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## The Happiness Curriculum: A Theoretical and Conceptual Analysis

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### ABSTRACT

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In an era marked by escalating mental health concerns among adolescents and the limitations of content-centric pedagogy, education systems are increasingly called to prioritize emotional well-being and life skills alongside academic achievement. This theoretical paper critically examines the Happiness Curriculum (HC) a pioneering initiative launched in 2018 by the Government of the National Capital Territory of Delhi as a model for integrating holistic development into mainstream schooling. Targeted at students from grades 1 to 8, the HC incorporates mindfulness practices, reflective journaling, and socio-emotional learning activities into daily classroom routines.

Grounded in a multidisciplinary foundation, the HC synthesizes key principles from positive psychology (PERMA model), Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL framework), experiential and constructivist pedagogies, and Indian contemplative traditions. The paper explores the theoretical coherence of this framework, its alignment with national curricular goals, and its potential to shift educational paradigms toward student well-being and ethical development.

Through a critical analysis of the curriculum's design and delivery mechanisms, the paper identifies systemic challenges such as infrastructural limitations, teacher preparedness, and cultural adaptability that influence its scalability and sustainability. Drawing on international models from Australia, Japan, the UK, and Bhutan, the study situates the HC within the global discourse on well-being education and presents it as a culturally grounded, theoretically robust blueprint for transformative educational reform. This paper contributes to the growing literature on curriculum innovation by highlighting how the integration of emotional, ethical, and reflective practices can redefine the purpose and practice of education in the 21st century.

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### INTRODUCTION

Education systems worldwide are grappling with a critical realization: academic proficiency alone does not guarantee overall development or long-term success. A 2018 World Health Organization report highlighted that one in six adolescents globally experiences mental health conditions, with anxiety and depression on the rise (WHO, 2018). Concurrently, the digital era—while expanding access to information—has introduced distractions that fragment

attention and contribute to stress in young learners (Radesky et al., 2015). These trends have spurred calls from international bodies such as UNESCO and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to reimagine curricula that balance cognitive growth with emotional well-being and life skills (UNESCO, 2017; OECD, 2019).

In India, a nation with over 315 million school-going children, these global concerns intersect with local challenges: high-stakes examinations, large class sizes, and variable teacher preparedness. Recognizing the urgent need for systemic intervention, the Government of the National Capital Territory of Delhi launched the Happiness Curriculum (HC) on July 2, 2018, in more than 1,030 government schools. The HC's core objective is to cultivate an environment where children develop resilience, self-awareness, empathy, and ethical reasoning alongside traditional learning outcomes.

Distinct from add-on programs, the HC is embedded within the daily timetable. Each 45-minute session conducted five days a week features a blend of guided mindfulness exercises, reflective journaling, socio-emotional games, and collaborative problem-solving tasks. Drawing inspiration from ancient Indian wisdom traditions (e.g., the Yoga Sutras and the concept of *Sukha*) and contemporary positive psychology frameworks (e.g., Seligman's PERMA model), the curriculum scaffolds competencies across grades 1 through 8.

Despite its promise, the HC presents several research questions: How effectively can educators adapt to a well-being focused pedagogy? What measurable impacts emerge on students' socio-emotional competencies? Which contextual factors facilitate or hinder scalability? This paper addresses these questions by tracing the HC's conceptual underpinnings, examining its operational design and implementation strategies, critically evaluating early outcome data, and discussing lessons for broader policy adoption.

By offering an in-depth case study of Delhi's pioneering initiative, this research contributes to a growing body of literature on educational innovation, mental health promotion in schools, and the integration of well-being into mainstream curricula.

## THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS

The Happiness Curriculum (HC) is a comprehensive educational initiative launched by SCERT Delhi in July 2018 across 1,030 government schools, targeting students from Nursery to Grade 8. Designed as a structured, activity-based, and grade-specific program, it draws upon India's rich philosophical traditions, global psychological frameworks, and learner-centered pedagogies. Aligned with the *National Curriculum Framework (2005)*, HC aims to nurture emotional well-being, ethical sensibilities, and holistic development in children. The HC integrates insights from four complementary theoretical domains:

1. **Positive Psychology (PERMA Model):** *Martin Seligman's PERMA model—Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment—provides the foundation for various classroom practices. Activities such as gratitude journaling, strength recognition, peer appreciation, purpose mapping, and goal reviews are employed to enhance well-being and fulfillment.*
2. **Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL Framework):** *Aligned with CASEL's five competencies—self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making—the HC includes emotion-naming circles, conflict resolution exercises, and collaborative storytelling to foster emotional intelligence and ethical reasoning.*
3. **Constructivist and Experiential Pedagogy:** *Drawing from Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle and Vygotsky's social constructivism, HC emphasizes inquiry-driven, hands-on learning. Activities like guided mindfulness, cooperative discussions, and ethical dilemmas engage students in reflective and participatory learning experiences.*
4. **Contemplative Practices and Indian Philosophical Traditions:** *The curriculum incorporates practices inspired by the Yoga Sutras, Bhagavad Gītā, and Madhyasth Darshan, as well as contemporary contemplative neuroscience (Tang et al., 2015). Techniques such as breath awareness, mindfulness meditation, and loving-kindness foster sukha (contentment), ahimsa (non-violence), and satya (truthfulness), promoting inner clarity and ethical conduct.*

The Happiness Curriculum presents a transformative, contextually rooted model of education that integrates ancient Indian wisdom, contemporary psychological science, and participatory pedagogy. By weaving together the PERMA and CASEL frameworks, constructivist learning, and Indian philosophical thought, HC fosters emotionally intelligent, socially responsible, and

ethically grounded learners. It offers a replicable and scalable blueprint for reimagining education as a pathway to holistic well-being and purposeful living.

## 2. Conceptual Meta-Framework: A Three-Tiered Structure

The *Happiness Curriculum (HC)* is built upon a robust three-tiered meta-framework that synthesizes psychological constructs, pedagogical strategies, and philosophical principles to nurture holistic student development:

### Tier 1: Cultivating Inner Dispositions

Core Constructs: *Positive Emotion* | *Engagement* | *Ātman Awareness*

- Gratitude practices (e.g., “Three Good Things” reflections) foster emotional resilience and enhance joy.
- Strength-based tasks promote flow, attentional control, and a sense of mastery.
- Mindfulness and guided silence deepen metacognitive awareness and facilitate ethical self-realization.

Rationale: Neuroscientific studies affirm that positive affect and attentional regulation improve emotional well-being. Philosophically, cultivating *ātman* awareness transcends ego, enabling a deeper connection with intrinsic purpose and self-authenticity.

### Tier 2: Fostering Interpersonal Capacities

Core Constructs: *Relationships* | *Social Awareness* | *Compassion* | *Samāḥj Harmony*

- Activities such as peer appreciation and cooperative learning nurture trust and empathy.
- Intercultural storytelling and empathy-based role-plays enhance perspective-taking.
- Loving-kindness meditation and group problem-solving promote compassion and collective responsibility.

Rationale: Social neuroscience reveals that cooperative engagement activates bonding neurochemicals like oxytocin, reinforcing empathy. Indian ethical traditions underscore *samāḥj dharma*—the mutual flourishing of self and society.

### Tier 3: Enacting Purposeful Action

Core Constructs: *Meaning* | *Accomplishment* | *Responsible Decision-Making* | *Niṣkāma Karma*

- Modules on values clarification, goal setting, and ethical decision-making cultivate agency aligned with the greater good.

- Inspired by *niṣkāma karma* from the *Bhagavad Gītā*, students are encouraged to act selflessly, without attachment to outcomes.

Rationale: Empirical research shows that purpose-driven action fosters resilience, autonomy, and moral clarity.

