



Enhancing the Happiness Quotient in learners through Nature

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Natural Environment had a great impact on nurturing positive health patterns, both physical and psychological. Studies show that Children who explore Nature and natural settings are more physically active, more cooperative and to an extent more creative and healthier and happier also. Localities with greater number of flora, greenery, and access to natural scenes reduce the extent of stress in learners. Moreover, it also increases motivation in them, which is reflected in their activities.

Various research studies show that learning and gaining knowledge in natural settings improves inter personal relations and intelligences. Children will be smarter, develops better skills to get along with others, healthier and happier when they have regular opportunities for free and unstructured activities in natural settings. Access to greenery always proves to enhance peace, joy, self-control and self-discipline with the learners.

Richard Louv (2011) book “Nature’s Principle” is ‘about the power of living in nature, not with it but in it’. In it he shows how tapping onto the restorative power of natural environment can boost mental acuity and creativity, promote health and happiness. Hence naturalized outdoor environments are the need of the present hour. It also means greening the environment by adding natural elements vital to overall health and function of learners. Well-being and happiness very much depends upon outdoors rather than indoors. It also means bringing back trees, shrubs, and herbs etc. which allow children to have safe, readymade, instant access to green places, pure oxygen supply and have direct contact with nature. Natural environments should include a wide range of natural features. It is not simply for observing and forgetting, but they must be able to actively explore, engage with

and experience different type of flora and fauna. So this demands allowing children to observe, attend, and interact with the outdoor world in their every day learning.

According to John Burroughs (1920) an American Naturalist, “To find the universal elements enough; to find the air and water exhilarating; to be refreshed by a morning walk or evening saunter; to be thrilled by the stars at night; to be elated over a bird’s nest or a wild flower in spring- these are some of the rewards of the simple life. I go to nature to be soothed and healed, and to have my senses put in order”. From these words we can understand the importance of natural environment in one’s life.

Outdoor greenery are places where children can reclaim the magic of enjoying and appreciating the varieties in nature, the ability to grow and learn to their fullest in their unique experiential way through the joy and happiness of exploration and discovery in the natural world. A beautiful and dynamic natural world which includes natural features adds interest and stimulation to the learning and creates additional variety for children’s learning and allows children to explore and experience the natural environment.

Positive Psychology is a recent branch in Psychology which deals with happiness and well-being. This thought also gives significant importance to nurturing our happiness through nature. Nature fosters our psychological well-being. A study related to emotional and cognitive benefits of Nature (Berman, Joinders, Kaplan, 2008) found that the subjects who took a Nature walk did better on a memory test than the subjects who walked down the urban streets. Children get motivated and energized when they become part of nature based activities. The outdoors increases happiness as it reduced stress by lowering the hormone Cortisol level in our body. Moreover, Environmental psychologists have argued that there is an Eco psychological factor in the human-nature relationship. Because when children spent more time in the outdoor natural environment, they feel more thankful and appreciative of what the nature offer to them. This unknowingly fosters their ecological ego, which in turn helps in inculcating values related to environmental protection and conservation. Thus it leads to their spiritual enhancement also.

Environmental Psychology is the study of human well-being and happiness, which is a part of neurobiological sciences (Stokols & Altman, 1987). It says that the love towards outdoors or nature must nurture from the early childhood period itself. So instead of making children spent maximum time indoors, parents and teachers must lead them to spend more time on the outdoors, in the greenery. While going through the related literatures related to

the impact of nature on happiness, it is found that exposure to nature can indirectly impact neurobiological functions of human brain. While in a greenery, the natural scenic beauty activates the circuits in the brain, results in activation of Dopamine release, which gives us a sense of happiness, joy and a positive energy. But we all know the present situation. Parents are afraid of sending children outdoors due to a number of reasons. The main factor is that the parents are afraid of their children's safety. Then fear of ultra violet rays, different types of pollutions, allergies, variety of novel insect borne fevers, new generation diseases like Corona pandemic also form the reasons. Another important aspect is that now a day's children's lives have become structured and conditioned by care takers or parents based on their aspirations. All these factors leads to the destruction of culture of childhood that played outside has shifted to the indoors (Hart, 1999: Moore, 2004).

So now we are spending more time indoors and online. Studies shows that nature can help us a lot in keeping our brain cells energized leading to health and happiness. So we need to preserve our natural outdoor spaces for our children to help them lead healthier, happier, and more creative lives. Dr. Laura Berrera-Hernandex and her team at the Sonora Institute of Technology has shown for the first time that Nature connectivity makes children happier due to their tendency to perform sustainable and pro ecological behaviours. The studies also found that in learners, feeling connected to nature had positive attitudes for sustainability practices and behaviours, plus reporting higher levels of perceived happiness. So from these studies it is clear that children who grow up with nature are happier and likely to be eco-friendly when compared to who suffer from nature deficit.

Outdoor play is often associated with physical growth and development of the child. There they are engaging in outdoor play with their whole body. Of course it is an excellent physical activity, but really it is an important aspect of growing well and happy. Moreover, team work and cooperation can emerge very quickly in nature as well. From all these, it is evident that outdoor play is an effective mode to boost happiness, self-confidence and emotional stability in our learners. Reviewing literature in this area shows that children who engage in nature play tend to be happier, calmer, sleep better and have increased life skills. 'Children who learn and play in nature are happier, healthier and smarter' (Jennifer Bristol of Texas children in Nature). Besides the health benefits, they have higher level of self-discipline, more cooperative with other, better problem solvers, feel more connected with nature and more happier than others .

Richard Louv, Author of the famous book, “The Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder”, clearly explains the disadvantages the future generation going to face because of the deficit of Nature. This deficit leads to many life style disorders in children and in adults. Natural Outdoors is often good repositories of Oxygen, which is an essential component for our normal brain functioning and learning process. So it is time for us to nurture our future generation to be happy and healthy. For this, Nature has a very important role. Connecting with nature is not just playing or spending time in outdoors or just appreciating the beauty of the colours and greenery. But it is creating the ecological ego in learners, which help them in being aware of the interrelation and interdependence between man and nature. It is high time for us to realize nature as more than just a resource but as a symbol of Human Happiness and Health.

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