

Educating for Happiness: Some practical Questions and Possible Answers

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Abstract

As Bhutan moves to further develop policies to enhance Gross National Happiness, increasing attention is being devoted to how education might contribute to this important goal. The following paper outlines one possible approach that is based on a future-oriented pedagogy used at the University of Auckland in New Zealand. Developed over many years of experimental teaching, it offers one possible way by which a more integrated, resilient and happy alignment of positive values and contributory action might be facilitated in the classroom.

What does educating for happiness imply?

The most fundamental starting point in addressing this question is to be clear on the terms we are using. This means that we need to have a very precise understanding of what “happiness” actually is. We might then begin to design and execute strategies for enhancing it.

To take happiness first, I believe our understanding of what happiness is are often quite superficial and uni-dimensional. For many, and particularly for those imbued in a western secular mindset, happiness refers only to a personal

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emotional state and there are several problems that follow from this inadequate definition.

Most important is the tendency to contain visions of happiness within the individual person and through this to fail to appreciate the inherently inter-connected nature of well-being. If happiness is seen as a personal attribute only, we immediately de-emphasise the reality of its interconnectedness. In truth, happiness depends on inter-connection and any individual experience of it is impacted by our relationships to the social and non-social worlds around us.

This is an understanding that is inherent in most non-western countries, as for example, in Hindu and Buddhist systems of thought, where the best route to happiness is via positive engagement with others and ideally, through active contribution to others wellbeing. This is the basic framework that expresses itself in the *bhakti* and karma yoga traditions of the Hindu system and in the doctrines of the bodhisattva tradition in Mahayana Buddhism.

It is a framework that has been under-emphasised in the more individualistic conceptions of the modernist West, but is slowly re-entering that consciousness by realising that happiness, as an individual outcome, is served hugely by the quality of our relationships.

This inter-connected view of happiness is still inadequately understood and needs to be made explicit if we are to educate for genuine happiness. To educate for happiness is never to educate the individual to further their own happiness in isolation from others as this is impossible. It brings a much richer potential to bear on our efforts, because in linking individual with collective happiness we can work towards systems of educating that not only intensify potential happiness but also simultaneously work to enable these individuals to act considerately and harmoniously with

others, so that a general happiness is also achieved in the process. We need to be fully mindful that happiness is not about individuals, but about the quality of relationships individuals have with others.

Yet this takes us only partially towards an adequate understanding of what an education in happiness involves, as we may recognise the interconnected nature of the phenomenon, but still miss the deeper dynamics of happiness as it develops within and between us. To see happiness as a merely emotional state that is somehow separable from other aspects of being is singularly naive. Happiness exists as a complex attainment that depends utterly on the cultivation of a wide range of integrated capacities.

It is often imagined symbolically to a jewel that has many aspects. These include insightfulness, wisdom, compassion, appreciation and the ability to love. It is then a multi-faceted state of being that cannot be viewed simply as an emotion. Properly understood, it is the final flowering of a mature integration of head, heart, soul and will. This implies that an education in happiness must accordingly be a multi-dimensional undertaking that engages and seeks to integrate a wide range of capacities. Happiness is a holistic ideal that requires a holistic approach to the person and their development.

This brings us to the meaning of education and this too needs to be properly understood if we are to build on solid foundations. Education properly defined refers to a 'bringing out from within' and is therefore premised on a particular understanding of human nature and how our potential can be best facilitated. This meaning involves an inherent optimism as to the hidden potential of development, and implicitly assumes that much that we think of as the best of our being exists in nascent form within the human soul.

The role of education is to clear the way for the unfolding of human potential and to imagine means to nurture its expansion and expression. In many ways, this humane idealism has been squandered by the authoritarianism of most mass educational processes as they are currently applied in the world.

Most national systems now assume that education involves not a bringing forth of potential, but a forcing in of largely uni-dimensional abstractions from without. As this shift has gradually become normalised, the role of the teacher has moved from collaborative facilitation to forced manipulation of the learner. The result has been a separation of head and heart and a basic dehumanisation of education, whereby learners are silenced, standardised, and disrespected as collaborators in an active process of fulfilling personal development.

