Ahimsa Center K-12 Teacher Institute Lesson

Title:
Sustainable Happiness

Lesson By:
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K-12 ESOL
Elementary Education

Grade Level/ Subject Areas:
K-12

Duration of Lesson:
3 weeks/60mins/day

Content Standards:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.5 Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.5 Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.

Lesson Abstract:
Students will explore the difference between happiness and sustainable happiness by using the Foster and Hicks Happiness Model-interdependent maps. Students will identify a list of what makes them happy, and then expand the origin of the happiness.

Guiding Questions:
What does happiness mean to you?
How are we interconnected with our self, others, and nature?
How does sustainable happiness make an impact on you, others and nature?

Content Essay:

How Did Sustainable Happiness Emerge?

Human beings are born with the ability to feel and show emotions. People experience a wide range of feelings such as sadness, happiness, excited, or scared throughout a typical day. In 1993, the United Nations (UN) wanted to develop a design for education and sustainable development (O’Brien 1). Over the next decade, the UN worked extremely hard to create an education for the greater good of the people.
The UN started their education initiative by using a survey to understand educational practices during the time when global warming issues were trying to be addressed (O’Brien 4). During this time, countries around the world that were industrialized were consuming and the UN wanted to bring awareness to the people about sustainability. The United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) report indicated a need for including sustainability education for teachers as a possible solution to improving the quality of life for everyone and live in a more sustainable for all to enjoy.

After the research was concluded, the report believed that “informing teachers and students about sustainability [was] essential” and “introduce education that fosters sustainable behavior” that would then disseminate to the well being of the teacher, the classroom community and beyond (O’Brien 1). The UN supported sustainable education and enticed educators with using the happiness emotion to draw support while learning about sustainability.

What is Sustainable Happiness?

Sustainable happiness is a concept Catherine O’Brien, an Assistant Professor in the Education Department of Cape Breton University and a researcher of sustainability for the past 20 years, created to build awareness about the implications of people’s choices while trying to attain happiness. The definition of sustainable happiness is:

“…happiness that contributes to individual, community and/or global well-being without exploiting other people, the environment or future generations” (O’Brien 2).

In other words, sustainable happiness is a concept for people to develop their life-style that integrates their choices with all living begins that surround them rather than making choices solely on mere self interest.

One of the key components in understanding the sustainable happiness definition is the idea of interconnectedness with everything that surrounds you. The UN wanted education to teach students the link to current actions and future outcomes, good or bad. They believed that sustainable education would help give students the foundation and understanding that people and animals have to work together (O’Brien 3). This meant teaching students how to be considerate of the well being for all and integrating these values in lessons. For example, Catherine O’Brien used an example about drinking a cup of coffee, in her Sustainability, Happiness and Education article in 2010, which for most people is an enjoyable moment first thing in the morning.

However, digging more deeply, and asking whether or not the coffee is fair trade would be a great investigation for students to learn the difference. Students may learn that the expense on the environment may be much great for non-fair trade coffee and what implications may arise and thus reinforcing the idea of being interconnected with one another, near or far.

Another component to understanding what sustainable happiness is teaching students what happiness means and incorporating values that contribute to a sustainable society in their daily activities. Their goal was to have an education that taught values within the curriculum (O’Brien 3). The process of deconstructing happiness and sustainability with students will help them be aware of more broader and global issues (O’Brien 7). For instance, asking students what their favorite activity is and maybe one says shopping, you can start the process by researching where the garment or item came from and whether or not it treated the workers fair. By integrating and explicitly teaching students how they directly affect the people, animals, and world around them it would help contribute to the UN effort of providing a sustainable future for all generations to come.
Why is Sustainable Happiness Important to Education?

