

Happiness Classrooms: Need and Significance

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ABSTRACT

Education plays a central role in the growth and overall development of children. It aims to improve and strengthen cognitive abilities and emotional endurance of individuals. The NEP 2020 envisions an education system that focuses on children's well-being in addition to other things. Happiness curriculum is globally recognized for its innovative character and scale of implementation. It is an important part in the journey of the implementation of the Happiness Curriculum. In this article, we have shared the core intent of the curriculum; its need and significance in the present era. Classroom instructions can be seen as critical lever for change in the aims and objectives of the education. What does actually go on inside a class can be of great importance. The article describes the pedagogy of the Happiness Curriculum and its relevance in the present day. Lastly, the impact of the happiness curriculum is shared.

Keywords: Happiness; Happiness Curriculum; Delhi government schools.

INTRODUCTION

Education is crucial in the development of the shape of any nation. It builds the human capital, socio-economic progress and innovation level of any nation. Investing in education is linked to the development of different competencies among individuals that contributes to their potential and productivity (Hansen & Reich, 2015). Numerous studies have consistently demonstrated a strong correlation between higher education and improved socioeconomic outcomes. Individuals with advanced degrees tend to have higher earning potential, greater job security, and better employment prospects compared to those with lower levels of education (Bah, 2023).

The National Education Policy (NEP 2020) "envisions an education system" that provides quality education to enable all children to learn and grow. The policy intends to develop "creative potential" of the children in a "harmonious way" (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020). In short, it aimed at promoting better learning, growth and development and well-being of all children while also enhancing cognitive abilities. The policy focuses on rediscovery of the center of education in 21st century by helping students to have "knowledge, skills, and necessary understanding" that helps them to "co-exist happily within society" (*The Philosophy of Coexistence. Coexistence Is the Underlying Law Of... | by Anand Damani | Philosophy of Coexistence, n.d.*).

Students' well-being is gaining importance these days as it impacts students' mental health. In the modern era of high-pressure environment of education, student's "well-being" is gaining unprecedented attention. Research studies consistently highlight the "critical role of well-being in shaping students' mental health, academic performance, and overall quality of life" (Vyas & Prajapati, n.d.). Research studies have revealed that children with positive mental health and high well-being, often enjoy better quality of life and have higher energy levels. On the other side, low levels of well-being in children is associated with mental health problems that adversely impact on the health and

development of students. It is imperative to recognize that well-being is an important parameter that includes different dimensions, such as emotional, social, physical, and spiritual health. Schools and educators must prioritize strategies that promote all aspects of students' well-being. This can involve creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment, fostering positive relationships, providing opportunities for social and emotional learning, promoting physical activity, and encouraging healthy lifestyle habits (Izzo et al., 2022).

A sense of happiness is very closely linked to the aims and objectives of education. However, this has been a most ignored aspect of educational curriculums so far. The curriculum contents in the schools are very limited in their breadth and depth, they are restricted to the development of “cognitive skills and rational thinking” to prepare them for job market (Copeland et al., 2010).

It is well accepted that well-being and academic achievement go hand-in-hand. Researches have defined that “students with higher well-beings are happier, and healthier, and tend to be more engaged in learning activities, have better concentration, and a higher motivation to learn”. Happy individuals also “overcome difficulties successfully, possess academic resilience and engage in lifelong learning” ((Children’s and Adolescents’ Happiness and Family Functioning: A Systematic Literature Review, n.d.). As happiness impacts all learning, it can be integrated across the curriculum domains. In this article, one such effort is viz The Happiness Curriculum is being described with its need and significance.

WHAT IS HAPPINESS?

Different people have defined happiness in their own way. However, there is a general “unanimous consensus among human being” on happiness and it is its “underlying aspiration for all”. According to philosopher A. Nagraj Sarman happiness is “a state of no-conflict, synergy, or a state of being in acceptance”. It is a condition in which an individual is in “harmony within and with the world outside, absence of struggle or synergy, and 04 feels the need to make this state sustainable and continuous” (*About A.Nagraj – Madhyasth Darshan – Jeevan Vidya. Existence Is Coexistence*, n.d.). It is an inner state that encourages all to thrive and flourish. Nagraj defines human living into 4 dimensions as an “integrated form of the material, behavioural, intellectual and experiential aspects” (*Original Hindi Books – by Shri A.Nagraj – Madhyasth Darshan – Jeevan Vidya. Existence Is Coexistence*, n.d.). In the happiness curriculum, these dimensions are corresponded with “our senses, feelings, learning (understanding) and awareness”. The ultimate combination “happiness triad”. In short, human-being seeks contentment from different areas of living and results in “happiness”(Madhyasth Darshan, Coexistentialism : A Nagraj) .

