



## ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Education

## EDUCATION FOR MENTAL WELL BEING

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## ABSTRACT

Despite large increases in the wealth and social circumstances of people in OECD countries over the last 50 years, there has been no substantial improvement, and may even have been deterioration, in psychological wellbeing. (Diener & Seligman, 2004; Huppert & So, 2009). There are also now many more stresses and strains on mental health in general as a result of the increased pace and complexity of life, and the breakdown of stable communities. Health is a crucial prerequisite for sustainable human development, and there can be no health without mental well being. It plays a key role in efforts to achieve social inclusion and equity, universal health coverage, access to justice and human rights, and sustainable economic development so consideration of mental wellbeing in education systems, including educating children about protecting their own mental health, should be part of every educational programme.

This paper analyses the links between sustainable development and mental well being, as we believe that both areas, if brought together, can lead to flourishing environment, communities and individuals. Firstly, the discussion will explore definitions of positive mental health and sustainable development. It will then highlight some goals of sustainable development and how education for mental well being can contribute not only to positive mental health but also to sustainability.

## Full Paper

*Humanity stands at a crossroads. Depending on the choices we make now, future generations will either look back at our time with anger or with gratitude.*

(New Economics Foundation, 2009)

With the expansion of material prosperity, there has been decrease in psychological well being of individuals which is affecting not only individual himself but also to the society and ultimately to the nation. Before the sustainable development of the nation, it is becoming more important to indulge in the sustainable development of the individual. Education is the most powerful weapon for it. The aim of the education is to bring out the hidden gem like potentialities in pupils and to make all possible efforts to ensure that the tender plants (tender pupils) do not waste their sweet fragrance (mental well being) in wilderness (in uncongenial environment). A teacher must make provisions for the mental well being of each and every individual so that they can sustain efficiently and can contribute in the sustainable development of the nation.

## Meaning of Mental Well Being

Mental health is an indispensable component of health, defined by the WHO as "a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community." However, mental health is a universal experience that is fundamental to personal wellbeing and social functioning (World Health Organization, 2011). Mental well being which is increasingly referred to as 'flourishing', can increase resilience, physical health and general wellbeing, and can reduce the risk of mental health problems. People who are flourishing have been defined as individuals experiencing positive emotions, engagement, meaning, accomplishment and positive relationships.

Keyes has proposed that the opposite of flourishing is the state of being mentally unhealthy, or languishing, 'which is tantamount to being stuck and stagnant, or feeling empty or feeling that life lacks interest or engagement'.

Following her extensive studies on positive mental health, Fredrickson (2011) described flourishing as a qualitatively different state from moderate or languishing mental health, using a metaphor of how water is different from ice. A tipping point of positive but realistic internal states leads to expanded awareness and positive regard for self and others, including concern for the wider environment. This state tends to be considered as a mental well being.

Progress in development will not be made without improvements in mental health. The reasons are equally straightforward. Mental illnesses cause more disability than any other health condition; bring enormous pain and suffering to individuals and their families and communities; and can lead to early death, human rights abuses and damage to the economy. Improving mental health is therefore a vital part of a successful development programme. Yet mental health is generally given a very low priority and often neglected altogether.

A study made by the Department of Psychiatry of Columbia University shows how inadequate are the mental hygiene services available to children. This study, involving 350 school systems over the nation, disclosed that (1) about 80 percent had no classroom discussion of mental hygiene problems, (2) in 85 percent of the schools where such problems were discussed there were no staff personnel trained in mental hygiene, and (3) in 17 percent of the schools there were no mental hygiene services of any kind.

As children go through school they learn the traditions and customs of our culture and acquire skills which will enable them to become self-sustaining members of society. These are important functions of the school. Equally important are the influences exerted upon the personality formation of children. If schools are to equip children for living; they must help them to become well-adjusted, adequate persons who can make the most of their potentialities, live with themselves comfortably, and get along well with others. It is only possible by assuring mental well being of students. Education for mental well being can be given in following manner.

## Expression through Writing

Sometimes intense emotions in children can be reduced by having them describe in writing how they feel and why. For instance, a fourth grade teacher encountered two excited youngsters who came running to her, each shouting his side of the story. She had asked them to take a sheet of paper and write down what had happened, telling them not to bother about spelling or punctuation. The outcome, as she described it, was this: "At first they write fast, pressing down as hard as they can on their pencils. But gradually, they cool off. By the time they have finished, they are almost back to normal. I then read their stories, we talk them over, and things work out pretty well". It is important that the discharge of emotion through writing be followed by a talk with the teacher, or a group discussion of the problem.