Incorporating sustainable happiness is important for student growth. The sustainable happiness education contributes to improving their well being and improves student achievement. In an article called, Making the Grade: Positive Mental Health Practices in Schools, found research that supports Positive Mental Health (PMH) approaches such as prevention-oriented or pro-active, important to students development because the research shows, “fostering the development of positive mental health by supporting individual resilience, creating supportive environments and addressing the influence of broader detriments of mental health are key components of promoting mental health (JSCH 1).” Designing school wide policy and curriculum that provides a safe place for students to interact, feel belonged and work collaboratively reinforces the interconnectedness principle of sustainable happiness education.

The model they suggest using has four pillars that work in conjunction with one another and the student is at the center. The first pillar is providing “Healthy School Policies” that strive to have “respectful, welcoming, and caring school environment” (JCSH 1) with administration ensuring wellbeing for all students. The second pillar is called, “Social and Physical Environment,” which promotes quality relationships of students, staff and the school environment. The third pillar is referred to as “Teaching and Learning” which provides staff and students curriculum that is culturally relevant, accommodating for students’ needs and building cooperation skills through experience. The fourth pillar is called, “Partnerships and Services” which is one of the most essential pillars because it makes connections between the students, teachers, parents, and community. This pillar helps to advance the students’ wellbeing and increase collaboration.

How to Incorporate Sustainable Happiness in the classroom, school and beyond?

Using what we have learned about sustainable happiness, one way to incorporate the key components in teaching our students is through a series of lessons that are rooted in values and based on interconnectedness. Catherine O’Brien discussed, during her lecture at the Ahimsa Institute Center, the idea of using several of her lessons she created for her Sustainable Happiness Course. One of the activities includes creating an interdependence map that shows the interconnectedness between the student, others and the environment. Another activity includes the Genuine Wealth and Reduced Consumption activities that again, emphasize the impact our choices have on all living things. I plan to create a month long unit that begins students sharing and discovering their identities, then adapting and incorporating her lessons with my students and then inspiring students to choose how they want to make a change. They can choose from the possible projects she suggests or even conducting further action research. Even though this will be designed for a month long unit, the lessons will be revisited throughout the year and carried on by the students.

Bibliography:


**Teaching Activities**

*Students will create interdependent maps. We will compare, contrast and discuss the interconnectedness between self, others and nature. Then we will adapt lessons from the teacher’s guide from Catherine O’Brien and students will create a culminating project they choose. They will then carry their understanding of “interdependentness” while carrying out an action research in the next lesson of mine.*

**Materials Needed**

Sustainable Happiness Unit by Catherine O’Brien:

[http://sustainablehappiness.ca/publications/](http://sustainablehappiness.ca/publications/)

laptops

The teacher will begin the unit of sustainable happiness by having them complete think of one of the most enjoyable and the happiest of times to share with a partners. Then they will identify the feelings they are experiencing and will then complete the “What Makes my Heart Sing” worksheet. They can then share with a partner and move on to creating an interdependence map. Here is an example from Catherine’s Lesson plan:

*Interdependence Map for Paper. Students will likely suggest trees, sun, soil, and water. You can draw the map as they contribute ideas. They may need to be prompted with questions about how trees are turned into paper (draw a line from the word “paper” to a new section called “factories” or “pulp and paper mill.” Elicit further ideas around what is needed at the factory (machines, that needed to be invented, energy to run the machines, people, lots of water). Prior to this, someone had to cut down the tree, machines for cutting had to be invented, logs are hauled, trucks needed to be invented to haul the logs (you could go as far back as the invention of the wheel!). You might want to draw more connections that go back in time to the invention of printing presses which shifted our production of paper made from rags to paper made from trees and the demand for paper increased. Students may suggest the connections to stores where paper is bought and trucks to transport the paper from the mill to the store; people work in the store selling the paper. And finally, there is the school that purchased the paper. (It has its own extensive interdependence map!).

This map can help students to respect the value of a single piece of paper. Prompt them to express any sentiments that arise when they consider all of the things that are needed to create that paper. Hopefully, some will suggest that it means we should try not to use so much paper, should try not to waste it, should recycle, and should buy paper that has been made from recycled materials.*

Students can choose to illustrate their maps or use the screen-cast-o-matic to explain their interdependence maps.