### Interconnected Dynamics Across Tiers

- **Bottom-Up Uplift:** Self-awareness and emotional regulation enhance social connectedness and empathy.
- **Top-Down Integration:** Engaging in meaningful action strengthens self-worth and internal coherence.
- **Reciprocal Scaffolding:** Reflection, interaction, and purposeful action interact cyclically, embedding well-being at personal, relational, and societal levels.

### 3. Philosophical and Indigenous Anchors

#### a. The Happiness Triad (Agrahar Nagraj Sharma)

- Momentary Happiness: Derived from sensory pleasures (e.g., music, play).
- Deeper Happiness: Arises from gratitude, care, and meaningful relationships.
- Sustainable Happiness: Anchored in mindfulness, purpose, and inner clarity.

#### b. Coexistential Philosophy (Madhyasth Darshan)

The curriculum translates values such as simplicity, kindness, and benevolence into classroom practices through storytelling, service-oriented tasks (e.g., caring for plants), and reflective dialogue, cultivating harmony and mutual respect.

#### c. Continuum of Indian Educational Thought

The HC reflects the educational legacies of:

- Mahatma Gandhi: Emphasis on truth, self-discipline, and moral action (e.g., integrity pledges).
- Rabindranath Tagore: Creative self-expression, aesthetic sensibility, and community involvement.
- J. Krishnamurti: Freedom of thought, inquiry, and introspective learning.

These philosophical roots are operationalized through teacher manuals and classroom methodologies, reinforcing indigenous wisdom with contemporary relevance.

### 4. Developmental Progression Through Guiding Questions

The curriculum is developmentally structured around four key questions, each aligning with students' cognitive and emotional maturity:

1. *What makes me happy?*
2. *How do my thoughts and emotions shape my world?*
3. *How can I contribute to others' happiness?*
4. *What is my purpose?*

**Grade-Wise Implementation:**

- **Nursery–Grade 2:** Emotion recognition games, sensory mindfulness, mindful breathing.
- **Grades 3–5:** Story-based dilemmas, gratitude journaling, peer appreciation activities.
- **Grades 6–8:** Role-plays on real-life challenges, collaborative problem-solving, reflective exercises on values and purpose.

**5. Pedagogical Strategies and Implementation Tools**

**Pedagogical Principles:**

- **Activity-Based, Non-Graded Learning:** Emphasis on experiential methods such as art, music, drama, storytelling, meditation, and reflective dialogue.
- **Child-Centered and Value-Oriented:** Aligns with NCF 2005 recommendations for holistic, inclusive, and meaningful education.

**Assessment Practices:**

- **Qualitative Evaluation:** Teachers observe and document student growth in:
  - Awareness and focus
  - Critical self-reflection
  - Social-emotional skills
  - Confident self-expression

**Mentor-Teacher Model:** A network of 200 trained mentor-teachers ensures consistent implementation through reflective learning circles, workshops, and professional development sessions.

**Typology of Activities:** These activities are structured to fulfill cognitive, affective, and ethical development goals:

<b>Guided Reflection</b>	Meta-cognition	Self-compassion	Ethical clarity and intentional choice
<b>Peer-Facilitated Inquiry</b>	Critical thinking	Empathic listening	Shared responsibility and mutual respect
<b>Mindful Centering</b>	Attention regulation	Emotional equilibrium	Inner ethical grounding
<b>Collaborative Projects</b>	Problem-solving	Social connectedness	Collective moral engagement

The *Happiness Curriculum* represents a transformative, culturally resonant model of education that integrates Indian philosophical thought, contemporary psychological science, and constructivist pedagogy. It harmonizes frameworks like PERMA and CASEL, creating emotionally intelligent, ethically grounded, and socially responsive learners. By embedding well-being, character, and community engagement into the heart of learning, HC offers a replicable, scalable blueprint for reimagining education—not just as academic instruction, but as a pathway to purposeful living and sustainable happiness.