This helps children to view their problems more clearly and to consider the emotion producing situation objectively. Writing is not a technique which can be used with all children; however, it is another medium for the expression and clarification of feelings and, as such, should have a place in the classroom.

## Educational Strategies for Mental Well Being

**Art as a Technique**

It has been said that art can provide relief from shock or other trauma, that it gives deep satisfaction of a creative nature, helps to strengthen the ego, provides expression for unconscious fears and anxieties, and contributes to the resolving of strong inhibitions.

Art may contribute to human relationships by providing children with a means for communicating their problems and feelings to others. Youngsters who are not sufficiently skilled in writing or spelling to express themselves well may be enabled to do so through a technique called "picture writing." This technique consists of having children fold large sheet of paper into as many frames as are needed to tell a story through a sequence of pictures. The paper is then spread out, and with pencil or crayon a series of sketches is made in comic-strip form. The stories are shared with the group by reading from the picture writing.

**Music as a Technique**

The effect of music on the emotions and activities of men has been proclaimed for centuries. There is some experimental evidence that music will stimulate mental well being depending upon the type of music that is heard. This has been demonstrated by Alexander who had groups of college students draw as they listened to stimulating then relaxing music. He found that stimulating music produces increased motor energy and art overall disturbance of the neuromuscular, respiratory and circulatory systems, while soothing music had a reverse effect.

Thus, it appears that music and art have immediate value as means through which tensions may be relieved and long-term value in aesthetic appreciation, creative expression, and the achievement of security. If they are used as adjuncts to therapeutic techniques, rather than taught as subjects to be learned, music and art can make a contribution to mental well being.

**Role Playing and Dramatics**

The tendency for children to engage in dramatic play appears to be almost universal. They assume the roles of real or fictitious figures and derive great pleasure from spontaneously enacting these roles in various forms of dramatic play, ranging from tea patties to space conquest

These techniques have been named psychodrama, in which individuals participate in situations which involve interpersonal relations, and sociodrama, which deals with intergroup relations. The purpose of these devices is to enable children to release and clarify their feelings through dramatization and to develop skills in human relations through experimenting with real life situations which results in mental well being.

**Reading as a Technique**

Books and stories can make a vital contribution to the mental well being of children. They provide a medium through which boys and girls may be encouraged to discuss their personal problems; they make available means through which youngsters can escape, temporarily, from their tensions and frustrations; and they furnish vicarious experiences which enable children to gain deeper insight into their own behavior by experiencing the life problems of others. It serves three main functions-

- Reading encourages discussion
- Reading for psychological escape
- Reading as a form of therapy

**Teaching for Mental Well Being**

Knowledge of growth and an understanding of human interaction become more and more important to a child as he grows older and faces to an increasingly greater extent the problem of guiding his own development. Mental hygienists feel that such learning is too important to be left to chance. They recommend that definite provisions be made in the school curriculum to provide instruction for mental well being. Like-

- Mental well being courses.
- Informal instruction.

- Unit for mental well being.

A number of teaching aids are available for conducting instruction in mental hygiene. Included among these are books and pamphlets for children, films, film strips, plays, tape recordings, and records.

**Effect of Teacher's Personality**

The damage wrought in classrooms where the teacher is immature, poorly balanced, maladjusted, or inadequately equipped to deal with children. The presence of such personalities in the classroom can provide a serious barrier to the healthy development of children.

On the other hand, there is evidence that a well-adjusted, mature teacher who is professionally competent and can establish rapport with children may have a positive influence on their mental health. Observations of the classroom behavior of teachers and pupils confirm this viewpoint. For instance, Laycock's study of the personality of teachers and their effects on child behavior show the direct nature of this relationship. A few of his observations are listed to illustrate how children reflect the tensions, anxieties, happiness, or unhappiness of their teachers:

**CASE 1:**

A man who is an elderly veteran. He is dirty and untidy, nervous, jittery and dashes about. He berates children who don't know the answers. His teaching is didactic and authoritarian. No development of class as a cooperative group. Result: Pupils appear fearful, timid, insecure, and repressed.

**CASE 2:**

Teacher is young and attractive. Pupils participated and enjoyed activity. Pupils gathered around piano and sang. Teacher appeared to be aware of the pupils' emotional, social, physical, and intellectual development. She created the "we" feeling. She seemed to like her children and seemed secure and well adjusted. Result: Classroom gives the impression of being a busy, happy workshop.

