

## **THE POWER OF SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL): TRANSFORMING SCHOOLS INTO HAPPY SCHOOLS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Young people should succeed in their academic, personal, and social lives, according to changing needs of the society. For the students, developing close relationships with classmates and adults is essential to coping with the complex demands of growth and development. Schools are under increasing pressure to provide students with more than just foundational knowledge in traditional academic subjects in order to boost their motivation and ability to produce better results. A very helpful and methodical classroom instruction program, social and emotional learning helps students learn how to better control their emotions, build healthy relationships, understand other people's viewpoints, solve problems, and use a range of interpersonal skills to deal with situations in the real world in an ethical and effective manner. Additionally, SEL programs provide settings that encourage and assist kids in becoming more accountable and compassionate outside of the classroom. In accordance with promoting social emotional learning, UNESCO has a view to converting school to a HAPPY SCHOOL, which will help students to be more comfortable to learn more effectively. The main objective of Happy schools of UNESCO is to provide inclusive and supportive learning environment, increasing academic engagement and achievement of students in addition to development of social emotional learning skills. The present paper is basically focused on happy school and happy curriculum to inculcate social emotional learning skills among the learners of the present education system.

**Key Words:** Social emotional learning, Happy School, Happy School Framework, Happiness Curriculum

### **SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING**

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is the process through which social-emotional competence develops. Through SEL programs, children and young people learn and use the knowledge, attitudes, and abilities required to comprehend and regulate emotions, create and accomplish constructive objectives, feel and demonstrate empathy for others, build and sustain meaningful relationships, and make responsible decisions. (Weissberg, Durlak, Domitrovich, & Gullotta, 2015).

Schools play an important role in developing social emotional competence by making school a happy place. Schools can use various kinds of approaches and methods to make a school socially and emotionally comfortable for the students so that students feel more enthusiastic while learning and attending classes. It is based on the idea that a teacher can foster emotional intelligence, resilience, and well-being among the students by teaching them from their hearts—all of which are essential for success in the majority of aspects of life.

## HAPPY SCHOOL

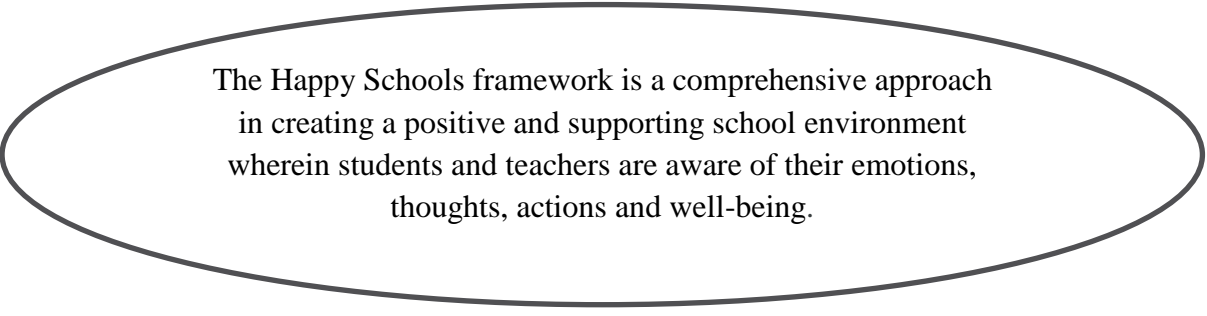
The purpose of education is not only to provide knowledge and inculcating skills but also to provide happiness that can be achieved through human efforts. The school is one of the principal sources of human development. A school where students, teachers, administration, and staff feel happy and burden-free may be defined as a happy school. It is the collective responsibility of students, teachers, school administration, and parents to create a loving and happy environment for school so that the school becomes a happy and burden-free school.

A happy school is one where management, teachers, and students are open to innovation; students learn content necessary for life, and acquire self-related skills; students highly value teachers because they are knowledgeable, attentive, helpful, sufficiently demanding, and able to explain their subject well (Kuurme and Heinla, 2020). By creating school as a happy school all the concerned people also enjoy peace of mind and health.

Peace is a concept that includes happiness. The happy people are at peace with themselves, the people who are at peace with themselves are happy. Schools that can support peace are key to ensuring happiness, well-being, psychological health, and achievement.

In fact, peace expresses itself in three forms—peace with nature, social peace, and inner peace and should thus serve to create an environment that fosters human potential optimally (Balasooriya, 2001).