Such 'education' is typically arranged in response to fit with the efficiency demands of scale and the larger the institution, the greater the degree of depersonalisation. This is the typical process of bureaucratisation and it points to a real problem in mass education, where scale works directly against the intimacy that really is a requirement for effective education in its traditional sense. Educating for happiness is all about creating spaces within which fuller and more harmonious states of seeing, being and inter-relating can be cultivated.

What does educating for happiness require in broad terms?

The most basic practical requirement is for teachers, or more properly facilitators, to be accomplished in their own development. In many ways, an adequate education for happiness involves seeing beyond the limitations of egotism and the conflicts this inevitably engenders both within and beyond the self.

If the facilitator has not managed to overcome the basic corruptions of self-absorption and self-centredness, then a genuinely collaborative and open process will not be possible. The egocentric educator is always prone to defensiveness, conflict, closed-mindedness and subtle violence in their relationships with others – tendencies that lead directly to dehumanisation and not the opposite, which a proper education in happiness would facilitate. Effective processes begin with the effective development of the facilitator.

To nurture the unfolding of a full humanity is a fragile and delicate art that requires gentleness, respect and an attitude of genuine service to others. If the educator is not highly developed in their own being, they will not be capable of dealing flexibly, openly and compassionately with those who wish to learn and the end result will be a miserable one or all concerned.

If we assume that the teacher has managed a certain degree of personal development, then the key to successful application is the balance that is achieved between structure and openness. As implied above, much of education - and this includes education in values, places too much emphasis on abstract content that is often of little use to students in meeting the real problems of living daily life in their communities and natural environments. As a result, changes to curricula, new materials, additional topics and subjects are introduced but seldom is the actual process of delivery given much attention. Good source materials are inordinately important, but often the emphasis on the pre-eminence of these reflects a deep assumption that understanding lives in dead pages and not in the living minds of learners.

I personally have a great deal of faith in the potential of young people (and indeed people of all ages) to reach critical understandings through dialogue and through bringing to the surface implicit, but often little articulated understandings and insights. Content then, in the sense of others opinions,

should be used sparingly as a means to prompt thinking and not to conclusively close it down, which is all too often the case.

This becomes a particular problem as we move towards the higher ends of the educational process where head-only learning tends to predominate and as a result, learners are increasingly encouraged to memorise and accept the opinions of external 'experts' and to deny the relevance of their own inner judgment and wisdom.

In designing experiences that can genuinely facilitate human potential, it is essential that the learners' understandings are the primary materials that we work with. In the course on values and ethics that I teach, students are regularly discouraged from going to the library and are encouraged instead to learn from each other - and from those around them - through open respectful dialogue and constant enquiry. The aim is to allow the person to develop their own resilient understanding of the world and their relationship to it.

In order to do this, their own values, assumptions, insights and biases have to be brought to the surface, articulated and tested in a humane and non-judgmental atmosphere. When such spaces are created, people display remarkable wisdom as heartfelt opinions are shared, challenged and built into robust insights. More formal materials from 'experts' can then be used constructively to further validate these self-generated understandings, or to explore other nuances of the issues under mutual consideration.

Education for happiness should then be driven overwhelmingly by the concerns of the learners themselves in spaces that encourage deep reflection and open collaboration. When this works, and I rarely experience situations where it does not, the results are inspiring and deeply humbling for any committed educator.

To make this practical though, we need to engage on a human scale where open sharing is possible. It is often argued that the optimal size for group interaction is around seven people and while this may be true, it is largely impractical in all but the most luxurious learning situations. When such a scale is possible there is the opportunity for real intimacy and the unique personalities of all can be specifically and deeply addressed. For most educators this will not commonly be the case, but the benefits of very small group situations can be compensated for by some of the larger synergies that a more diverse range of perspectives can bring into being. In many ways, there is a trade off between breadth and depth of engagement that can remain in balance in groups of up to 40 people. Beyond this scale real educational potential suffers and it may well do so at significantly smaller sizes as we descend the age continuum.

How could an education for happiness be designed?

