How can schools support pupils’ happiness?
An evidence-based approach

Jonathan Noakes, Director
Dr Iro Konstantinou, Researcher
Tony Little Centre
Nine in ten children with mental illness struggle to get NHS help

Just five per cent of parents of children with mental illness say the NHS does enough to look after them, a poll found.

Screen addiction can damage young brains

It's time to put mental health first

Study finds high levels of depression among LGB teenagers

Feelings of being different believed to lead to self-harm and other mental health issues

One in four girls have depression by the time they hit 14, study reveals

Data from government-funded research prompts fresh questions about effect of social media and school stresses on young people’s mental health

Rise in 999 call-outs for children at mental health breaking point

Quarter of 14-year-old girls in UK have self-harmed, report finds

Children’s Society analysis suggests tens of thousands hurting themselves on purpose

LGB 10- to 25-year-olds are four times more likely to have felt depressed, harmed themselves and thought about killing themselves, according to a UK-wide survey.
Some facts

• In the UK, one child in ten between 5 and 16 years old has a mental health problem, which for many continues into adulthood
• Among teenagers rates of depression and anxiety have doubled in 30 years
• 75% of mental health problems start in adolescence
• BUT… if problems are picked up early, outcomes are good

Transforming children and young people’s mental health provision: a green paper (Dec 2017)
Key Facts

- 12.8% (one in eight) 5 to 19 year-olds had at least one mental disorder when assessed in 2017
- 16.9% of 17 to 19 year-olds experienced a mental disorder
- Emotional disorders were the most prevalent type of disorder experienced by 5 to 19 year-olds in 2017 (8.1%)
- Emotional disorders have become more common in 5 to 15 year-olds – going from 4.3% in 1999 and 3.9% in 2004 to 5.8% in 2017
WHO definition of mental health (2014)

“A state of wellbeing in which every individual realises 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 his or her community.”
The good news

We know a great deal more about the causes both of mental illness and of mental health than we did even twenty years ago.
Causes of poor mental and physical wellbeing

• **Broad social consideration**: the ‘Age of Anxiety’
• **Rapid technological change**: social media, information overload
• **Existential confusion**: identity, lack of social cohesion
• **Emerging adulthood**: more freedom, more opportunities, more choice can lead to a more disjointed approach to career, family and life projection (for a good discussion see the book *Lost in Transition*)
• **Economic pressures and socioeconomic background**
• **Attitudes towards mental health**: stigma
• **Academic pressures and public failure**

Henriques, 2014
‘Wellbeing’ and ‘happiness’

Although often used interchangeably, in academic literature ‘Wellbeing’ and ‘Happiness’ have slightly different (but overlapping) meanings:

**Wellbeing** refers to both mental health and physical health
It focuses on meaning and self-realisation (Ryan & Deci, 2001)

**Happiness** is defined as frequently feeling positive emotions and having an enduring sense of overall life satisfaction
“feeling good – enjoying life and wanting the feeling to be maintained” (Layard, 2005)
See-saw metaphor

Stable wellbeing is when individuals have the psychological, social and physical resources they need to meet a particular [...] challenge. When individuals have more challenges than resources, the see-saw dips, along with their wellbeing and vice-versa.

Dodge et al., 2012: 231
What can be done?

What role can schools and communities play, with sufficient guidance and training?

• Offer trained counselling
• Tackle stigma, create a culture of openness
• Early identification: train teachers to recognise the signs of anxiety and depression
• Build resilience in young people
• Teach young people
  - how to use social media healthily
  - how to recognise signs of depression
  - how to maintain physical and mental wellbeing
What have we done at Eton?

1. Research projects at the Tony Little Centre
2. Reviews of literature into constructs leading to wellbeing
3. Pupil Voice and the Wellbeing Advisory Board
The Tony Little Centre for Innovation and Research in Learning at Eton

Established in 2015, the Centre was set up to promote a culture of evidence-informed practice, creative innovation and disciplined enquiry in teaching and learning.
The value of experimentation

Promoting a culture of calculated risk-taking

‘Mastery’ v. ‘growth’

Learning from trialling – a gradual and iterative approach

Design Thinking
Research and enquiry

Skilling teachers up as researchers and enquirers

Combining intuitive identification of problems with analytical evaluation of evidence

Balancing different forms of evidence with experience for evidence-informed practice
Benefits of evidence-informed practice

• the creation of more powerful professional development by connecting training to teaching practice

• improved teaching techniques

• better whole-school decision making

• improved outcomes for students

(Churches & McAleavy, 2016)
SUCCESSFUL REVISION: what does the research say?