Creating happy schools is crucial to raising the standard of instruction and learning as well as to the advancement of the country's educational system today. A happy school is just one that provides its pupils with a joyful learning atmosphere so they may be joyful and enthusiastic about attending and learning from their teachers. These kinds of schools have the potential to boost students' drive, excitement, and inventiveness for improved academic achievement, which in turn inspires and prepares their instructors for their teaching duties.



The Happy Schools framework is a comprehensive approach  
in creating a positive and supporting school environment  
wherein students and teachers are aware of their emotions,  
thoughts, actions and well-being.

In June 2014, UNESCO Bangkok launched the Happy Schools Project to find out what makes for a happy school based on the voices of students, teachers, parents, and others at the heart of the school community. The 2014-2015 research study produced the Happy Schools Framework, which consists of 22 criteria for a happy school that are grouped into 3 broad categories People, Process, and Place. (Nguyen, Nguyen, & Nguyen, 2022). These are as follows:

- **People** - Human and social relationships within the school community all fall into the first category of People.
- **Process** - The category of Process includes ways of teaching and learning that can promote a student's sense of well-being.

- **Place** - The Place category refers to the school environment and its atmosphere. Under this category, the importance of a warm and friendly learning environment is highly emphasized

Happy School strives not only to foster a welcoming and accepting atmosphere but also concentrate on building crucial social-emotional abilities that enhance the total health and happiness of students and the wider school community.

UNESCO views a 'Happy School' as a space that supports the learning, health, well-being, and daily joy of the entire school community. In essence, a Happy School is a space that brings together the conditions that enable school community members to embody positive attitudes and attributes that support lifelong learning, such as collaboration, communication, understanding, empathy, motivation, engagement, curiosity, resilience, and empowerment.

A Happy School cultivates happiness both 'in' and 'for' learning - happiness 'in' learning entails making happiness an integral part and a central goal of the learning process itself, while happiness 'for' learning involves leveraging happiness as a means, a vehicle to enhance learning experiences and outcomes.

The framework, published in 2016, consisted of three pillars for a happy school – people, process and place. UNESCO launched a global scale-up of the Happy Schools initiative in 2022, and the regional framework has been under revision since then to include a fourth dimension of 'principles', a stronger focus on the implications of digital technology. The study of school happiness has gained momentum driven by UNESCO guidelines that foster peace through education and fundamental pillars of learning such as learning to live together and learning to be. These guidelines include qualities based on relationships, including empathy, tolerance, respect for diversity, communication, and teamwork (UNESCO, 2014 & 2016).

The key aspects of each pillar of the framework are as follows:

- **The People Pillar** seeks to improve well-being, pleasant interpersonal interactions, and the characteristics and attitudes of the many players in school communities, including the community members, parents, teachers, administrators, support personnel, and students.
- **The Process Pillar** focuses on changing assessment, pedagogy, and curriculum. Strategies to maximize contentment and everyday delight in schools, including extracurriculars that improve instruction and learning opportunities including sports, art, and recess.
- **The Place Pillar** aims to modernize both online and offline environments to make classrooms more community centers that are more inclusive, safer, and healthier.
- **The Principles Pillar** highlights the essential principles that unite school communities and facilitate the fulfillment of the pillars of people, process, and place.

These four pillars are not distinct from one another; in fact, these all are inter-wined and inter connected. The principles of happy school framework foster a positive and inclusive school culture, which promotes social-emotional learning, reduces bullying, and supports the academic achievement.

The Happiness Curriculum places a strong emphasis on helping students develop their social and emotional learning, which enables them to think critically, be self-aware, be attentive, and form wholesome connections. The curriculum offers a wider viewpoint that addresses the

role of happiness in educational endeavors and its influence on society at large, in addition to building social and emotional skills in students.

Happiness Curriculum was introduced by the Government of NCT of Delhi in July 2018. Happiness Curriculum aims to develop happiness in feeling and practice (Happiness Curriculum, 2018). It has four sections in it,

