Concept Note

I. Background and Rationale

The pursuit of happiness has always been the aspiration of all human beings. In recent years, a growing global movement for happiness has been driven by mounting global challenges that are undermining happiness in wider society; namely income inequality, growing intolerance, environmental degradation and unprecedented technological advancement. In schools, learners are also facing the repercussions of such challenges in a world that is more competitive, stress-fueled and test-focused than ever before. At the same time, a growing body of research has highlighted the crucial relationship between happiness and educational quality, whereby schools that prioritize learner well-being have the potential to be more effective, with better learning outcomes and greater achievements in learners’ lives.

Happiness is now reflected in the global policy agenda as well. In 2011, it was recognized as a fundamental human right in a United Nations General Assembly resolution. One year later, another resolution declared that it would be celebrated through an International Day of Happiness, which falls on the 20 March each year. Finally, the new global agenda for sustainable development, which was adopted in September 2015, reflects happiness and well-being across its various goals and targets. According to the 2016 World Happiness Report, happiness is now increasingly considered as a ‘proper measure of social progress and the goal of public policy’.

There have also been increased efforts to measure countries’ levels of happiness and well-being through global indices including the World Happiness Report and the Happy Planet Index. Similarly, efforts have also been made to measure student happiness through the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in its 2012 assessment, with the link between well-being and learning outcomes to be included in 2018.

At the national level, countries have increasingly placed happiness and well-being as a specific goal in their national and education policies, or have included elements relating to happiness in their policy frameworks. Examples include Bhutan’s 2011 policy of Educating for Gross National Happiness, the Republic of Korea’s 2013 policy of Happy Education for All, as well as Singapore’s introduction of Social and Emotional Learning, to name but a few. While some countries have introduced such policies so as to emphasize local cultural values and their importance in sustainably developing their countries, others have developed policies in response to national concerns regarding the excessive emphasis on academic domains of learning and the consequent rising levels of stress among learners.

The Happy Schools Project was launched by UNESCO Bangkok in June 2014 with the aim of promoting happiness in schools through enhanced learner well-being and holistic development. Based on a series of research activities, the 2016 publication – Happy Schools: A Framework for Learner Wellbeing in the Asia-Pacific – is one of the main outcomes of the project. The report features a framework of 22 criteria for a happy school under three broad categories: 1) People – referring to human and social relationships among members of the school community, 2) Process, referring to teaching and learning methods, and 3) Place – referring to the context and environment of the school. Based on this framework, the report also features promising and innovative school practices for reaching these criteria, all of which are based on perspectives from school-level stakeholders that were captured through a series of research activities. The Happy Schools Framework goes

beyond focusing on purely academic outcomes in the aim to offer a different vision of the quality of education – one in which learners’ unique talents, strengths and abilities are appreciated, recognized and celebrated.

Moreover, the report signals an important call for policy dialogue, whereby the research findings could be elaborated and translated into succinct conclusions and recommendations at the policy level. More specifically, it outlines the need for considerations such as prioritizing happiness and learner well-being within/across education policies, introducing a new generation of ‘positive teachers’ as well as ensuring that the values, strengths and competencies which can develop and nurture happiness among learners are recognized and evaluated as part of assessment efforts.

Within this context, the 2016 UNESCO-KEDI seminar, devoted to the theme of ‘Happy Schools for a Happy Education’, will bring together officials from Ministries of Education, researchers and school representatives to explore how the Happy Schools Framework could potentially be operationalized within countries’ education systems. Through sharing of country experiences in promoting happiness and well-being through education policies, it will also provide an opportunity to build and validate the framework as the basis for an integral measure of the quality of education in the Asia-Pacific.

II. Objectives

The objectives for the 2016 UNESCO – KEDI regional seminar will be to:

1. Share UNESCO Bangkok’s Happy Schools Framework for learner well-being;
2. Share perspectives on opportunities and challenges for the framework to be operationalized in national policies and practices; and
3. Identify policy measures that can be taken by Member States in the Asia-Pacific region to implement the Happy Schools Framework.

IV. Dates and Venue

Dates: Tuesday 11th – Wednesday 12th October 2016
Venue: (KEDI to confirm). Seoul, Republic of Korea.
Timeline:

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<th>Activities</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Country case study research</td>
<td>September 2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. UNESCO-KEDI Regional Policy Seminar</td>
<td>October 2016</td>
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V. Working methods and Documents

Preparation for the seminar will be undertaken by UNESCO’s Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education (UNESCO Bangkok), Section for Inclusive Quality Education, and the Korean Educational Development Institute (KEDI), Office of Public Relations and International Affairs, who are the co-organizers of the seminar.

The language of the seminar is English. The seminar sessions will be organized based on each of the three objectives, the results of which will contribute to the production of a policy brief. Presentations and
discussions are encouraged to be highly participatory through exchanging of perspectives and practices among participants. The inputs for the seminar will include:

- Country case studies
- Research by relevant researchers and institutions
- School field visit

**VI. Beneficiaries**

This regional seminar will impact upon education systems by engaging Ministry of Education officials and education professionals, as well as schools in the Asia-Pacific region.

**VIII. Criteria for Participants**

Participants will be selected from Member States in the Asia-Pacific region, with the aim of having each sub-region represented. The Seminar is pleased to invite participants from the Ministry of Education, or related ministries, research institutes, universities, institutes and organizations as well as schools. Participants from the relevant Member States should meet one of the following requirements for the Seminar:

1. An **official or researcher** who has experience working on initiatives related to well-being and happiness in education policy and practice within the national education system.
2. An **official or researcher** who is deeply involved in socio-emotional learning and development and/or 21st Century skills/transversal competencies.
3. A **school representative** who is deeply involved in promoting well-being and happiness through promising and innovative practices at the school level.

**VIII. Funding and Organizational Arrangements**

The seminar is co-financed by KEDI and UNESCO Bangkok. Participants from some selected low-income countries will be financed through these resources. Participants from middle- to high-income countries and other interested persons representing international, regional and sub-regional organizations, UNESCO Field Offices, and development agencies and private sector should seek funding from their own or other sources. Participants with special requests or requiring further clarification should contact the event organizers directly.

**IX. Contact Persons**

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