The Tony Little Centre for Innovation and Research in Learning

GIVING EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK

Tony Little Centre
June 2018

THE ADOLESCENT BRAIN

TONY LITTLE CENTRE FOR INNOVATION AND RESEARCH IN LEARNING
OCTOBER 2018

BECOMING TECH AWARE

1/ CYBERBULLYING
2/ STRESS AND ANXIETY
3/ SELF-ESTEEM
4/ RELATIONSHIPS
5/ PRIVACY
6/ SLEEP
7/ ADDICTION
8/ SOCIAL ISOLATION
9/ EMOTIONAL REGULATION
10/ FAKE NEWS AND OVERLOAD OF INFORMATION
11/ PORNOGRAPHY
Happiness study at Eton

This project looked at the relationships among boys’ wellbeing and their academic achievement across the whole school.

The research did not find any correlation between wellbeing and academic success, but the data from the wellbeing surveys (answered by over 1,000 boys, with a fuller follow-up survey answered by just over 100 randomly-selected boys) showed some interesting results in wellbeing.
Happiness study at Eton

Boys’ life satisfaction and positive emotions increase during the time they are at Eton in terms of four trends:

1. **social support**, from friends and community
2. sense of **autonomy** in pursuing **individual interests**
3. sense of **competence**, through achievement in various domains
4. deep sense of **gratitude**, for vast opportunities the school provides
What does the literature say about happiness?

- Motivation
- Meaningful work and flow
- Mindfulness
- Competence
- Autonomy
- Personal responsibility
- Optimism
- Social connectedness
- Gratitude
- Empathy
- Resilience
- Growth mindset
- Sleep
- Exercise
Social Connectedness

Research has consistently found that favourable exchange with one’s proximal social environment has positive effects on both mental health and wellbeing (Argyle, 2001; Tough et al. 2017).

Studies have shown again and again that social relationships – and specifically, the quality of those relationships – is the best predictor of happiness. Deep connections with others enrich our lives and form a foundation for happiness across the lifespan.

“If I wanted to predict your happiness, and I could know only one thing about you, I wouldn’t want to know your gender, religion, health, or income. I’d want to know about your social network – about your friends and family and the strength of the bonds with them.” Daniel Gilbert (2017)
Research-based interventions

Encourage healthy relationships in
a. Classroom, e.g. active listening; cultural awareness
b. School-wide, e.g. mentoring programmes across year groups
c. Community-wide, e.g. charitable work (Bower et al., 2015)

Effects of community engagement
120 Etonians in Year 12
Researching:
Openness to experience
Teamwork
Empathy
Respect
Gratitude
Gratitude

A large body of research has shown a strong link between gratitude and happiness. Individuals who cultivate a habit of gratitude are more likely to feel happy and fulfilled throughout life. Interestingly, this link between gratitude and happiness is found across many different cultures.

Definition
Gratitude is an emotion which occurs after people receive aid which is perceived as costly, valuable, and altruistic.

However
This fails to capture everyday tasks such as 'grateful for getting out of bed' or an appreciation of one's abilities, or of a climate in which such successful work was possible.
(Wood et al., 2010)
Gratitude and Personality

Several studies have linked gratitude to each of the Big Five, with grateful people being more

• Extroverted
• Agreeable
• Open
• Conscientiousness
and less neurotic

(McCullough et al., 2002, 2004; Wood et al., 2008)
Constructs related to gratitude

- Motivation to improve relationships
- Relationship formation
- Constructive conflict resolution
- Trust
- Willingness to forgive
- Emotional support to others
- Altruism
- Perceived social support

