

Happiness Curriculum in Schools of Delhi

A Study of Teachers' Belief and its Relevance in School System

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Abstract

Curriculum, in the simplest terms, means the experiences and exposure to learners not only in the academic areas but also in the areas which are equally important like games, sports, vocational activities, dance, music, and performing and visual arts etc. It is done to for the holistic development of the child. However, the present education system and its curriculum is generally accused of promoting academics and overlooking the development of traits like resilience, happiness and life skills among others. The introduction of Happiness Curriculum in schools in Delhi was a step taken to provide for this gap. Through this paper, the researchers are sharing their small research undertaken to study the beliefs of teachers about the Happiness Curriculum in schools. Further, research also explored the relevancy of Happiness Curriculum in current school scenario. The lockdown limited our interaction to only 12 teachers. A semi-structured questionnaire was used to collect data. Further, telephonic interview was conducted with few school coordinators and district coordinators regarding its implementation. Overall, the teachers appeared positive about the Happiness Curriculum and found the curriculum very relevant in the present times.

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ANECDOTE

Both the authors belong to middle class families and education has always been a priority like in any middle-class family in our country. Though we both were enrolled in different kinds of school — one went to a government aided school and the other went to a missionary managed convent school. We both have our vivid memories of our schools, which are similar in more aspects than different. We remember carrying three language books, science, social science and mathematics book, along with notebooks for each subject. This continued till we reached class fifth. Once we reached class sixth, the demography of our bags changed — now we had several science books (trifurcated into three books), social science books (trifurcated into three books), mathematics books and books for two languages till we appeared for our first national level exam — class tenth boards. We did not realise at that time but now looking back we realise that our bags weighed almost 4–5 kgs in primary classes, which subsequently increased to 6–7 kgs in upper primary and further increased at secondary and senior secondary levels. Apart from carrying the physical load, there was immense academic load also because most of the subjects demanded cramming of majority of the content. While reading about various commission reports and national policies on education during our pursuit of degrees of education we always

thought that things would be very different for our children. Now, when our next generation is in school, we realise that things have changed but generally for worse in terms of both physical and academic load. Their bags weigh from 5–6 kgs in primary classes, 8–10 kgs in secondary stage and so on. This may not be the situation across the schools of the whole country. Subjects like health and physical education, visual arts, performing arts, work education has generally been ignored by schools, parents and education system as whole. This is so because they are considered non-academic, non-career oriented, non-remunerative and primarily subjects of leisure only. The authors want to highlight that NCF, 2005 visualisation of joyful learning or child centric curriculum is still missing in the schools. Nothing seems to have changed much from 1990s to 2020. In the present milieu, Government Schools in the national capital Delhi have introduced Happiness Curriculum as ‘an endeavor to guide the attention of students towards exploring, experiencing and expressing happiness in not just the momentary but deeper and sustainable forms as well’ (SCERT, 2019). The curriculum does not prescribe any book(s) but it does have a fixed place in the timetable with activities. Through interactions with the teachers, the researchers are modestly trying to explore the viability of the happiness curriculum. In simple words, what

do teachers (the actual trans actors of the curriculum) really think about this curriculum?

INTRODUCTION

Current education system evaluates learner and their ability on the basis of how well the learner scores or performs in the examination either conducted by school or by any state or central board. Unfortunately, the education system apart from measuring few cognitive skills completely ignores the measure of skills like analysis, creativity, social skills, emotional and motor skills. As a result, what happens when learners face the real challenges of the world, they reel under depression, anxiety, stress and sometimes it becomes so extreme that it becomes unbearable for students to cope and unwillingly they take life threatening decisions. Such education has no meaning if, it does not prepare the individual to handle the difficult or adverse situations of life.

