

# COUNSELLING CONNECTION: P. Knox

## Practicing Happiness in Schools

### SCIENCE BEHIND HAPPINESS

It seems that many human beings are on a quest to be happy. It sounds simple; however experiencing true happiness can be a struggle for many. Professionals at the Greater Good Science Centre (Berkeley University) set out to explore if there was scientific evidence of factors that contribute to a happier and more meaningful life. Although there is a predetermined genetic factor to happiness, it turns out, there are many practices that humans can regularly engage in to improve overall happiness. Happiness increases life expectancy, physical health, relationship interactions, creativity, resilience, problem solving and innovative skills. If educators are aware of the science behind happiness, they can model and teach skills to children early on. Happiness practices can become part of daily living when consistently implemented. Educators' awareness that people can consciously have control over happiness can positively impact the culture of classrooms and schools. This in turn will impact student achievement!

### EXAMPLES OF HAPPINESS PRACTICES

**Gratitude**  
**Giving to others**  
**Empathy**  
**Connection**  
**Reconciliation**  
**Cooperation**  
**Mindfulness**  
**Forgiveness**  
**Compassion/Kindness**  
**Physical Activity**

### HAPPY TEACHER = HAPPY STUDENTS

**Teachers might benefit from reflecting on their own happiness practices and how these might impact students in their classes. It is easy to get wrapped up with the many responsibilities and demands in the teaching profession. However teachers are influencing lives at every moment and must remember that their thoughts and intentions might greatly influence the happiness of themselves and their students. Some questions to consider include:**

Do I take time prior to arriving at work, to focus on my daily intention for my students/ myself?

How do I practice gratitude / intentional focus on what I am thankful for?

Am I able to observe my negative thoughts and make adjustments to them so that they don't wear me down?

How can I give to my students today, so that they feel cared for and respected?

Is there room for me to slow down? Am I aware of the gift of the present moment?

If a student's behavior is causing me stress, am I able to ask myself what happened to that student and why he or she might be acting out?

How can I connect with challenging students and explore how they can be supported?

Do I allow others on my team to support me, or do I view that as weakness?

Is there room for empathy and compassion for my difficult students?

Are there students who might need me to recognize their strengths?

Am I holding a grudge towards a student or staff member that is creating negative energy? What can I do to change my attitude toward this hurt and release my grudge?

Is the anxiety/stress of my job getting in the way of my ability to positively connect with students? Do I take time to notice what is going on in my body? Thoughts? Physical Discomfort? Do I need support to manage?

How can I intentionally model kindness today while interacting with students and staff?

How can I make time in my plan today to allow my students to practice happiness?

Am I physically active? How can I work with my schedule to allow for breaks?

Do I look through the lens of my students and recognize what they are observing and feeling as a result of my presence?

# HAPPINESS PRACTICES IN THE CLASSROOM

Teachers have minimal resources in the classroom to meet all of the diverse needs of the students. The thought of having to attend to more practices might seem overwhelming. However it doesn't need to be *extra* work. If teachers are open to adjusting their perspectives, engaging in self-reflection, and incorporating simple routines into the day, many of the situations that cause teachers stress and unhappiness can be diminished. When students are happy and feel connected, they become engaged in learning in the classroom. Some ideas to promote happy learners are:

- Communicate to students what you are grateful for when working with them. They are teachers too!
- Send gratitude notes to students/have them write to others (beginning/end of day activity).
- Implement gratitude journals/photos/exit slips/reflection writing. This can be done in all subjects.
- Allow students to express internal and external experiences of their day. Validate feelings and question them/be curious if they are searching for a different experience.
- Ask students questions about their lives and allow time for them to ask others questions. Make connecting and relationship building a priority!
- Connect with each child as they enter the classroom (smile/high five/handshake/say their names).
- If you struggle with connecting with a student, find another colleague who can!
- Allow talk time at the end of the lesson where students can share in small or large groups.
- Question students about how their learning can be connected to outside world/people.
- Ask students for feedback regarding their experience in your class. This can be difficult but valuable. If you struggle with this, ask yourself why?
- Allow for small time slots for grounding/self regulating (5 minutes can help and all ages benefit)
- Incorporate social emotional learning into lessons (What can a child do if feeling anxious during Math/Science Lab? Encourage students to attend to feelings in body when frustration arises as a result of working in a group, and validate those feelings. Allow *the student* to come up with ideas to emotionally regulate).
- Create space for quiet time/mindfulness activities (helpful before and after transitions).
- Set times for academic student help in the week and stick to it. Take your lunch breaks and use as opportunities to practice mindfulness/reflection/connecting with others.
- Let go of the power over sense of control. You can be collaborative with your students and still be an effective leader!
- Have a plan for dealing with defiant students/visualize this plan regularly. How will you attend to your own anxiety and anger in the moment?
- Admit when you are wrong, it is okay to tell students you messed up with how you reacted to them.
- Encourage and model secret acts of kindness. This can be class project too!
- Incorporate humor into day. Let your students laugh and see you laugh! Attend to how this feels.
- Show video clips of celebrities talking about happiness practices.
- Display happiness quotes in class that acknowledge happiness practices.
- Videotape yourself and critique with colleagues so you can observe how you connect show kindness with students while teaching.
- Invite a colleague into your class to observe and invite his or her input.
- Plan a field trip where the primary goal is to practice kindness/compassion

## Reference

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- Joaquin. (2018, April 16). *Positive Education: happy students & positive psychology In the classroom*. Retrieved from: <https://positivepsychologyprogram.com/positive-education-happy-students/>