Hasemeyer, 2013
Research based interventions

• List things to be grateful for (weekly or daily)
• Write about people they are grateful for
• Write a letter of thanks
• Write about things that went well and their causes

Emmons, 2003
Empathy

The act of ‘feeling into’ another’s affective experience

Strayer & Eisenberg, 1978: 191

Empathy therefore involves a two-part process.
The first part is the cognitive awareness of the internal state of another person. The second part is the emotional response toward the other person

Hoffman, 1987
Stages of empathy in children

1. emotional decoding skills (the ability to name discrete emotions)
2. understanding of emotional states
3. perspective taking

Barnett (1987) describes an **optimal environment** for fostering empathy as one that:

1. meets the child’s emotional needs and downplays self-concern so that one’s focus is on others
2. promotes the child’s awareness and expression of a wide range of emotions
3. provides multiple opportunities for the child to observe his or her interactions with others while being actively responsive.

Ickes, 1997
Research based interventions

1. Role taking to combat bullying

Bullying behaviour is expected to diminish when the bully’s empathy deficits are diminished through the teaching of three skill sets: (1) affective training and observational learning, (2) socio-affective experiences, and (3) social skills and moral development.

- Affective training involves learning to interpret and understand emotions in others through facial, bodily, or vocal expressions.
- Explicitly teach social skills through active listening and dialogue
- Discuss moral and ethical implications of the actions taken by the various characters taught in the curriculum

Verducci, 2000
Research based interventions

2. Using moral dilemmas
Assess the students’ current level of moral understanding. This can be done through informal interviews or by observation. Next, an appropriate story is chosen, and students are given time to brainstorm and collaborate about the details and implications of the story. Students are asked thought-provoking questions to encourage discussion of the dilemma.

This approach can facilitate empathy by giving opportunities for decision making when presented with various choices often on controversial issues, such as exam cheating, lying etc.

Upright, 2002

Also see Cuzzo et al. 2017 https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/tl.20249
‘Making Caring Common’ project at Harvard

Making Caring Common (MCC), a project of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, helps educators, parents, and communities raise children who are caring, responsible to their communities, and committed to justice.
Building Resilience

'Resilience' refers to a person's ability to bounce back after adversity, hardship or failure: 'abandoning the imprint of the past’ (Cyrulnik 2009)

It’s a dynamic process that occurs in a context, involving interaction with environment

It’s a construct: there’s an element of choice

Pupils can be taught to identify their character strengths (see Seligman) and to develop their own toolbox of resilience skills
Bernard (2004) identifies the following traits with being associated with resilient students:

1. **Higher levels of social competence:** students who can interact well with others

2. **Problem solving skills:** students who can think through how to manage their challenges deal better with challenge, change and adversity

3. **Sense of autonomy and self-efficacy:** students who have a sense of independence, responsibility and confidence in their own capacity to deal with circumstances fare better in the face of challenges

4. **Sense of purpose, hope or meaning:** students with a sense of optimism about their future and a belief in the meaning and purpose of what they do tend to learn better and to thrive
The 7 Learnable Skills of Resilience

1. Emotional awareness
2. Impulse control
3. Realistic optimism
4. Causal analysis (flexible thinking)
5. Empathy
6. Self-efficacy
7. Risk taking

Reivich, 2008
University of Pennsylvania
Penn Resilience Program - Toolkit

Self-Awareness
The ability to pay attention to your thoughts, emotions, behaviors, and physiological reactions.

Self-Regulation
The ability to change one’s thoughts, emotions, behaviors, and physiology in the service of a desired outcome.

Mental Agility
The ability to look at situations from multiple perspectives and to think creatively and flexibly.

Strengths of Character
The ability to use one’s top strengths to engage authentically, overcome challenges, and create a life aligned with one’s values.

Connection
The ability to build and maintain strong, trusting relationships.

Optimism
The ability to notice and expect the positive, to focus on what you can control, and to take purposeful action.
Research-based interventions

1. Competence builds resilience
   Break down tasks which seem overwhelming into smaller chunks. Help them overcome their fear of failure and build confidence through experiences which show them how to build competence awareness.