Assuming that the pre-requisites for open discussion are in place – particularly a small group and an accomplished and sensitive teacher - the issue that becomes key in organising for an effective education is how to arrange the process of interaction and collaboration. In the area of holistic education there is a wide variety of opinion on how much the learning experience should be designed and this will vary according to the age group involved and the particulars of the group itself. In my experience there needs to be a balance struck between structure and openness that allows for flexibility yet involves some degree of constructive direction in the learning process itself. When the need for direction is taken into account along with the overall goal of facilitating a multi-dimensional flourishing in which head, heart and will are brought into alignment the issue of structure really involves working on several levels simultaneously. One arrangement that I have found to be inordinately practical is to structure the learning process into three broad episodes which are the following.

First of all, it is important to recognise that effective learning in any area has to be purposeful and as such, I explicitly frame our initial deliberations around the question of what kind of society we wish to come into being in the near future.

To focus deliberations we usually settle on the year 2020, as an anchor point although this can be shifted according to the age and particular concerns of the group involved. 2020 is useful for our purposes because it represents a point in time that is tangibly connected to the present (being only 10 years away) but distant enough to imagine significant change. We open discussions to trying to define what this world will look like in concrete and tangible terms.

In the second phase we then move to discussions of how we feel about the chances of this world coming into being by that date, and how our personal actions in the present are contributing to or detracting from this possibility. The final part of the process involves us looking at how we can practically develop personal strategies in our own lives that will help make this better world become a living reality. In framing the learning experience in this way, learners are made conscious of a progression that is both logically and emotionally meaningful. Learning is given an explicit purpose of defining and contributing to a better and happier world, and a strong sense of empowerment and integrative purpose comes to permeate the process.

As this sequential engagement is followed, learners simultaneously bring to the process an increasing integration of intellectual, emotional and motivational potentials that ends in a more harmonious alignment of head, heart and will. Although these capacities are involved in all stages, the structure is designed to bring to the fore each in turn by emphasising a particular mode of responsiveness.

In the first stage where a better world is defined, the head is pre-eminent as learners think through the elements that

make upon a better society and logically argue these to find consensual common ground. This part of the experience typically also involves detailed deliberations as to the synergistic roles of different social institutions and the relationship these have to making or corrupting valuable ends.

The second structural phase involves bringing the heart to the fore as we explore our fears and hopes for this world, how better and worse worlds will feel, and the personal reactions we have when recognising our own inadequacies in contributing to making these dreams realities. The final stage aims to bring the will to the fore, as we explore practical ways in which we can overcome our own inconsistencies in order to actively work towards bringing this idealised world closer.

The end result is an integration of understanding, feeling and determination that releases astonishing energy in the classroom. The structure then is designed to make learning sensible and orderly, to facilitate a multi-dimensional development and ultimately to release a wiser, more considerate and more resilient character capable of sustaining personal and collective happiness.

Within this thematic structure however, the process is completely open. It is the learners themselves who define what a better world looks like and why. It is they who determine the extent to which their own actions might be falling short of their own ideals and it is they who identify the practical strategies that they might personally undertake to contribute to a happier world. This is then structuring without violence, and without the impositions that undermine personal growth.

It is facilitation with a light touch that aims to provide purpose and direction, but only to the extent that this facilitates focussed and meaningful sharing and unfolding. There would be other ways that basic frameworks could be

conceptualised, and I have experimented with many, but I have found this future-oriented one to be particularly powerful in practice.

How might an education for happiness be structured?

It is useful to remember that happiness is an outcome that can only be approached through the co-development of other aspects of being, and through their successful integration. With that in mind, we can look at each of the stages in learning that have been outlined.

Finding common ground in positive visions of the tangible future

It is very helpful to provide an explicit focus that frames and focuses attention, and if a future point of reference can be established, then it grounds discussion and allows us to work with specific outcomes in mind.

I begin all courses that I teach with a variety of exercises through which learners get the chance to talk in small groups, and through this to consciously articulate their often only vaguely formed thoughts and feelings in settings that are comfortable and amenable to open sharing. These groups are changed in terms of membership, so that participants are asked to form new groups with people they have not yet spoken with, in order that a wide sharing of perspective is facilitated but also so that they can get to interact with as many of the group as possible. This is very important in creating an atmosphere where people feel that they are on familiar and friendly terms.

