



Schools: The Happiest Days of our Lives?

Dr Trevor D Lee

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This book discusses the most important aspect of the work in schools - what we need to do to experience well-being and how we can share this with school children. One case study school is examined in depth and practical suggestions offered for teachers who wish to embrace well-being lessons into their curriculum. What we want, above all else, is for our children to flourish, to be their best selves. Recently, Governments have begun to show that they have got the message that a sense of subjective well-being counts, by realising that a growth in gross Domestic Product does not warrant a growth in personal well-being, and that new measures have to be envisaged. The promotion of a sustainable sense of well-being is well within our grasp, where we encourage our children to feel good, to function effectively as well as deal with negative emotions [that inevitably arise in life] by dealing with them effectively. This is the fruit of a resilient approach to life. It is time to concentrate our energies on promoting the key elements of well-being in schools and homes – positive engagement; meaning; optimism; positive relationships; competence; vitality; resilience; emotional stability. In schools, we need to recognise that positive mental states broaden and build cognitive processes, that pupils in a positive mood have a broader focus of attention, are more creative, more resilient, are generous with time and resources and are more tolerant of others. Surely this is the glue that will create a more cohesive and creative Britain as we seek a way forward from austerity to well-being? The best news of all is that our quality of life is not inextricably bound to the popular mythology about what constitutes an acceptable standard of living. It is possible that the current fall in living standards should not, of necessity, make us unhappier people. We might become wiser, in that recession provides a new and previously unexplored opportunity to rediscover the old truths about the emptiness of a purely materialistic life, along with the possibilities of actively encountering a new spiritual dimension to our understanding. According to the science of positive psychology, it is this quest for meaning that will bring greatest life satisfaction and well-being, not the next episode of retail therapy for the rich or the theft of a wide-screen by a hoodie. Furthermore, there is no inevitability about a recession of values or virtues despite living in reduced circumstances. As teachers and members of the wider community, we have a new goal to direct our public service, namely to ensure that as many people as possible flourish, develop their full creative potential and are mindful of themselves as well as the needs of others. Talking straight, the alternative strategy is bleak as we witness the current reductionist schema of many of the politicians, aimed solely at surviving the current economic downturn. Some might say that we all seem to be waiting for the ship to right itself, impotent and powerless to take any active steps to improve conditions. This seems both to be an unworthy occupation and pre-occupation. To realise our vision in schools means seeing beyond the blinkered limitations of taking seriously only those things that can be measured by league tables, focussed on exam results. It means spending time creatively in the preparation and delivery of a meaningful curriculum that is taught by a passionate and lively team of teachers, who recognise in turn the wider value of the work that they are engaged in with the young. If this vision of compassion is realised then we will have played a part in creating a new agenda of thriving in society and our idealistic dreams that we had in the late seventies, presented in the opening lines of this book, will be finally have been realised.

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