2. Learning from failure
   Build pupils’ knowledge of their brain’s programming. Students will gain the competence, optimism and understanding to persevere – and even make progress – through failure.

   When students make mistakes, explain that these are not failures: they are opportunities for the brain to build a bridge that will bring them success in future.

Willis, 2016
Growth Mindset

Mindsets (or implicit theories), [...], are people’s lay beliefs about the nature of human attributes, such as intelligence or personality. Some people hold a fixed mindset (or an entity theory) and believe that human attributes are simply fixed traits. In contrast, other people hold a growth mindset (or an incremental theory) (Carol Dweck, 2012).

Benefit mindset

This emerging mindset and global movement is symbolized by people who believe in being well and doing good for our world [...] motivations should be situated within a purposeful and collective context. [...] The pursuit of this goal [wellbeing] is leading to the realization that human flourishing is best thought of, not as an individual activity, but rather, as something we must do together (Buchanan & Kern, 2017).
Growth Mindset

A collaborative project with Research Schools International

• Year 12 students: 187 boys split into an intervention group and a control group
• Three-week intervention: three 40-minute sessions with preparatory videos and reading
• Looked at how the intervention impacted on pro-social attitudes
Growth Mindset

• Researchers analysed the data using quantitative and qualitative methods.

• Results revealed that students who took the growth mindset course learned to be more growth-minded. This adds to the growing body of research suggesting that by just learning about the power of your own thinking and your brain’s ability to change, you can become a more growth-minded person.

• We also found an intriguing connection between growth mindset and prosocial attitudes. Not only did we find a statistically significant relationship between students’ mindset scores and their prosocial attitude scores, but students who took the growth mindset course actually improved their prosocial attitudes. That is, the growth mindset course led to a statistically significant increase in students’ prosocial attitudes; we did not find a change in the control group.
Trained Counselling

Psychological Services at the Stephenson Wellbeing Centre, Eton

• Three full-time therapists (a Clinical Counselling Psychologist, a Clinical Psychologist & Analytic Psychotherapist, and a School Counsellor) led by a Consultant Child & Adolescent Psychiatrist with dedicated administrative support

• Part of Pastoral Care, headed by the Deputy Head (Pastoral) in collaboration with the Director of Welfare

• Most common issues: anxiety, stress, attention, bereavement, homesickness
Wellbeing Advisory Board

Pupil voice and wellbeing

Recruit students to implement interventions on issues they find important. Empowering and effective

- Sleep
- Mental health
- Body image
Wellbeing constructs and academic achievement

- Growth mindset: Blackwell et al. (2007)
- Social connectedness: Bond et al. (2007)
- Prosocial attitudes: Caprara et al. (2000)
- Resilience: Zeng et al. (2016)
- Belonging: Noltemeyer (2016)
What can we teach young people to help them?

• hold high expectations - risk, challenging goals and change are good for us
• focus away from the self - encourage them to help others and volunteer
• people are not born smart - encourage a Growth Mindset
• failure often leads to success - the only bad failure is the one we don't learn from!
• normalise, don't personalise - encourage them to see failure/difficulty as normal
• bad feelings are normal - only psychopaths and dead people don't have them!
• learning anything worthwhile requires some frustration - teach strategies to cope
• bad feelings don't last
• don't over worry or over protect - allow them to make mistakes and take risks
• perfection doesn't exist - be the best that you can
• teach young people skills
• one size does not fit all
• foster many different ways to bounce back

Dr Tina Rae
Tony Little Centre and contact details

- Tony Little Centre: https://www.etoncollege.com/CIRL.aspx
- Blog: https://cirlresearch.com/
- Twitter: @Eton_CIRL
- Jonnie Noakes: j.noakes@etoncollege.org.uk
- Iro Konstantinou: I.Konstantinou@etoncollege.org.uk
References

References

sion.pdf (accessed Dec 2018)


- Hasemeyer, M. D. (2013). The Relationship between Gratitude and Psychological, Social, and Academic Functioning in Middle Adolescence. 
https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=5885&context=etd

- Henriques, G. (2014). What is causing the college student mental health crisis? 


https://www.cnbc.com/id/25464528
References