The ideal size for these small discussion groups, which is where a huge part of the actual learning occurs, is around four people. A working group of this size brings a variety of perspectives into play, allows all to feel included, and avoids

the tendency in larger groups for some to withdraw into merely passive roles.

I find it very constructive to set discussion topics that ask learners to reach consensus and this requires that they share, compare, test and finally agree on the basic issues under discussion. Each discussion in a new group then follows on from the conclusions reached in prior discussions bringing flow to the process and a real sense that the opinions being expressed are being valued.

We typically begin our classes in values and ethics by trying to identify what type of world we want to live in the year 2020. It is a useful place to begin because there is no right answer to the question, and so learners have to draw out their own personal values in order to build perspective. Given the open-ended nature of the task, we narrow it down such that groups are asked to reach consensus on a list of five or six basic descriptors of this 'better' world. The groups work to identify these and to find common ground, and then they take these ideas into new groups where the exercise is repeated. This can be done more than twice if the groups are still searching for agreement, but generally I find that two iterations are sufficient for learners to clearly develop a set of ideals upon which they fundamentally agree.

In doing this work for many years and in several different cultures and countries, I find the results are typically very similar. Young people look to their future and want it to be secure, non-violent, sustainable, just and inclusive (generally meaning that no-one is deprived of the basics required for a good life – education, food, human rights etc). These are highly consistent emergent ideals and as we collate the various responses we typically find ourselves on common ground, ground that has been created openly and actively by the learners themselves.

A period of consolidating and testing these ideals follows, whereby larger group discussions refine any overlaps into a robust and committed set of practical end-states, which we can all agree as a group we would like to see obtain. The validity of these can be made more resilient still by looking at the opposite states of a 'worse' as opposed to 'better' world. In the end, having discovered a shared set of meaningful ideals students feel a genuine sense of commonality and purpose which is of great value in all that follows.

The direction of learning from here can take many directions as it is responsive to the uniqueness of the group, but several possibilities can be of particular value. The first is to note the cohering justifications that are inherent in the collective view of the good society. Ultimately, students will readily agree that these end states are valuable because they will allow for a genuine and widespread happiness to be obtained and so the link to a happier society can be made almost immediately. The second is to engage in a series of discussions that show that in order to reach this more just, sustainable and happy society, a widespread moral maturity will be required if others interests – be they future generations, other living creatures or the excluded and exploited – are to be truly included. Through such explorations the connections between happiness, harmony and ethical maturity can be quickly and efficiently established.

It is also very useful to combine some reflective writing to consolidate and deepen learning in this stage of the process. Students can be asked to explain why certain virtues need to be spread more widely in society if the outcomes we desire are to obtain and also to explore in writing what social or institutional changes would be helpful in achieving genuine progress.

The first option, focussing on individual characteristics is useful because it links individual level factors such as generosity, wisdom, compassion, appreciation and courage to

social outcomes such as justice, sustainability, non-violence and inclusion. The second option is equally useful in broadening thinking on how different social forces (such as government, media and education) are inter-linked and must be co-ordinated if positive change to a happier world is to become a reality.

In exploring individual values, I often ask learners to again discuss the vital individual characteristics (or virtues) in small groups and to again reach consensus on a basic list, which almost invariably comes to cohere around greater consideration, the ability to exercise self-control and having a more educated and informed understanding of the inter-connections between personal action and the outcomes experienced by others.

In discussions of social/institutional changes learners commonly come to agree that more informative and less sensationalist media would be useful along with improved education in values and more vigilant government control of material economy and its wastage. To get the most out of this learning it is useful to have learners first work towards consensus in dialogue and then to consolidate these understandings through some personal writing, during which they are asked to reflect and more deeply explain their thinking. The end result of these deliberations is a much more complex and integrated understanding of how a happier and more decent world can be brought into being, why it is important and what needs to be accomplished socially and personally if these ideals are to become a living reality.

This part of the learning for a happier world is primarily abstract and engages the head more than other realms but not purely so. To identify the lineaments of a better world requires delving into personal values and complex of feelings. It also begins to have students think purposefully as they envision a future point of time and open up to how we might shift to get there. From the outset we are working on multiple

levels – of the head, the heart and the will. Yet, the initial stage is primarily intellectual and deliberately so, as this is generally a safer realm for learners to begin their engagement and importantly it also allows for a rigorous clarity to be established, which is employed as a constant orienting structure for the rest of the experience. The second phase of learning then builds upon this mental clarity as we move to a greater opening up of personal dynamics and the deeper emotions these entail.