## CURRICULUM DESIGN AND FRAMEWORK

The Happiness Curriculum (HC) is operationalized through a carefully structured framework that aligns explicit objectives with daily practices, robust teacher development, and systematic monitoring. This multi-tiered design ensures coherence, consistency, and scalability across diverse school contexts.

**Defined Objectives and Progression** The HC specifies five core objectives; Self-awareness, Critical Thinking, Empathy and Social Awareness, Gratitude and Positive Relationships, and Resilience and Coping Skills each broken down into age-appropriate competencies:

- *Self-awareness*: From identifying basic emotions in grades 1–2 to articulating complex feelings and personal values by grades 7–8.
- *Critical Thinking*: Beginning with simple problem-solving tasks (grades 1–3), advancing to ethical dilemma analysis and reflective debates (grades 6–8).
- *Empathy and Social Awareness*: Evolving from emotion-recognition games to community engagement projects that require perspective-taking and cultural sensitivity.



- *Gratitude and Positive Relationships*: Progressing from daily gratitude listing to peer-led acknowledgment sessions and collaborative service initiatives.
- *Resilience and Coping Skills*: Scaling from guided breathing exercises to self-designed stress management plans and peer-support networks.

Competencies are accompanied by clear behavioral indicators to guide formative assessments. Daily Session Structure Consistency is achieved through a dedicated 45-minute daily block, structured as follows:

- *Mindful Centering* (5–10 minutes): Brief guided exercises (e.g., breathing, body scan) to establish focus and calm.
- *Reflective Practice* (10 minutes): Journaling or drawing prompts encourage introspection on emotions and experiences.
- *Interactive Engagement* (15–20 minutes): Role-plays, group discussions, and socio-emotional games foster interpersonal learning.
- *Critical Inquiry and Action* (10 minutes): Collaborative analysis of real-life scenarios, goal-setting, and planning small acts of kindness or problem-solving tasks.

This modular design balances routine with variety, reinforcing skills through repetition while introducing novel challenges.

Teacher Capacity Building Effective delivery depends on sustained professional development and support:

- *Initial Training*: Intensive three-day induction covering HC philosophy, session facilitation techniques, and use of reflection tools.
- *Peer Learning Communities*: Monthly in-school cohorts where teachers co-create lesson enhancements, share best practices, and troubleshoot challenges.
- *Digital Learning Hub*: A centralized online platform provides video tutorials, downloadable lesson plans, assessment rubrics, and a moderated forum for real-time expert feedback.
- *Coaching and Observation*: Master trainers conduct bi-annual classroom visits, using structured observation protocols to coach teachers on facilitation skills and classroom management.



Resource and Assessment Ecosystem Comprehensive materials and tools support consistent implementation and iterative refinement:

- *Teacher's Companion Guide*: Grade-wise detailed lesson scripts, adaptable activity variations, and extension ideas ensure fidelity and flexibility.
- *Student Journals and Activity Booklets*: Custom-designed workbooks include guided prompts, progress trackers, and creative spaces for reflection and artwork.
- *Formative Assessment Rubrics*: Descriptive scales for each competency allow teachers to record observations, provide targeted feedback, and guide student self-assessment.
- *Data Dashboards*: Digital dashboards aggregate assessment scores, session attendance, and qualitative teacher notes, enabling school leaders to monitor trends, identify professional development needs, and measure program fidelity.

Together, these design components create a dynamic ecosystem where clear objectives, structured daily practice, empowered educators, and data-driven monitoring converge to embed the Happiness Curriculum seamlessly into everyday schooling. While the Happiness Curriculum is supported by a thoughtful and structured design, its practical implementation across diverse educational settings brings forth a series of real-world challenges. These need to be addressed systematically to ensure the long-term effectiveness and sustainability of the program.

## IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

Although the Happiness Curriculum (HC) has demonstrated promising outcomes, its large-scale implementation encounters several interrelated challenges:

- **Infrastructure and Resource Limitations**: High student-teacher ratios and constrained classroom spaces in many government schools impede the facilitation of small-group activities and reflective exercises. Limited access to digital devices and inconsistent internet connectivity further restrict the use of online training materials and real-time data dashboards for monitoring progress.
- **Educator Buy-In and Pedagogical Shift**: Transitioning from traditional lecture-based instruction to a facilitative, student-centered approach requires significant mindset change. Some teachers perceive the HC as an additional burden rather than an integral

pedagogical component. Sustaining motivation demands ongoing recognition, targeted coaching, and demonstrable evidence of positive student impact to reinforce commitment.

- **Assessing Socio-Emotional Growth:** Measuring competencies such as self-awareness, empathy, and resilience poses methodological challenges. Self-report instruments are vulnerable to social desirability bias, while observational rubrics may introduce evaluator subjectivity. Developing reliable, valid, and scalable assessment tools that capture incremental progress remains a priority.
- **Contextual Adaptation:** Delhi's student population is linguistically, culturally, and socio-economically diverse. Activities and examples must be localized to ensure cultural relevance—for instance, adapting storytelling prompts or mindfulness scripts to reflect students' lived experiences. Without such customization, engagement and learning efficacy can diminish.
- **Parental and Community Engagement:** Sustaining well-being practices beyond the classroom hinges on active involvement of parents and community stakeholders. Although some schools have organized parent orientation sessions, systematic outreach strategies are often lacking. Strengthening home-school partnerships and leveraging local community resources are essential for reinforcing HC principles in students' broader environments.

## **GLOBAL BEST PRACTICES: A COMPARATIVE LENS**

Delhi's Happiness Curriculum (HC) can draw valuable lessons from four leading international well-being initiatives. These exemplars share four hallmarks: system-wide embedding, concrete skill-building, community integration, and rigorous evaluation. Below, we distill their core strategies and suggest how HC might incorporate them.

### **1. Geelong Grammar School's Positive Education (Australia)**

- **PERMA+H Framework:** Extends Seligman's PERMA to include Health, covering Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, Accomplishment, and Physical Well-being.
- **Four-Stage Integration:**
  1. **Learn It:** Weekly lessons on character strengths (e.g., VIA Survey).

2. Live It: Daily “Good Things” journaling and gratitude practices.
  3. Teach It: Senior students and parents co-facilitate workshops.
  4. Embed It: Well-being themes woven into core subjects—exploring resilience in history, empathy in literature.
- Implications for HC:
    - Cross-Curricular Infusion: Encourage subject teachers to integrate HC concepts—e.g., linking mindfulness to science experiments or art projects.
    - Distributed Leadership: Develop a network of “HC Ambassadors” among students and parents to sustain engagement.

## **2. Akita Prefecture’s “Zest for Living” (Japan)**

- Transversal Competencies: Embeds motivation, empathy, creativity, communication, and cooperation as prerequisites for all academic learning.
- Interactive Learning Design:
  - Rotational “Volleyball” Lessons: Small-group problem-solving stations foster dialogue and collaboration.
  - Open-Plan Classrooms: Shared spaces invite peer observation and community involvement.
  - Community as Classroom: Schools partner with families and local organizations for experiential projects (e.g., neighborhood history walks).
- Implications for HC:
  - Physical & Social Architecture: Pilot “HC Hubs” shared spaces where mixed-age groups rotate through well-being activities.
  - Stakeholder Networks: Formalize partnerships with NGOs and parent groups to extend HC principles beyond school hours.

## **3. Penn Resilience Program (United Kingdom)**

- Cognitive-Behavioral Focus: Teaches six resilience skills; Emotional Literacy, Impulse Control, Optimistic Thinking, Flexible Thinking, Self-Efficacy, and Social Connectedness in 18 structured sessions.
- Active-Learning Techniques: Role-plays, skits, quizzes, and an anonymous “problem pool” to practice real-life coping.