Every year millions of students appear in competitive exams so to get admission in various national premier educational institutions. Our parents, schools, society and in fact the education system push the children so hard and mount so much pressure on the students either to excel or occupy the top position or qualify in the competitive exams so that they can be one among the others to get a seat in the premier institutions. If students are unable to excel, crack the competitive exams or

do not occupy the higher ranks, then we as parents, teachers, schools, education system never coach or mentor our children how to cope up with the failures. In fact, we fail to prepare students on how to handle the failure in exams. This small event of the life which hardly had any impact on the whole life takes control and many of them succumbed to this pressure and commits suicide because of it. In one of the recent movie called ‘*chichore*’ exactly this is what has been depicted. Success and failure determines the fate of the children and life comes to halt or becoming meaningless for many who fail in the exams. Professor Yashpal in his submitted report Learning without Burden (1993) said that “*students who refuse to compromise with non-comprehension than to those who memorise and pass the examination are considered as successful*”. Several committees have suggested in the past of providing education which prepare students for life i.e. critical and creative thinking, problem solving and decision making abilities, working in cooperation and collaboration with others but unfortunately instead of focusing on these aspects it has increased the academic load on students.

HAPPINESS CURRICULUM —

A BACKGROUND ANALYSIS

For the mental health and well-being of students, Delhi Government introduced Happiness Curriculum in the year 2018. The purpose of the

curriculum was two-fold — education beyond academic performance and achievement and second leading a sustainable happy life. The concept of Happiness Curriculum was not new. Many countries like UK, Australia, Japan, Bhutan etc. have started similar kind of curriculum or program. The initiation of such kind of curriculum was started on Mindfulness in UK schools in the year 2012. The program of Mindfulness was introduced in UK schools after considerable researches done for the past 10–15 years by Professor Jon Kabat-Zinn and his colleagues. Most of the researches done on Mindfulness (see report — *How mindfulness can help your employees and impact your company's bottom line*, 2013) report that it help individuals to enhance level of concentration, develops sensitivity and empathy, increase cognitive performance, creativity, emotional intelligence, happiness and contentment and more importantly ability to break old habits and form new ones (p.6). The initial researches done on Mindfulness at school level done as an intervention reported that it help the students to bolster the mental health of the students, improve academic achievement (Kuyken, W., et al.; 2013), stress relief, better school climate (Wisner, B.L., 2013), less inattentiveness behaviour of students, less hyperactive behaviours, less ADHD symptoms (Klatt, M., et al. 2013) paying more attention, more self-control, increase classroom participation and respect to others

(Black, D.S. and Fernando, R. 2013). This program shows that students' mental health and well-being can be fostered if such kind of activities are being regularly conducted in the schools. Similarly, Bhutan started Gross National Happiness (GNH) education similar to Mindfulness program so to counteract the ongoing lethal consumerism at global level which has led to the breaking of collectivistic values and promoting individualistic values among the new generation in the country. Bhutan Prime Minister believe that it can only happens if country promotes education system which can cultivate among children happiness, compassion, wisdom, generosity, goodness and humility. Dhaila Colman (2011) while interacting with Prime Minister of Bhutan, he said that "No human beings in this world believe in anti-GNH" (p.16-17). Prime Minister further said that "curriculum or textbooks can hardly play any role in cultivating GNH". Teachers have to play a vital role and they have to believe in GNH, then only it seems possible.

When the author surveyed the literature on Happiness Curriculum, hardly any curriculum had been made before for school system, though some studies have done on happiness or related to happiness. The premise of preparing Happiness Curriculum by the government is that it wants to address psychological crisis that arises out of violence, stress, conflicts, vulnerabilities,

prolonged exposure to physiological and emotional disturbances that happens in the early life of the students. The present education system failed to build the capacities within children to effectively deal with the psychological crisis that is raised by the unpredictable socio-cultural, political and economic environment. As a result, children of today are highly vulnerable to various socio-psychological and emotional disorders and diseases. As a result, their physical, mental and emotional well-being is severely affected. Due to this, rise in the percentage of crimes among children and youth have multiplied. According to National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB, 2018), there is almost twenty percent increase in crime rate in last two years. Most of these crimes committed by the children belong to elite as well as of weaker sections of society. Different psychologists, sociologists and educationists attributed reasons—effect of extreme poverty, drug abuse, anti-social peer groups, family violence, child sexual abuse, abusive parents and most importantly social media. Most of these heinous crimes are committed by the age group of 16–18 years. What is more concerning is that, there is a multi-fold increase in crimes against women and girl child. One can easily blame societal, economic, political factors responsible for it including the social media. But, one cannot escape away from the responsibility that shaping and nurturing of children