Exploring personal values, deep emotions and common barriers to engaging our ideals

Once a shared vision of a happier future has emerged and some basic connections to personal virtues and social process have been clarified, a useful progression can be made by entering into a period of deeper reflection on our own personal relationship to these ideals. There are a variety of ways that a sensitive educator can proceed and the particulars are always determined by the needs of the group as a unique collection of people. I have found that a particularly valuable way to deepen understanding is to allow learners to engage in one or both of two broad themes aimed at developing a deeper insight and connectedness.

The first of these, and the more challenging, involves asking learners to look openly at the degree to which their own daily lives reflect the ideals and values that have been explored in the first stage of the learning process. Are we personally acting in accordance with the ideals we espouse, or is there a considerable gap between how we act in the present and how we know we should act if a happier future is to be obtained? There are many ways of asking this specific question and the sensitivities of the group really have to be at the forefront of creating constructive engagement. One way of engaging reflection is to have us consider those who are excluded from many of the benefits of an advantaged society and to ask how compassionate, inclusive and generous we are in our

everyday relationships with these constituencies. Thus, how much time or money do we give as individuals to help those who are disadvantaged or excluded?

I find that at this stage, some supportive materials are useful either to give a more felt insight into the sufferings experienced by those who are in poverty or hunger, or who are lonely, hurt or ill. I have shown videos, given short readings of had talks given to learners to make these connections emotional ones, as genuinely compassionate engagement stems from a fundamentally emotional sense of connection.

If I ask how much time or money learners are giving to charity, how much effort they put into voluntarily helping others, or about the practical support they provide to those actively attempting to make positive change, we typically find that most are falling well short of what we mutually recognise we could or should be doing. Very few people actually give money to others in need, or visit those they know are lonely or ill, or share their time in communal efforts for the good. The main purpose in bringing these inconsistencies to the surface however, is not to prompt bad feeling, but to take a clear look at the facts of discrepancy and to delve into the personal barriers that prevent us from acting more in alignment with what we recognise as necessary if a happier world is to be created.

This phase of opening up can be an emotionally-charged one as learners are brought face to face with some of their own shortcomings. If asked for example to rate themselves on self-created scales (say from 1 to 7) that specify the extent to which they are living out the virtues they previously identified as essential to happiness, most find themselves acting in ways that are less than ideal. As they reach this insight, learners often experience strong emotional responses – embarrassment, awkwardness, frustration, disappointment

and so forth and these needs to be channelled towards empowering and not disempowering outcomes.

Perhaps the best and most sensitive way of doing this is to focus discussion on identifying the barriers that we all experience when trying to put our abstract values into practice. When learners reflect in this mode they usually come to recognise a common set of shared blockages that include selfishness, a sense of futility (I can't make a difference), a diffusion of responsibility (it's up to someone else), social comparison (no-one else is helping, so why should I?), peer pressure (its uncool) and diffuse intentions to improve personal contribution at some indeterminate point in the future. These are all common and very human constraints and to see them operating in ourselves clears the way to consciously challenging them in our own daily lives.

The over-arching purpose of entering into such reflection is to gain insight into the discrepancies that we all carry between our abstract ideals and the way we actually live our daily lives. It can be an uncomfortable learning, but handled with sensitivity it is tremendously powerful in pointing the way to overcoming the conflict between head and heart and bringing our whole being - our thoughts, speech and actions into a more constructive and happy alignment. The critical emphasis however must always be on understanding and not condemning.

A companion mode of engagement is to have learners discuss and write on how they feel when they do act with head and heart in harmony. I regularly use reflective writings and exercises which ask learners to go into the world with the positive intention of acting generously and compassionately. There are many ways of doing this, but one of the most effective is to ask learners to do a number of good and generous acts that help others and to write about the experience. Learners can be asked to perform two good deeds and to write about how they felt both during and after

executing the helpful actions. They can be asked to reflect on and to discuss what such contributory actions did for the quality of the relationship (e.g. strengthen or weaken it) or how the others responded - all with an aim of sensitising them to the positivity of acting in harmony with ones ideals, and so coming to realise more fully how contributory actions really do boost the happiness of self and others.