**Section 1** on ‘**Mindfulness**’,

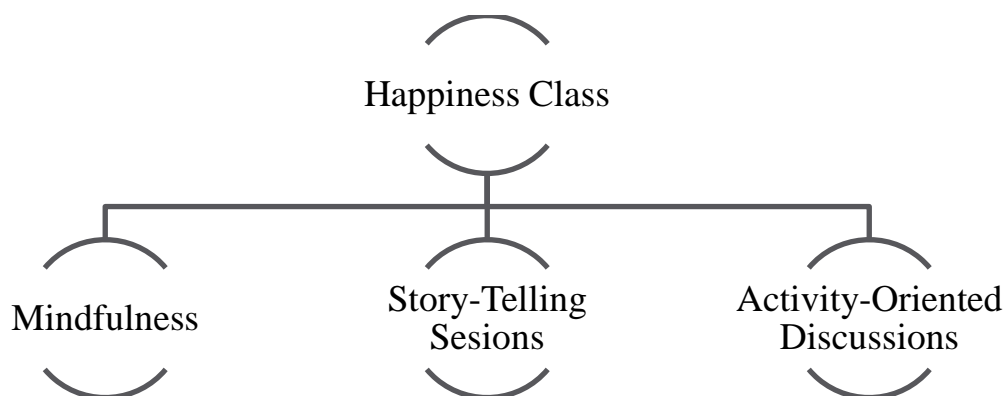
**Section 2** on ‘**Stories**’,

**Section 3** on ‘**Activities**’ and

**Section 4** on ‘**Reflections**’

### Mapping Happiness Classes in the UNESCO Happy Schools Framework (2016)

The Happiness Curriculum is delivered through a 45-minute "happiness class" for students from Nursery to Grade 8 (age group: 3-14-year-olds) in Delhi government schools. Preferably, the first period in a day focuses on three main components: mindfulness, story-telling sessions, and activity-oriented discussions and reflections in classrooms (Care et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2019).



- **Mindfulness:** In the Indian knowledge system such as Vipassana in Buddhist traditions, mindful reading was given more importance than memorizing facts (Sisodia, 2019). Children may learn to focus and be aware of their thoughts, feelings, and emotions via mindful meditation. Students can focus more intently on their academics and foster better interpersonal interactions at home and in the classroom by being mindful of their own emotions. Regular mindfulness practice aids in teaching students' brains to pay attention to the ideas that come and go without passing judgment.
- **Storytelling:** Although these stories are inspiring in nature, they are not intended to instill moral principles in pupils. Rather, the stories are grounded in the students' local setting, which lends relatability to the characters and circumstances. Children are encouraged to ponder, reflect, and choose for themselves what their own course of action might be if anything similar occurred in their lives via the discussions that ensue after the stories. Through these stories, children's emotional quotient is supposed to be developed. In happy courses, there are no teachings on morality, no chanting or praying, and no brief exercises that can agitate kids. (Sisodia, 2019).

- **Activity-oriented discussions and expression:** Students are encouraged to analyze, understand and evaluate their thought processes. Topics such as desires, emotions, trust, and gratitude feature in these activities (Sisodia, 2019). For example, one of the exercises asks students to write short poems or verses expressing their thanks to friends, family, and instructors. These poems are then posted on a "gratitude wall." Through these exercises, students can freely express their thoughts, sentiments, and emotions in the classroom.

In happiness lessons, questions are asked at the conclusion of each storytelling session, and there is no right or wrong response. Pupils possess the liberty to convey themselves, and educators' impartial attitude plays a crucial role in encouraging participation among students. Collaborative spirit and collaboration are fostered via group activities. Both teachers and students have grown more personable and confident in expressing themselves outside of the happy classroom. The goal of going to school has expanded due to the conversations on real-life issues that arise from stories and thoughts. It is no longer restricted to memorizing facts from certain subjects and applying them to tests.

The integration of SEL practices within the framework of Happy Schools aims to cultivate a holistic educational approach that focuses on emotional intelligence, empathy, responsible decision-making and positive relationships. These practices contribute to the well-being and happiness of students, teachers, and the entire school community.

### **Objectives of the Happiness Curriculum**

As per SCERT-Delhi and DoE (2018), objectives of the happiness curriculum are as follows:

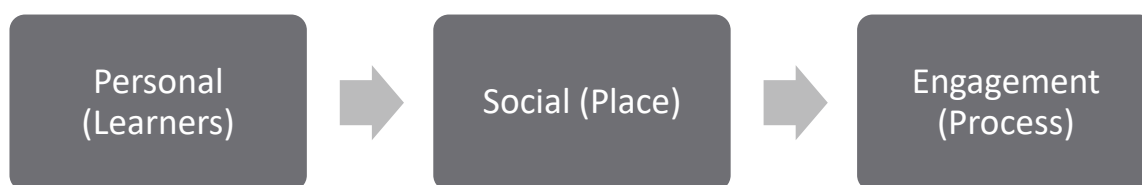
- Develop self-awareness and mindfulness among learners
- Inculcate skills of critical thinking and inquiry in the learners
- Enable learners to communicate effectively and express themselves freely and creatively
- Enable learners to understand their expectations in relationships, develop empathy, and ensure healthy relationships with family, peers and teachers
- Enable learners to apply life skills to deal with stressful and conflicting situations around them
- Develop social awareness and human values in learners to engage in meaningful contributions to society
- Develop a holistic approach to education in a universal context

Fox Eades et al. (2013) discuss this in the context of educational settings such as happiness in classrooms. Seligman (2002) emphasizes three kinds of happiness in his book "Authentic Happiness": pleasant life (pleasure), engaged life (engagement/good) and the meaningful life. Seligman (2002), mentioned three kinds of happiness which are described briefly given below:

- **Pleasant life:** In this state of contentment, people want to maximize enjoyment and reduce suffering. Students benefit when they arrive at school with a cheerful attitude, which can be created by "play, laughter, recollecting a happy memory or food." Other instances include curriculum components like having students write thank-you notes or positive recollections. These cheerful feelings can foster a happy environment in the classroom and aid in kids' learning.

