

A Ray of Happiness in the Indian Education System?

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From the beginning of time, the meaning of education has been dynamic. It has changed from being defined as one's *dharma* in ancient times to being understood as 'scientific thinking' today. Mirrored in the Preamble to the Indian Constitution is the definition of an educated Indian: a person with scientific temperament and liberal outlook, who is capable of individual thinking. She will bring an era of new knowledge on the foundation of her observations, experimentation and reflection by being peaceful and happy (Liav Orgad, 2010, Heignotes, 2016). But is this dream, which the nation saw in 1947, being fulfilled 73 years after its independence?

Aims of education

Any investment made by a government in education is done in the light of future gains. We are able to open new doors of knowledge and innovation in the fields of science, mathematics and arts. But we cannot close our eyes to the fact that even after educating a large number of young people every year, we are not able to assure them of a life without

the evils of violence, bitterness, greed, hatred. Globally, the greatest threats facing humankind today are situations rapidly rising due to societal evils (Directorate of Education, Government of the National Capital Territory, Delhi).

Then again, India ranks 133rd in the World Happiness Report 2018, as well as accounts for the highest student suicide rates in the world (ET Contributors, 2018), statistics which question our education system on the wellbeing of students in Indian schools.

Considering this as a crisis, the Delhi government imagined a curriculum which would not only promote cognitive development language, literacy, etc but also address the wellbeing and happiness of the students (SCERT, Delhi, 2019). To make this dream a reality, in July 2018 the Delhi Government's Aam Aadmi Party launched the *Happiness Curriculum* from Nursery to class VIII in all government schools of the national NCT (National Capital Territory).



I did an independent study on the Happiness Curriculum as my winter field project and spent more than seven weeks in the field: in eight government schools of Delhi, starting from building a relationship with teachers and students to interviewing, observing classes and holding focused group discussions with teachers and other academic authorities. This helped me to understand, more comprehensively, the curriculum's pedagogy and its classroom applications.

What is the Happiness Curriculum?



The Happiness Curriculum (HC) is a scientifically designed course which is based on a strong humanitarian and social model designed by a philosopher named, Agrahar Nagraj (1999) called, The Triad of Happiness (SCERT, Delhi, 2019). According to this, human beings get happiness through their senses, relationships, and learning. Each of these, in turn, addresses the four dimensions of human life: the material, the behavioural, the intellectual, and the experiential. According to A. Nagraj, human beings need and seek fulfilment from all these aspects of living, resulting in peace, satisfaction and joy that together constitute human happiness.

Based on this model, the Delhi Education Department built its curriculum in such a way that all the units and modules eventually provide access to children to all three forms of happiness. The modules have been designed in a spiral format which means that every subsequent theme will link

to the previous one and knowledge will get deeper as the child progresses from one class to the next. A '*Teacher's Handbook for Happiness Class*' was provided for teachers' guidance.

According to the creators of the syllabus, its contents are universal and designed age-appropriately with the guidance of teachers, philosophers, and others. The intended outcome of the course is to enhance students' awareness level, mindfulness and deepen learning so that they lead a happier and more meaningful life irrespective of what they become in their futures. The creators believe that with this course, every child, regardless of ethnicity, region, religion, and caste can learn how to be happy, because happiness is a skill that, with proper guidance, can be *practised* and *learned*.

Salient features

- Every Happiness class has three main components – mindfulness (10 minutes), an activity or story (25 minutes) followed by activity-oriented discussions. Each day has a specific focus, for instance, on Mondays, there is a special focus on mindful listening; on Saturdays, on expression and so on.
- The curriculum does not follow a rigid timeline. Teachers can choose to remain with one unit for an entire year if they feel the essence of the unit has not been delivered to students.
- It follows a child-centred pedagogy, where children lead the class and the teacher facilitates the discussions.
- There are no written examinations or grading systems. Evaluation is carried out to directly monitor and observe the status of happiness in each child's life.
- The objectives of this curriculum are completely synchronized with the National Curriculum Framework 2005.

Happiness Curriculum and Moral Science

After the launch of HC, the major criticism this curriculum has faced is its similarity with the Moral Science (MS) programmes which have already been a part of our education system for decades.