When young people engage with these exercises the insights they gain are primarily emotional and this can be made more explicit by asking them to rate the extent to which these actions impacted on their well-being on a numerical scale of say 1-7. Whatever the specifics, building all such experiences around the opportunity to share and develop collective understandings is paramount and small group discussions and open sharing should be employed throughout.

If time permits, ideally an education for happiness can employ both processes – of developing insight into the nature of personal inconsistencies and into realising the felt benefits of acting well. Both involve bringing emotional responses and realities to the surface and explicitly linking these to the conceptual understandings of what is needed of us all - if a happier world is to be built. The result, when managed well, is a strong momentum towards a greater harmonisation of head and heart and the beginnings of a spontaneous search on the part of learners for ways in which a greater alignment can be pursued in their own lives.

The pressing question most have at the end of this phase is how they might personally act in order to actively contribute to bringing a happier world into being. This leads directly to the third and final stage of learning, which brings into play the will and how it might be employed to help us overcome our own personal inconsistencies so that we may enjoy a more positive and purposeful involvement with the world around us.

Designing practical pathways for personally enhancing the happiness of self and others

By the conclusion of the first two phases of this holistic process, learners typically emerge with robust understandings of what a better and happier world will look like, what it requires both at the individual and collective levels, and of the extent to which being in alignment with these ideals induces happiness and being out of alignment detracts from it.

These powerful insights are enormously helpful in allowing learners to realise their place in an inter-connected and value-based web of relationships. But important as these insights are, the process at this stage is incomplete as for many, it will not be apparent how they might best respond to this enhanced clarity. The final stage of educating for happiness builds upon what has gone before to facilitate resilient plans for consistent action that will in practice bring head, heart and will into a fuller synthesis.

The completion of the first two stages of learning leaves students remarkably engaged and highly motivated to identify practical ways by which they might find a happier alignment in their daily lives. The dynamism this brings to the final stage of learning is remarkable and the energy released in the classroom is very positive indeed. There are many ways in which the final integration of forward-looking will might be engaged depending on the level of the learner and the specific goals involved. In my work with young people in their late teenage years, I have found that an active focus on their future personal plans is highly effective. Over the years we have come to focus on how their ideals might be put into action around the development of creative value-based contributions in the area of organisational development – this being a direct reflection of the interests of the majority of the groups I work with. The principles though can be adapted to any situation.

As learners come to realise shared goals and recognise how their own actions towards this can lead to greater happiness for self and others, they begin a spontaneous search for the most practical means by which their engagement might be made effective. In exploring a range of possibilities, I have found that the United Nations Earth Charter to be a very valuable document to employ in this search as it articulates clearly and compellingly the framework within which we all have to act if we are to secure a decent, just, sustainable and happy future. The Earth Charter is a well-known and much respected document that outlines a blueprint for genuine progress, and lays down a set of principles for responsible action. It is divided into several components but broadly conceived it speaks to the need for all to engage wisdom, compassion, self-restraint and generosity in our personal and professional lives in order that a collective, inter-related thriving can be secured.

This point in an education for future happiness opens up opportunities for wider collaboration within a group as they seek to define for themselves how they can contribute to a happier world without causing injustice, ecological harm or suffering for any larger constituency. The document's guidelines are explicit and demanding, stating that given current global trends, any actions that exacerbate resource depletion, pollution, exploitation, division or ignorance are ethically unacceptable for an improving world. Learners in my classes are given this document to study in detail and to discuss as to its relevance to the better worlds they have previously identified.

All groups in my experience find that the Earth Charter represents an eloquent and defensible (if challenging) summary of all of the major conclusions they have previously agreed upon. Having affirmed the legitimacy of the document, we then try to identify real practical courses of action that will contribute positively to the world around us, without violating any of the principles of the charter. Learners are accordingly

challenged to develop practical plans for innovations, services, goods, institutional changes or community development that will help facilitate their vision of a better world, while staying within the confines of the Earth Charter. This is a challenging but highly meaningful task and in my experience, young people engage with it with real energy and focus.