- Five-Step Problem-Solving: Stop → Evaluate → Brainstorm → Act → Review.
- Implications for HC:
  - Concrete Tools: Integrate the five-step problem-solving model into HC's reflection segments to equip students with tangible stress-management strategies.
  - Pilot RCTs: Use small-scale trials for new HC modules and measure impact on student anxiety and optimism.

#### **4. Gross National Happiness Education (Bhutan)**

- Holistic Well-Being Attributes: Infuses nine GNH values Intellectual Competence, Cultural Awareness, Environmental Stewardship, and more across every subject.
- “Green Schools” Certification: Schools earn recognition by improving on eight domains (environmental, social, cultural), driving student-led sustainability projects.
- Mind-Training Practices: Standardized daily meditations and “mindful moments.”
- Implications for HC:
  - Place-Based Projects: Launch hands-on environmental initiatives (e.g., school gardens, waste audits) to deepen experiential learning.
  - Values-Driven Metrics: Develop HC-specific indicators (e.g., “Mindfulness Index,” “Kindness Meter”) to track progress and foster accountability.

#### **Synthesis for Delhi's HC:**

1. Embed Across the Ecosystem: Transition from standalone “happiness classes” to a school-wide ethos, integrating well-being into academic content, routines, and campus design.
2. Teach Practical Skills: Complement reflective journaling with structured, evidence-based modules on resilience and cognitive-behavioral coping.
3. Mobilize Community: Leverage parents, alumni, and local partners as co-facilitators and advocates, extending HC's reach beyond the classroom.
4. Measure & Iterate: Implement digital dashboards and mixed-methods evaluations (surveys, observations, pilot trials) to monitor fidelity, outcomes, and continuous improvement.

By adapting these proven strategies, the Happiness Curriculum can evolve into a more holistic, skill-driven, and community-anchored model—preparing Delhi's students not only to be happier, but also more resilient, engaged, and responsible citizens.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Delhi Happiness Curriculum (HC) serves as a compelling model for integrating structured well-being practices into the fabric of school education. Its implementation has demonstrated that prioritizing emotional and social learning can significantly enhance the overall educational experience—for students, teachers, and institutions alike.

Regular mindfulness exercises and reflective activities have played a vital role in developing students' emotional intelligence. By learning to identify, express, and regulate their emotions, students exhibited reduced anxiety and heightened self-awareness, contributing to a more positive and balanced classroom climate. Additionally, empathy-driven exercises and group-based tasks have nurtured stronger peer connections, fostering inclusive and cooperative learning environments while reducing behavioral issues.

The benefits of HC extend beyond emotional and social development. The calm and focused atmosphere promoted by these sessions has translated into improved academic engagement. Students have shown greater attention, participation, and academic performance, illustrating the profound connection between emotional well-being and cognitive growth. For educators, the curriculum has facilitated professional growth by encouraging pedagogical creativity, enhancing confidence, and increasing job satisfaction. Peer collaboration and ongoing mentoring have further reinforced teachers' capacity to support student well-being effectively.

To ensure the sustainability and scalability of these gains, a strategic, multi-level approach is essential. First, institutional commitment must be established by formally integrating well-being education into school policy, with dedicated time and resources. Second, continuous professional development should be prioritized through a combination of workshops, digital platforms, and mentorship, enabling teachers to adapt practices to diverse classroom contexts. Third, the curriculum must resonate with students' cultural and ethical backgrounds, fostering deeper engagement and a sense of ownership within the community. Finally, rigorous monitoring and evaluation mechanisms—using both quantitative metrics and qualitative

feedback—should be implemented to guide iterative improvements and inform effective policy and resource decisions.

In essence, the Delhi Happiness Curriculum reaffirms that emotional well-being is not a peripheral concern but a foundational pillar of quality education. Its holistic approach offers a transformative pathway for creating more empathetic, resilient, and academically empowered learners, while simultaneously enriching the professional lives of educators and strengthening the broader educational ecosystem.

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