**Classroom Climate and Mental Well Being**

The feeling tone which exists in the classroom has much to do with the mental well being of children. The most effective learning take place when children are in a warm, friendly environment where they enjoy full, busy, gratifying days. Moreover, a supportive classroom climate may provide an antidote to the unpleasant experiences many children have outside of school. To a great many boys and girls, school is the only place where they can find friendship, acceptance, and recognition-factors which make it possible for them to resist the pull of negative forces in the home and neighborhood. One of the teacher's primary functions, then, is to create a classroom atmosphere in which children are happy, and where their needs for recognition and belonging are satisfied.

**Classroom Climate in the Elementary School**

Elementary schools have placed more emphasis on classroom climate than have secondary schools because it is generally recognized that young children, for the most part, operate on the basis of feeling rather than thought or intellect. Some of the procedures commonly followed in establishing a pleasant feeling tone in the elementary school classroom are these: w

- The room is made as pleasant as possible.
- Teacher's friendly attitude.
- Recognizing their personal significant.
- Sensitive to children's feelings.

**Classroom Climate in Secondary Schools and Colleges**

The need for recognition and belonging is as important in the secondary school and college classroom as it is in the elementary classroom. Perhaps the greatest improvement in classroom climate is needed at college and university level. Here students get relatively little persona attention while the subject matter taught is given primary emphasis. College students do not minimize the importance of teaching subject matter in the classroom, but feel

that it can be done with more recognition for students as individuals, and in an atmosphere of improved classroom relationships. They offer the following specific recommendations to college instructors:

1. Become more aware of student reactions.
2. Talk to students informally before and after class.
3. Learn the names of students so that you can greet them by name when you meet them outside of class.
4. Recognize good work with a few words of praise, or with notes in the margins of papers.
5. Have the student feel free to offer suggestions or express grievances without endangering relationships with the instructor.

### **Observations of Children in Informal Settings**

An impression of children's inner feelings can be gained by observing their activities on the playground, in club or recreational groups, or wherever they are away from an organized academic setting. In these informal, unguided activities, children show their spontaneous impulses and a keen observer can learn much about the way they think and feel. For example, the conversation of children in these free settings is often very revealing. Not only do they express their own thoughts, fears, aspirations, and emotions, but they reflect also their interpretations of the teachers and parents—sometimes so faithfully that even the tone of voice and expressions can be recognized.

The observation techniques do not yield precise data, but they do furnish a starting point for further study that may help provide a balanced view of a child's many-sided behavior which can help in mental well being of students.

### **Self-Expression as a Diagnostic Aid**

Another way of uncovering the inner thoughts, feelings, and attitudes of children is through encouraging their response to statements, questions, problems, or issues which have emotional implications. Creative writing, unfinished stories, open questions, and art expression are some of the techniques which the classroom teacher can use to encourage the self-expression of children.

**Creative Writing-** Teachers commonly require children to write themes or compositions as part of their work in language arts. This procedure can be used to study children's feelings as well as their writing. Instead of assigning an emotionally neutral subject, children are asked to write about topics such as: "How it feels to be scolded," "What I don't like about my home," "The time I was left out," "Things that make me mad and what I do about it," "Three wishes for myself or my family," and other subjects having emotional implication. This may sound like a negative approach, but children need avenues through which to express their gripes and frustrations. By writing them out, they not only release tension, but tell the teacher things he would otherwise be unable to learn.

**Unfinished Stories--**Attitudes about particular problem situations can be revealed by asking children to write a conclusion to a short story that is purposely arranged to have no ending. Here are two examples of unfinished stories:

Jim is a nice kid. Almost everybody likes him. One day he was sitting in a booth at the drug store having a friendly soda with some guy and gals when his favorite teacher came in. What do you think he did?

The endings which students provide may help the teacher gain insight into their values and attitudes, **Sentence Completion Technique--**This device makes use of series of statements which youngsters are asked to complete. In doing so they reveal their feelings about the issues involve.

For example there is a case of one child-  
I used to be afraid . . . (of the dark).  
My father wants me . . . (to be anything I want to be).  
I cannot understand . . . (what makes me mad).  
It is wrong . . . (to make people feel bad).

I despise . . . (people who criticize).

Sometimes I hate . . . (my father because he suggests things to do I don't want to do them).  
Evidently, this child is indicating that she may be lonely, insecure, unhappy, made miserable by a brother whom she feels to be more loved by her parents.

### **Conclusion**

In short as *sustainable development starts with safe, healthy and well-educated children and their choices and participation are critical for the sustainable future we want* so by taking initiative in the required direction, education can take active part in conserving human resources by contributing to the mental well being of the nation's asset which in turn ultimately would result in sustainable development of the individual as well as of the nation.

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