Happy Schools: A Framework for Learner Well-being in the Asia-Pacific

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The Happy Schools Project

Launched in June 2014 to promote happiness in schools in the Asia-Pacific through:

• Documenting perspectives from school stakeholders.

• Identifying and sharing promising and innovative practices.

• Establishing a Happy Schools Framework.
Happiness and the United Nations

• **2011**: UN General Assembly Resolution recognizes happiness as a ‘fundamental human right’.

• **2012**: UNGA Resolution declares the International Day of Happiness (20 March).

• **2015**: New agenda for sustainable development – well-being reflected throughout.

“Happiness for the entire human family is one of the main goals of the United Nations”

– Secretary General Ban Ki Moon
SDG 4: Quality Education

- UNESCO to lead and coordinate SDG 4 - Education 2030 agenda with partners.
- Target 4.7 refers to competencies also recognized as character strengths:

“But by 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development.”
UNESCO Initiatives

Learning to know

Learning to do

Learning to live together

Learning to be

Source: Learning: The Treasure Within, Delors et al. (1996)
Global Initiatives

• Global happiness indices as alternative measures of development.
• Measurement of happiness and well-being as part of learning
• Happy Schools Framework as a reference for measuring Target 4.7 (SDG4)
Why Happy Schools?

• **Schooling experience** as one of the most shaping experiences in life.
• **Global Movement** for prioritizing and measuring happiness and well-being.
• Learner happiness undermined by:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>External Factors</th>
<th>Internal Factors</th>
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<tr>
<td>Increased income inequality</td>
<td>Poor learning environments</td>
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<td>Growing intolerance and violence</td>
<td>Insensitivity of educators</td>
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<td>Rapid technological advancement</td>
<td>Obsolete and irrelevant curricula</td>
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<td>Environmental degradation</td>
<td>Over-focus on academic content and test scores</td>
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Research Design and Methodology

• Conceptual Framework: combines Learning to Be, Learning to Live Together and Positive Psychology.

• Research Methods:
  • Desk Study (June 2014 – November 2015)
  • ASEAN Schools Workshop (November 2014)
  • Happy Schools Survey (January – May 2015)
  • Happy Schools Seminar (June 2015)
Theories of Happiness

• Desk study explored various philosophies, policies, and initiatives.

• Three important linkages found:
  1. Happiness is something collective that is obtained through friendships and relationships.
  2. Education is essentially holistic and multidimensional.
  3. Education can lead to happiness, but can also be a source of happiness in and of itself.

Therefore:

*We can learn to be happy, but we can also be happy to learn*
Happiness in Policy

Countries are increasingly reflecting happiness and well-being in national policy frameworks:

- **Bhutan**: Policy of Educating for Gross National Happiness (GNH).
- **Japan**: Cabinet Commission on Measuring Well-being established in 2010; conducted its first Quality of Life Survey in 2012.
- **Republic of Korea**: Policy of ‘Happy Education for All: Creative Talent Shapes the Future’.
- **Singapore**: Social and Emotional learning (SEL) integrated as part of the Character and Citizenship Education syllabus.
- **Vanuatu**: National Curriculum Statement referencing Learning to Live Together; piloted the Alternative Indicators of Well-being for Melanesia in 2012.
Happy Schools Survey: Responses

Over 650 responses received from almost 30 countries in the Asia-Pacific region:
Happy Schools Survey: Results

Top 5 Factors for a **happy** school:

1. **Heart**
   - Friendships and Relationships in the School Community

2. **Book**
   - Warm and Friendly Learning Environment

3. **Lollipop**
   - Learner Freedom, Creativity and Engagement

4. **Magnifying Glass**
   - Teamwork and Collaborative Spirit

5. **Thumb up**
   - Positive Teacher Attitudes and Attributes

Top 5 Factors for a **unhappy** school:

1. **Cross**
   - Unsafe Environment Prone to Bullying

2. **Alarm Clock**
   - High Student Workload and Stress Driven by Exams and Grades

3. **Stopwatch**
   - Negative Learning Environment and School Atmosphere

4. **Clip board**
   - Negative Teacher Attitudes and Attributes

5. **Heart**
   - Bad Relationships
Happy Schools Framework

- Main outcome of the report.
- 22 criteria identified.
- Three overarching themes: People, Process and Place.
- Aims to inform policy based on school-level perspectives.
People

• Friendships and Relationships in the School Community
• Positive Teacher Attitudes and Attributes
• Respect for Diversity and Differences
• Positive and Collaborative Values and Practices
• Teacher Skills and Competencies
Process

• Reasonable and Fair Workload
• Teamwork and Collaborative Spirit
• Fun and Engaging Teaching and Learning Approaches
• Learner Freedom, Creativity and Engagement
• Sense of Achievement and Accomplishment
• Extracurricular Activities and School Events
• Learning as a Team between Students and Teachers
• Useful, Relevant and Engaging Learning Content
• Mental Well-being and Stress-Management
Place

- Warm and Friendly Learning Environment
- Secure Environment Free from Bullying
- Open and Green Learning and Playing Spaces
- School Vision and Leadership
- Positive Discipline
- Good Health, Sanitation and Nutrition
- Democratic School Management
Reflections

• **Happiness and school quality are inseparable.**

• Over-focusing on ‘the numbers’ undermines learner well-being.

• Need to prioritize learner well-being through:
  • National development and education policies
  • New generation of ‘positive teachers’
  • Assessments that value and evaluate well-being

• **Signals a shift in the way we define and measure the quality of education**
Next Steps

- Policy dialogue and sharing of promising and innovative practices among countries (2016 UNESCO-KEDI Regional Policy Seminar)

- Development of a policy brief to share findings and recommendations of the report with policymakers

- Advocacy campaign to change attitudes towards a ‘good quality’ education.

- Development of indicators and guidelines vis-à-vis each of the specific Happy Schools Framework criteria

- Scale-up the Happy Schools Framework to other regions beyond the Asia-Pacific
Thank you!

• For more information please visit: www.unescobkk.org/happyschools


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