

HAPPY SCHOOLS SEMINAR CONCEPT NOTE

4-5 June 2015, NIST International School, Bangkok, Thailand



I. Background

Throughout the 20th Century, education discourse was commonly geared toward preparing learners for the world of work, especially in the context of growing economic development and competition. But moving into the 21st Century, are we satisfied with this? Or should we expect more from education systems in a world of rapid change along with increasing mobility, life stress, inequalities and environmental concerns? These questions reflect the greater attention placed on social and emotional aspects of learning as increasingly reflected in education systems across the Asia-Pacific region and in schools themselves, which have a fundamental role to play. We regard schools that ensure the holistic development and well-being of learners as ‘Happy Schools’.

Until now, there has been limited effort to document and compare how well countries promote, uphold and foster learner well-being and holistic development. The UNESCO study on Learning to Live Together (LTLT)¹ found that while numerous policy and curriculum goals associated with LTLT-related competencies exist², there is no robust instrument to monitor how well such policy and curriculum intents translate into the reality of schools. Following on from the LTLT study, the ‘Happy Schools Project’ analyzes the ways in which interactions among students, teachers and the school community contribute to individual well-being and holistic development.

The initial phase of the Happy Schools Project has so far involved an ongoing desk study to review existing research and initiatives in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond. In addition, a survey³ has been released in several languages, aiming to gather the views of students, teachers and parents as well as the general public on what factors contribute to making a happy school. A seminar is to be held from 4-5

¹ For more information on the LTLT study, please see: <http://www.unescobkk.org/resources/e-library/publications/article/learning-to-live-together-policies-and-realities-in-the-asia-pacific/>

² Examples of LTLT-related competencies as presented in the above study include empathy, tolerance, communication and leadership among others.

³ The links to the survey in English, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Russian and Thai can be found at: <http://www.unescobkk.org/news/article/how-can-we-make-schools-happier-places-you-tell-us/>

June 2015 in Bangkok, Thailand to, among other things, share the findings of the Happy Schools survey results and facilitate the exchange of ideas and best practices by participants. The results of the desk study, survey, as well as the outcome of the ‘Happy Schools Seminar’, will all contribute to developing a ‘Happy Schools Framework’ based on an initial set of criteria (see Annex 1).

2. Objectives

The seminar aims to build a ‘Happy Schools Framework’ that can facilitate the implementation of the concept of ‘Happy Schools’ in a diversity of contexts through:

- 1) Discussion and shared understanding on the criteria that promote the concept of ‘Happy Schools’, and
- 2) Discussion on the strategies, as well as identifying ways and means for schools to meet each criteria.

3. Participants

The seminar aims to bring together a variety of participants to ensure maximum diversity and creative discussion among 25-30 participants. Five to six schools from various countries in the Asia-Pacific region will be represented. This will include different types of schools to allow for different perspectives to be shared, including public, private and international schools. Each school is to be represented by one student, one teacher and one school leader. In addition, the seminar will include a small number of experts and researchers from UNESCO Bangkok and other institutions.

4. Tentative Programme Outline

Day One: Thursday 4th June 2015	
AM	Welcome, presentation of UNESCO’s concept of ‘Happy Schools’ base on the desk study, survey results and initial criteria.
PM	Each school to share their best practices in an innovative and creative way. A walking tour of NIST International School will be arranged to highlight aspects of the school environment and practices which are conducive to the concept of a ‘Happy School’.
Day Two: Friday 5th June 2015	
AM	Review of day one and individual/group reflection to identify of the criteria based on school presentations and UNESCO’s initial criteria.
PM	Discussion on strategies, the ways and means each of the criteria can be measured and implemented in schools in a diversity of contexts, with consensus reached on an initial framework.

5. Seminar Format

Innovative and creative working methods will be used in this seminar to create an informal atmosphere and allow for free exchange of ideas. Activities will include games, practical demonstrations and role plays to ensure interaction between participants. Each school will be allocated 30 minutes to present their school. When presenting, schools are recommended to use such methods, including audio-visual materials wherever possible.

Language: The seminar will be conducted in English.

Dress code: Happy and casual 😊

6. Background Documents

A number of background documents will be shared with participants ahead of the seminar, including a briefing on the survey results, a draft framework (based on Annex 1), as well as an information note on the Happy Schools Project. Schools are also encouraged to bring any available materials or documents from their countries relating to the theme of 'Happy Schools', including country background information, policy documents, photos, videos, posters, etc.

7. Outcomes

The three main outcomes of the seminar are as follows:

- a) The 'Happy Schools' framework is developed for review.
- b) Best practices and perspectives are captured to contribute to a report.
- c) An initial network of schools embracing the concept of 'Happy Schools' is established.

8. Funding and Organizational Arrangements

This seminar is organized by UNESCO Bangkok and hosted by NIST International School⁴. Participation in this seminar (including travel, accommodation and other costs) is on a voluntary basis, and participating schools should seek funding from their own or other sources. Participants with special requests or requiring further clarification should contact the event organizers directly. Suggested accommodation and logistical information is provided in the General Information Note provided to participants.

9. Contact Persons

Aliénor Salmon (Ms.)

Research Assistant

Education Policy and Reform (EPR) Unit

UNESCO Bangkok

Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education

920 Sukhumvit Rd, Bangkok 10110, Thailand

Tel. +6623910577 Ext.213 Fax. +6623910866

Email: a.salmon@unesco.org

Ramya Vivekanandan (Ms.)

Programme Specialist

Education Policy and Reform (EPR) Unit

UNESCO Bangkok

Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education

920 Sukhumvit Rd, Bangkok 10110, Thailand

Tel. +6623910577 Ext.380 Fax. +6623910866

Email: r.vivekanandan@unesco.org

⁴ For more information about NIST, including location information, please see: <http://www.nist.ac.th/>

Annex 1. Initial Criteria for the Happy Schools Framework

People	Process	Place
Friendship with other students (of the same or across grades)	Teamwork learning (help and support from other students)	Outdoor playing and green spaces
Good relationship between students and teachers	Learning content is useful for daily life	Creative visual displays
All students of different backgrounds feel included	Reasonable workload (homework and exams)	A warm and friendly learning environment
Helping students with special needs	Freedom to express opinion in school and in the classroom	Comfortable for students with different needs and backgrounds
Support from local community	Interesting and engaging learning activities	Good nutrition
Parental encouragement	Frequent feedback from teachers	School is safe and free from bullying, stress and competition
School leadership	Extra-curricular activities	
	Learning outside the classroom	