In my study, I found that, while the two programmes overlap, they are not the same. The core values of both are similar, but they are different in their features. The MS programme is based on the aim of giving pre-decided values to students. The stories and the pedagogical methods used are more teacher-centred, where the common question

asked during the discussion is *What have you learned from this story?*

My observations of happiness class revealed that questions are asked more in a child-centric manner; the question is never *what have you learnt, but are why do you think a particular character does this or what might we do if we were on his/her position?* The answers are left to the students to think and reflect upon.

It simply implies that whereas in an MS class, 45 students take a single moral from the story, in the Happiness class, there could be 45 different perspectives of the same story.

Perceptions about the Happiness Curriculum

I found that although the HC is currently being conducted in a very small proportion of schools in comparison to the number of schools in the country, still the idea of it is very different for all the stakeholders.

- For Principals, Happiness Coordinators and District Coordinators, it is about building self-trust, healthy relationships, a good and safe society, and promoting sensitivity for ecological sustainability in children.
- For Teacher Development Coordinators and School Mentors, it is more about increasing the power of concentration in children so that they can focus mindfully on things.
- For teachers, it is about good and bad habits and moral values which help children deal with their stress levels so that they can focus better on their studies.
- For students, it is a fun period in which they hear stories, do activities while learning *achchi baatein* (good things).
- For AAP officials, it enables and strengthens our education system for the all-round development of humankind by making students honest and responsible human beings. (SCERT, Delhi, 2019)

The HC is viewed from different perspectives for each stakeholder. One of the reasons for these perspective differences is the inadequate training which happiness teachers have received in these two years – just one workshop in early 2018 during the launch. This means all new teachers and the teachers who took this curriculum for this new session were not given training, although to help new teachers, the Happiness Coordinators, School Mentors, and Teacher Development Coordinators (TDCs), who get more frequent training than the

teachers themselves, are there to guide. But the data collected shows that because of academic pressure, there are very few regular meetings in the school that focus on the HC. This has resulted in creating a gap between the teachers and the government.

Another reason for the unpreparedness of young teachers is that until now, teacher training programmes do not train future teachers in this curriculum and new teachers get to know about it only they come to school. Consequently, the most reliable guide for teachers is the teachers' handbook, which has now become the only reference book for all the young and new teachers of the HC.

Impact on students

It has been found that there is a visible positive impact on the children. According to the teachers, this curriculum has helped both them and the children to bridge the teacher-student gap. Violence, especially in boys' schools, has reduced. Children have started sharing their personal stories and experiences which have led to the creation of a safer and non-judgmental space in the school.

Parents also see a visible difference in their wards, they say that their children are now learning a lot of things which will help them in life. For example, one of the parents shared the insight that earlier their son would always demand something or the other whenever they went to the market but now, he has stopped doing so. 'I don't want anything to show to my friends, I will only take things that I need,' the son tells the father.

Way forward

My findings from this study were that this curriculum has had some positive impact on students' lives but its larger impact on the education system cannot yet be established because of the limited duration of the curriculum as well as of my study. But one thing which my study can establish is that every child can learn to be happy in our education system if educators, teachers and parents work together. Right now, HC is not a part of our national curriculum, but the values it contains have their origins in the *National Curriculum Framework* (NEF, 2005) and *Learning Without Burden* (1993). This means if we can implement these national guidelines and suggestions keeping the Delhi model in mind, and any school, teacher or parent can help children and themselves, practise happiness.

The only thing we need to believe is: Happiness is much more than a feeling. It can be *taught* if

guided and practised well.

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Born and brought up in a family of teachers, **Kriti Gupta** was inclined towards education from a very young age. Taking her interest forward, she completed a Bachelor's in Elementary Education from Delhi University and has volunteered with multiple organizations, including Eklavya, SAMA (a resource group of Women and Health), and Lokpanchayat. This year, she has completed her Master's in Development from the Azim Premji University, Bangalore. She is interested in the domains of education and mental health and wellbeing. She can be contacted at kritiguptaa96@gmail.com