For children, happiness is a crucial component of overall well-being. It impacts their development (emotionally as well as cognitively) and learning. Studies claim that happy individuals are more motivated, focused and creative. Happiness enhances the memory, problem solving skills and critical thinking. It fosters a growth mindset, helping children to tackle challenges and take risks. In short, happiness creates an optimal state for effective learning and academic success. So, what actually goes inside a classroom for happiness can be of great importance.

RELEVANCE IN THE PRESENT AGE

Happiness is essential for child development. It positively influences students’ emotional, cognitive and academic growth. Studies have consistently demonstrated that happy individuals are more motivated, focused and creative. Happiness leads to enhanced memory, problem-solving skills, and critical thinking. It empowers children to embrace challenges and create the ideal conditions for effective learning and academic success.

Cultivating happy classrooms requires prioritizing strategies that foster positive emotions and a sense of belongingness. All of this can be achieved by creating a welcoming atmosphere, building strong relationships with students, emphasizing a growth mind-set, encouraging self-expression, practicing mindfulness and gratitude, promoting a social-emotional learning, celebrating successes, providing opportunities for choice, and modelling positive behaviour. By implementing these strategies, educators can build a more nurturing and supportive environment that could strengthen optimal learning, students’ well-being, and lifelong success.

The present era is characterized by rapid change, uncertainty and global challenges, the pursuit of happiness becomes increasingly vital. The economic downturns, political instability, or personal setbacks can be chaotic. It may impact our “mental and emotional well-being” negatively. Yet, happiness can offer a beacon of hope and a sense of purpose. Happiness is not simply not an emotion only but “a state of mind that can be cultivated and nurtured”. It is rooted in a sense of contentment, gratitude, and optimism. When we prioritize happiness, we become more resilient to adversity, better able to cope with challenges, and more likely to find out meaning and the purpose of life. It can serve as a perfect anti-dot to stress, anxiety and depression. It is only through happiness that we eliminate negative effects of “stress on our physical and mental health”. It can also enhance our relationships with others, improve our productivity

and increase our overall life satisfaction.

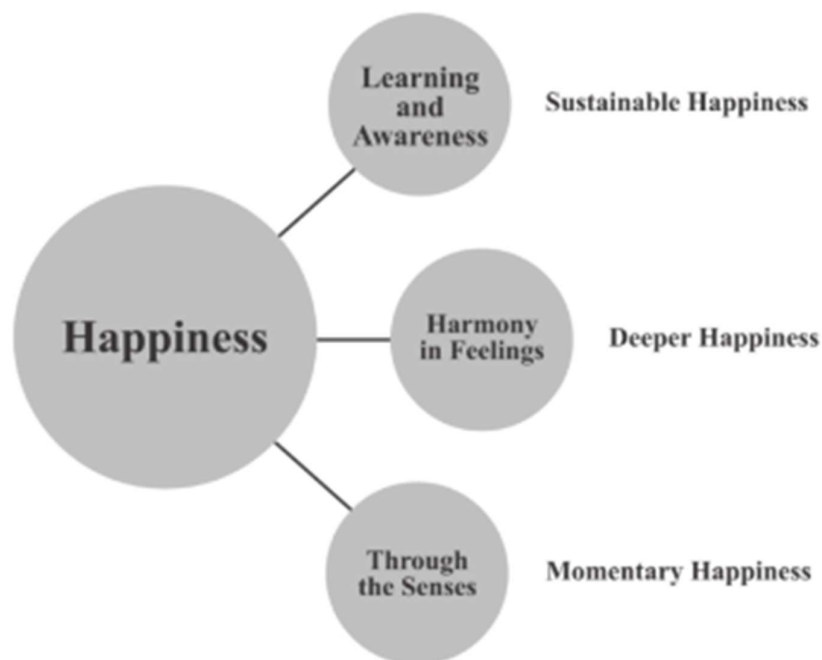
There are different strategies for cultivating happiness. It generally includes mindfulness, gratitude practice and forgiveness, engaging in meaningful activities, spending time with loved ones, and seeking support from others. Let's talk about how the Happiness Curriculum Classrooms deal with happiness.

