in different settings have been proposed, particularly in education,

due to interest in positive psychology. However, many of these proposals, although interesting and worthwhile, lack the necessary conceptual foundations and empirical rigor. Further scientific and evidence-based interventions are required to create a true applied positive psychology. In Latin America, working groups have developed theory-based emotional intervention strategies and tested hypotheses using experimental designs with control groups. In Argentina, Cingolani and Castañeiras (2011) designed and evaluated a psychosocial intervention program for 15- to 18-year-old adolescents enrolled in school. They used intervention techniques such as dramatization, fables, self-registration, and emotional regulation to improve adolescents' identification and management of emotions, including positive emotions such as life satisfaction. Follow-up assessments confirmed the effectiveness of the intervention (Cingolani, 2010).

We (Oros, 2005, 2008b, 2009) developed a program for strengthening positive emotions in 4- to 9-year-old children, from preschool to the first year of primary school. The intervention was designed within the framework of a larger program for at risk children in Argentina that promoted psychological resilience by strengthening social, cognitive, emotional, and linguistic resources (Richaud de Minzi, 2007).

The intervention to improve positive emotionality was designed to be dynamic, interactive, and systematic. It was applied in the classroom over the course of the academic year by the teacher and/or an outside agent, although it could also be used in clinical settings. To facilitate program effectiveness, teachers received intensive training and continued technical assistance from our team. There were three simultaneous intervention conditions that stimulated positive emotions in the academic environment: (a) direct intervention, (b) indirect intervention, and (c) incidental intervention (Oros, Manucci, & Richaud de Minzi, 2011). The three types of interventions shared the following objectives: (a) teaching children to recognize and distinguish between their own and others' emotions; (b) identifying the emotions typically associated with certain contexts and appropriate ways to express emotions; (c) increasing the frequency of positive moods and enjoyable situations inside and outside of the classroom; (d) using recasting processes to identify positive aspects of disagreeable situations and stimulate the recognition and appreciation of favors and benefits; (e) recognizing and enjoying personal achievements and positive qualities; (f) promoting the development of sympathy and prosocial behavior; and (g) teaching appropriate and socially acceptable strategies for reducing stress and anxiety.

The direct intervention condition involved specific instructional activities that promote positive emotionality during weekly 40-min classroom sessions. These activities were not necessarily related to the day's curricular material. Each session focused on a particular emotion, although other positive emotions might also be included. The intervention activities included narration, structured play, relaxation exercises, dramatizations, cost-benefit analyses, searches for alternative problem solutions, and daily writing exercises. Oros and Richaud de Minzi (2011) provide a detailed description of these activities, which appeal to most children and have been found to have pedagogical and therapeutic value. The indirect intervention condition was based on classroom curricular content and involved associating brief emotion-stimulating activities (e.g., reflection questions, illustrative examples,

graphic stimuli, allegorical accounts, and word play) with relevant conceptual and attitudinal content. This intervention condition, which required considerable creativity and flexibility, was performed throughout the school year on an ongoing basis. The incidental intervention condition involved identifying and employing opportunities to strengthen, stimulate, and/or promote positive emotionality that spontaneously occurred during daily coursework. This intervention condition differed from the other two conditions because it could not be planned in advance and required the instructor or external trainer to be alert to detect opportune moments for implementing the intervention.

To extend children's learning beyond the classroom, the intervention program also included extracurricular activities that involved the participation of parents and other significant individuals to facilitate the transference of strategies and abilities to nonacademic environments, such as the home, neighborhood, and clubs. The goal was to illustrate that what was learned was not limited to the classroom but was a useful tool for other situations. Parents simultaneously participated in a program to promote positive parenting (Vargas Rubilar & Lemos, 2011; Vargas Rubilar & Olmedo, 2011; Vargas Rubilar & Oros, 2011). Working with teachers, children, and parents was crucial for the program's success. Although children are the primary focus, positive emotional development also requires enhancing family and school environments (Magnusson & Mahoney, 2007; Oros, 2011b).

The intervention was applied at different schools in Argentina that enrolled children at risk of extreme poverty. Comparisons of the results of the intervention and control groups as well as 3- and 12-month follow-up evaluations found that the emotional experiences of children participating in the program improved. These findings support the hypothesis that emotional resources could be developed and strengthened through the systematic implementation of appropriate intervention strategies.

8.5 Conclusions and Recommendations for Future Research

Frequently experiencing positive emotions promotes the development of personal resources that predict resilient behaviors in the face of adversity (Castro Solano, 2010). Hence, as psychologists, it is important to determine the extent to which individuals benefit from positive emotions and to design interventions that promote happiness and a more fulfilling and satisfactory life. Fostering positive emotional experiences must start at an early age because the stable emotional, attitudinal, and motivational patterns found in adulthood are established early in life.

This chapter has summarized current research findings regarding positive emotions in children in Argentina. To date, the findings are similar to findings for adolescents and adults elsewhere and confirm that experiencing emotions such as joy, sympathy, gratitude, serenity, and personal satisfaction promotes optimal social functioning and stress management during childhood. Moreover, this

research indicates that interventions can increase the extent to which children experience these emotions.

However, it is necessary to develop more comprehensive and complex models that identify the mechanisms that link the experience of positive emotions to social behaviors. Future research should identify the specific, cognitive, affective, and motivational principles that underlie these processes.

It would also be worthwhile to determine the extent to which children's positive emotionality is related to prosocial behaviors. Rydell, Berlin, and Bohlin (2003) have noted that extremely high levels of positive emotions are associated with negative effects. This issue, although relevant, has not been sufficiently investigated and requires further study.

Because there are also issues related to individual differences in children's positive emotionality, further research regarding the influence of gender and age would be worthwhile.

From a psychometric perspective, measurement scales that provide a theoretical and practical basis for the study of other positive emotions such as love, humor, and hope should be constructed or adapted.

Hervás, Sánchez, and Vázquez (2008) have noted the need to identify the optimal timing and extent of effective interventions. The intensity and frequency of intervention might vary for different groups of children, depending on their developmental level and sociocultural context. The sociocultural characteristics and needs of the target population must be considered when designing, adapting, or implementing intervention programs. In particular, different groups might exhibit different priorities in regard to emotional resources.

Because the same intervention might not produce the same effect for different individuals, it is necessary to determine why some children respond more rapidly and favorably, while some respond more slowly, and why others experience serious difficulties in modifying their affective experiences as well as why some children maintain positive changes while others do not. It is also crucial to identify the personal characteristics, social environment factors, or program features that promote or hinder the development and maintenance of positive emotions.

Because differences in developmental level affect psychosocial development, it is important to compare children's emotional development at different ages to determine the extent to which changes are associated with a particular developmental period.

Intervention strategies should employ new technology such as animated drawings, movies, and audio stories to support teaching activities. Because stories that enhance positive emotions significantly influence children's affective experience and empathetic behaviors (Oros & Esparcia, 2011), technology that can make story characters "come alive" might increase stories' impact.

In summary, this chapter has argued that investigating, assessing, and promoting positive emotions in children is a promising area of positive psychology that deserves further study in Latin America and other regions. To the extent that the discussion of the issues here motivates further study, the objective of this chapter will have been met.

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