and youth lies on sound education system and more so on teachers. Unfortunately, Indian education system has hardly been able to channelise the energy of children and youth for the nation building and that's why situation is looking murkier. Here, it is worth to note that co-curricular activities which is an essential part of the curriculum and always fosters the development of affective and psychomotor domain is all throughout being neglected in our education system. Though education system focuses on making of Knowledge Society, it fails to understand that Knowledge Society cannot be developed without making good human beings. Good human beings can only be made if the human ecology is free of stress, tension, depression, fear, anxiety, conflict etc. On the other hand, if our education system promotes peace, tranquility, values, well-being of persons etc. then one can expect to make a world full of happiness.

Researchers seek to find out whether on-going Happiness Curriculum in classroom has yielded any marked change in the non-altruistic behaviour of the students. For this, researcher have in-depth and detailed discussions on their belief as teacher on Happiness Curriculum, that it would be able to transform the enviable academic climate to cooperative and collaborative academic climate. Do they believe that Happiness Curriculum will foster positive mental health and

well-being amongst students? Whether they believe that Happiness Curriculum will be able to reduce cut-throat competitions, rivalry, stigma of failure etc among the students? Most importantly, will Happiness Curriculum be able to sustain the emotional and psychological well-being of children for larger part of life?

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are to understand the —

1. belief of the teachers on the concept of happiness and its reflection in the curriculum.
2. viewpoint of teachers about effectiveness of Happiness Curriculum in transforming the competitive academic climate in classrooms.
3. perception of teachers about role of Happiness Curriculum in promoting positive well-being among students.
4. the view point of teachers about the role of Happiness Curriculum on sustainable happiness in the life of students.

Method

The following paragraphs would divulge on the method employed in this research—

Sample of Teachers

Delhi government has implemented Happiness Curriculum till elementary level. As it was COVID-19 lockdown period, so researchers decided to select purposively twenty teachers

who were working at elementary level for more than ten years of experience in teaching in Delhi government schools and well known to researchers.

Tools Used

An open-ended questionnaire, containing nine questions related to above-mentioned objectives and five questions related to the academic and personal details, was developed for collecting the data. The purpose was to find the teacher's view point, perception on the above aspects.

Result

What do teachers say?

The loosely structured interaction of the researchers with the teachers led to an insight into how teachers look at introduction of Happiness Curriculum in the schools. All the observations from these interactions have been encapsulated in the following paragraphs.

Demographic details

As mentioned earlier, the new curriculum has been introduced in over 1,000 Delhi government schools between Nursery and Class VIII. Our interactions were limited to 12 teachers indulged in implementing Happiness Curriculum from Class VI to Class VIII. All of these were females and were in the age range of 25 to 38 years with an average age of 30.5 years. All of them except for one had post-graduation degree to themselves. An equal number (6) of

teachers had an experience of more than 5 years and less than 5 years.

Concept of happiness

Teachers held their own perspective of the word happiness. Some equated it with well-being, joy, contentment while others took it as something which led to stress busting or feeling of positivity. One interesting viewpoint was "...the feeling of satisfaction that we achieve after doing anything is happiness". Another comprehensive narration by a 27-years-old teacher was "...Happiness is equated with feeling pleasure or contentment, meaning that happiness is not to be confused with joy, ecstasy, bliss, or other more intense feelings". Among the different concept of happiness, which the teachers highlighted, was one common thread — happiness is a state of mind.