THE HAPPINESS CURRICULUM CLASSROOMS

It was in the July of 2018 when the government of Delhi introduced "The Happiness Curriculum" in the schools under Directorate of Education (Delhi) reaching to almost eight lakh students. A new class focused on happiness has been added to the curriculum for students from class Nursery to class 8th. This curriculum was inaugurated by his holiness Dalai Lama in 2018. The curriculum is based on the assumption that "helping students to develop the essential skills associated with happiness will enhance their learning experiences and quality of life".

The Happiness Curriculum aims to improve "self-awareness, mindfulness, critical thinking and inquiry among the learners". It also aims to enable learners to "communicate effectively, express freely, understand expectations in relationships, develop empathy and apply life-skills" in dealing with conflicting and stressful episodes of real life.

The Happiness Curriculum mandates a compulsory class of 45-minutes daily that aims developing mindfulness skills, critical thinking, reflection and socio-emotional skills among students. It is based on the philosophy of co-existence propounded by A Nagraj (Coexistentialism, The Philosophy of A. Nagraj Sharma | Contentment | Soul). The curriculum describes happiness at three levels (also known as Happiness Triad), it consists of Momentary Happiness (deriving from physical things), deeper happiness (feelings within relationships) and the sustainable happiness (deriving from awareness & learning).



The entire curriculum and its pedagogy is based on this happiness triad. The overall design of the curriculum is to help children moving to "sustainable happiness" through engagements in given "reflective stories and activities". The classes are designed to help students to "reflect on the relationships" among the "feelings, thoughts and behaviours" and how do they impact on the individuals, families and society around us. The curriculum is universal in nature and designed age-appropriately. The teachers are expected to deliver the curriculum through "Teachers' Handbook for Happiness Class" that contains different mindful activities, stories with reflective questions and scope for self-expression.

IMPACT OF THE HAPPINESS CURRICULUM

A recent study conducted by the SCERT Delhi in 2023 has shed light on the profound impact of the "Happiness Curriculum on the social and emotional wellbeing" of children. The research findings underscore the curriculum's effectiveness in fostering positive mental health outcomes, particularly among younger students.

One of the key takeaways from the study is the significant improvement in social and emotional wellbeing among children who have participated in the Happiness Curriculum. The curriculum's emphasis on mindfulness, gratitude, and empathy seems to be particularly effective in cultivating these essential life skills. Interestingly, the research indicates that younger students, specifically those in Class 6, have experienced a more pronounced positive impact on their social and emotional wellbeing compared to their older counterparts. This suggests that the curriculum may be particularly beneficial for children at a crucial developmental stage, helping to build a strong foundation for their mental health. Furthermore, the study has dispelled any gender-based disparities in the curriculum's effectiveness. Both boys and girls have demonstrated similar improvements in their social and emotional wellbeing, highlighting the curriculum's inclusivity and its ability to benefit children from diverse backgrounds.

The findings of the research provide compelling evidence for the efficacy of the Happiness Curriculum in promoting positive mental health outcomes among children. By incorporating mindfulness, gratitude, and empathy into the educational curriculum, the program is helping to equip students with some instruments that they need “navigate the challenges of life and build resilient, fulfilling lives” (SCERT, 2023).

CONCLUSION

Education is essential for children's growth, helping them develop their minds and emotions. In addition to academic success, and cognitive growth, emotional aspect of students is also very important. Well-being of children is gaining traction these days due to its long-lasting impacts on the growth and learning of students. The Happiness classrooms employ mindfulness, reflective stories, reflective expression and activities as the main form of pedagogy. It is based on the Happiness Triad, from the Madhya-darshan philosophy of co-existence. The happiness curriculum improves the social and emotional well-being of children. It is beneficial to build the emotional resilience among children and also to improve mental health of children.

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