- **Engaged life:** Students in this state of being are proactive and in charge, which makes them feel inspired, involved, and happy (Shernoff & Csikszentmihalyi, 2009). Students' participation, awareness, focus, and attention span can all be increased with mindfulness and storytelling.
- **Meaningful life:** This state of being is close in appearance to the Buddhist understanding of happiness, which emphasizes selflessness and long-lasting well-being as essential components of existence. Activities that get children thinking about meaning might help them find a kind of enjoyment that lasts.

**Strategies used in the Happy Schools to develop Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) skills:** To make happy schools, uses strategies that match the three main areas and dimensions in the Social and Emotional Learning Model. The different strategies for each dimension have been explained briefly in the following manner:



- **Personal dimension** comprising of Happy Learners and Happy Teachers. Strategies or activities for fostering Self-awareness includes:

**Strategy 1: Mindfulness Integration**

- Establish daily mindfulness exercises in classrooms and staff meetings.
- Provide mindfulness training both for students and teachers.
- Create a dedicated space for mindfulness activities within the school for mindfulness activities.

**Strategy 2: Emotion Mapping**

- Implement regular sessions in which students and teachers can map and discuss their emotions.
- Use tools such as emotion charts or journals for individuals to track their emotional experiences.
- It is recommended to incorporate emotional intelligence lessons into the curriculum.

**Strategy 3: Professional Development**

- Offer professional development workshops for teachers to improve their self-awareness and self-management.
  - Provide teachers with resources and support to improve their well-being.
- **Social Dimension** includes Place i.e. Happy Classrooms for the learners; strategies for Self-management includes:

### ***Strategy 1: Relationship Skills Education***

- Include students in teaching teaching-learning process to understand how to have good relationships in the classroom.
- Set up peer mentoring programs to help students interact in a positive way.
- Promote peer tutoring.
- Motivate students to assess each other's performance in class.

### ***Strategy 2: Inclusive Classroom Practices***

- Conduct awareness sessions for both students and teachers on diversity and inclusion.
- Make sure that everyone in the classroom feels welcome and like they belong.
- conduct professional talks on inclusion.
- avoid segregation of students.

### ***Strategy 3: Compassion Building Activities***

- Organise activities that help people feel compassion and empathy, like community service projects or sharing circles.
- Use conflict resolution programs to teach students how to handle conflicts positively.
- organize activities that how to share and care for others.

➤ **Engagement dimension** refers to the process of creating happy environments for the learners. Following are the strategies that can be incorporated to equip the necessary SEL skills:

### ***Strategy 1: Responsible Decision Making***

- Include lessons about making good decisions in the school curriculum.
- Set up a student committee to make decisions at school.

### ***Strategy 2: Interdependence Mapping***

- Conduct workshops or projects in which students and teachers map out the interdependence of their actions within the school community.
- Encourage collaboration among different classes or age groups to reinforce interdependence.

### ***Strategy 3: Happiness Literacy Programs***

- Students and teachers should be taught the factors influencing well-being by implementing happiness literacy programs.
- Make positive psychology a part of the school's culture and curriculum.

### ***Strategy 4: Community Engagement***

- Involve parents and the local community in school initiatives to establish a comprehensive approach to fostering a joyful environment.
- Establish alliances with organizations that promote the well-being and contentment of students and educators.

## CONCLUSION

Thus, Happy School Framework helps to inculcate Social Emotional Learning (SEL) skills and improve the academic outcomes of students' long-term success and well-being. According to Aunampai et al. (2022), "Children's interactions with teachers, their classmates, and the lessons they acquire make them happy at school; on the other hand, bullying has a highly negative correlation with school happiness". By fostering a positive and supportive environment, schools can improve academic achievement and reduce dropout rates. It helps to increase the Student Well-being, navigate adversity, build confidence, and thrive in life. Besides this, Social Emotional Learning (SEL) programs enhance the teacher satisfaction and retention by promoting a conducive school environment.

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