Change in academic climate owing to Happiness Curriculum

All the twelve teachers strongly held that Happiness Curriculum has brought a change in the competitive academic climate in the classrooms. This is significant because teachers were dealing with different ages and were from different schools. When 100,000 students spend the first half-hour of each school day without opening a textbook, learning instead through inspirational stories and activities, as well as meditation exercises — it is leading to a soothed academic climate in the classrooms. However, one of the teachers

voiced out that she doubts that the happiness classes can change the traditionally engrained prominence on exams and memorisation. Happiness Curriculum is pretty close to Mindfulness meditation and there have been studies on mindfulness meditation. Jian-Wei Lin and Li Jung Mai (2016) in their work also found that most students enjoyed the mindfulness meditation process and agreed that the intervention improves in-class learning efficiency. Erin Kathryn Hebert (2018) in her work found that mindfulness practices positively impact classroom climate. This change in academic climate due to Happiness Curriculum is important because positive classroom climate and teacher resiliency are correlated with positive student development and academic outcomes, as well as student social emotional learning (Cohen, 2012; Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

Effect on well-being of students

All the teachers interacted with for this research was upbeat about the capability of Happiness Curriculum in inducing positive well being among students. One of them went extensive and elaborated her belief in strong words, "I believe this effort will open new doors of reform in the field of education, especially at school level..... and well-being among students". Preliminary studies in this newborn field suggest that mindfulness-meditation trainings (similar in nature to Happiness

Curriculum activities) have positive effects on children's and adolescents' psychological well-being (Biegel et al., 2009; Burke, 2010; Flook et al., 2010). The teachers further held that this was a needed step because of the increasing techno-socio-emotional complexities in life in the rapidly changing milieu.

Life-long impact of Happiness Curriculum

All the teachers held that they believed that it would bring life-long impact on mindfulness meditation. They had their own reasons for saying that. One of them said, "Positive education focuses on specific skills that assist students to strengthen their relationships, build positive emotions, enhance personal resilience, promote mindfulness and encourage a healthy lifestyle. So, Happiness Curriculum will definitely impact on well-being of children". Some focused on the skills built in by happiness classes, while there were those who relied more on the power of moral stories in leaving a life-long impact on well being of children. There was one who said she believed in the power HC has in leaving a life-long impact, however, it really depends on how it is being conducted in the classrooms. She further said that 'she knows anecdotally that the HC classes are being conducted as another box ticking activity in the class. If done that way, then it would not produce the desired results'.

Change in interaction pattern among students

The teachers echoed that happiness classes have brought a positive change in the interaction pattern among students. Students are believed to be more self-regulated so exhibited more emotional control. They were generally more smiling and happier. Meiklejohn et.al. (2012) reviewed mindfulness programmes that provided mindfulness training to children and observed that students have better adaptive self-regulation (particularly in terms of anxiety, emotion and attention), academic performance and behavioural changes.

Change in interaction pattern between students and teachers

The impact of the happiness classes has brought a favourable change in interaction pattern between students and teachers. Most of the teachers opined that it is the interplay of both teachers and students, which has brought changes in the interaction pattern between teachers and students. One of the teachers stood apart from others and highlighted that this change may not be permanent. She said that the 'novelty' aspect of introduction of Happiness Curriculum may have led to this. She was a little wary about the success of the HC program because she believed that it won't be easy to sustain motivation because of the hugely crowded classrooms which do not allow for closer interactions

with children and HC program would need that for the achievement of the desired objectives.

Regularity of happiness classes

It was interesting to note in this study that teachers opined similar by on almost all the aspects though their reasons may have been different. All the teachers again held that teachers were efficiently doing the happiness classes — either owing to personal motivation or because it features in the timetable and so have to be followed. The teacher who had earlier also highlighted that this might be a tick box activity for some teachers, again ascertained that time-table may be a binding force for the teachers but practically the sustenance of this kind of program would need some other efforts on classroom size or regular training of teachers.

Increase in work-load of teachers

The teachers agreed to the fact that happiness classes have increased the work load but none of them complained about it. In fact, they were pretty open about it since it led to the positive changes in students, improvement in student teacher relationships — so they did not mind the slight increase in work load. Further, one of them said ‘it really depends on one’s attitude that you feel a change in workload or not — I may not feel any kind of change in workload because I’m enjoying it’.

What does District and School Coordinators say?

To have a deeper understanding about the philosophy of Happiness Curriculum, relevance in present school education, how it has been executed at school level and what effect it had on the psycho-social well-being of the students, telephonic interview was conducted with few school coordinators and district coordinators of Happiness Curriculum. The excerpts of the telephonic conversation are presented below on following areas —

Philosophy of Happiness Curriculum

According to the document published by SCERT, the concept of happiness of an individual is based on happiness triad— momentary happiness (achieved through senses) associated with the sense of achievement/ fulfillment of materialistic aspects of life like good food, good music, clothing, good job, decent salary, good house etc. Deeper happiness (harmony in feelings) associated with feeling, emotions, care, gratitude, empathy etc. These are intrinsic in nature and stay with individuals for lifelong. According to Happiness Curriculum Document, the “impact of deeper happiness is in the inner state and help us to be in relationship” (p. 12). Sustainable happiness (achieved through learning and self awareness) “involves clarity of thought, deeper understanding of self, being able to focus, being mindful, finding cause, purpose and interconnectedness in

our living, etc". (p.13). Document emphasised real happiness comes when an individual moves beyond the momentary happiness and tries to seek deeper and sustainable happiness. Coordinators commonly shared that "happiness is a mental state" and 'free from mental worries, anxieties, stress, depression and living a blissful life". Through, Happiness Curriculum, government and teachers associated with it are trying to build in the capacities among individual students so that they can realise that in life what is more important is to achieve happiness in life by being empathetic, be courteous to others, gratitude, serve and help others, having deep sense of inner satisfaction for the actions which results into bringing happiness in the life of others. Happiness curriculum shifts focuses from momentary happiness to sustainable happiness.

Relevance of happiness curriculum in present school education system

When being asked what the relevance of introducing happiness curriculum is, when the curriculum is already value laden? Coordinators emphatically said that "transactions of the curriculum in the classroom have been highly confined to transmission of information's where students crammed the information's for examination system. This has aggravated among students competitiveness, rivalry, jealousy, fear, anxiety, stress or even depression leading to behavioural problems and

sometimes so acute it leads to various heinous crimes". Present education system prepares young children's to be "self-centered, materialistic, highly individualistic and having no space and time for others and their well-beings". They further said that "Happiness curriculum is an attempt wherein students are made aware of their intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships, realisation of their self, being mindful and having deep sense of the purpose of existence of their life".

Implementation of Happiness Curriculum at school level

According to them, Happiness Curriculum is being implemented at school from Class VI-VIII, SCERT and Department of Education had prepared a handbook wherein list of activities are listed to be organised in the classroom in the first period of school timetable. The Happiness Curriculum had sessions on mindfulness, mediation, yoga and moral values along with other social and emotional learning. A 45 minutes session is conducted wherein apart from yoga and meditation (compulsory activity beginning and at the end of period) a list of mindfulness activities related to sensory awareness, followed by moral stories and some group activities to do (1-2 periods). The step by step detailing was done in the handbook for each of the three activities. On Saturday, special activity was conducted based on self-expression (gratitude, respect,

courage, humble, kindness). The curriculum is well-structured and activities are well delineated. School teachers are trained by the school coordinators who were in turn trained by the district coordinator and mentors of the happiness curriculum. A provision of evaluation on weekly basis of the implementation was done by school coordinators and that on fortnightly basis by district coordinators.

Effect on the psycho-well being of the students

On being asked whether it has resulted in some positive effects on well-being of students, coordinators replied that “students participate enthusiastically, motivated, elated and most importantly students’ confidence level has improved a lot”. They further said, “many of the students who hesitate to speak in the class, they now actively participate in the classroom, not only in happiness

period but also in their subject periods”. Overall good and positive outcomes have been reported till date. They also acknowledged the initial hiccups and difficulties faced by the teachers and mentors. Teachers, in the initial phase, had no clue about how to implement it in the classroom but with time everything has been managed well.

CONCLUSION

The results of the small research felt like a cool breeze as teachers emerged supportive of the happiness curriculum and were appreciative of the structure and utility of the programme. This would go a long way in ensuring the success of the programme. Happiness Curriculum is promising in terms of its impact on adaptive self-regulation (particularly in terms of anxiety, emotion, and attention), academic performance, and behavioural changes.

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