Given the challenging nature of the task, we typically form slightly larger groups than the four person ones that are used in most of the previous discussions. By this time, participants are typically more comfortable working in larger groups, that they are more motivated to share and discern useful answers and that there is genuine value in bringing as much perspective to bear on the ideas as possible. To avoid the possible domination of discussion by a small minority, the educator can employ a variety of techniques to balance input, such as having an object to be passed around which allows only the holder to speak or any other of a large number of such facilitation rules. I have in the past experimented with having small groups develop plans for practical action as teams, but these are far less meaningful than encouraging individuals to think up practical pathways that will allow them to shape their own intentional contributions to best fit the specifics of their own lives, values and planned futures.

This final stage of the learning process is where collaboration comes most to the fore as learners become truly inspired by each other's ideas and the synergies of sharing have their most tangible pay-off. In the many times we have explored options for future conduct, the creativity and commitment of students has been striking, and it is often the case that learners organise for many hours of mutual sharing outside of the classroom as they exhibit a desire to deeply explore the question and seem highly motivated to identify pathways that will allow them to genuinely contribute to building a better world.

It is also at this point that a tangible happiness begins to pervade our deliberations as a hopeful positivity of purpose comes to dominate the proceedings. To witness this is wonderful thing for any educator, as you can see people literally blossoming before your eyes. I have no doubt at all that this is a function of mutual collaboration and of a fuller realisation of one's integrated potential to think, speak, act and feel in value-grounded ways of being.

The final results are a host of positive plans that are capable of genuinely adding to a spreading happiness. Given the previous exercises and discussions, learners approach their future plans with an inherently reflective and broad-minded intention that spontaneously thinks in inter-connected and broadly considerate ways. I have seen a wide variety of plans put into action ranging from providing healthy lunchboxes of organic food to busy office workers, to educating consumers on the sustainability of what they consume, to monitoring systems for businesses social responsibility, to obtaining and using recycled woods for furniture production. Again, all of these interventions are developed by the learners themselves in an environment structured to maximise collaboration and positive creativity. There is literally no end to what can be developed under such forms of holistic engagement and the happiness generated in the process is tangible, infectious and profoundly practical.

The end result is, I believe, a greatly enhanced and highly resilient development that empowers learners to think, feel and act in happiness generating ways. It is a fulfilling and holistic process of collaborative learning that consciously aims at building a happier world and it has a considerable potential for succeeding in its intention.

How applicable would an approach like this be to Bhutan?

I believe that this approach to integrative education has much to offer Bhutan at the present time. The Fifth King and the

current Prime Minister have shown a remarkable commitment to both generating Gross National Happiness and to adapting education in the kingdom to facilitate this outcome.

The above model has been successfully used in a wide variety of contexts including in shorter iterations with Vietnamese, Indian, Samoan, Scots, American and Maori learners. It is not bounded by cultural constraints, as the specific content is always developed by learners themselves. The broader facilitative process is designed to build on universal human concerns about the future and about personal and collective improvement.

The overall design has been developed with a particular age-group in mind; those in their late teenage years or early twenties. As such, it could be easily applied in late high school, in the country's colleges or in classes at the Royal University. Its broad applicability comes from its ability to connect where the learner is now, with a future vision of a better world and how that might be brought into being. Given that Bhutan has a very explicit future vision of cultivating greater happiness, this collaborative, integrative approach could contribute in constructive and eminently practical ways. The resource demands are low and the outcomes high in quality. These include enhanced value-consistency, greater self-awareness, a more integrative understanding and an increasingly resilient sense of contributory purpose all of which are fundamental to achieving both personal and collective happiness.

The thematic approach can be easily adapted for any mature group where the creative integration of personal values, social goals and practical planning is deemed desirable – thus, government officials and graduating students returning from overseas study might clearly qualify. However, for younger students, the approach would need some modification. It would be unreasonable for example to expect younger

children to be able to think of the complexities of social arrangements or to contemplate their own inconsistencies. These are considerations appropriate to more mature learners but still, the articulation of personal ideals for a better world and reflecting on the benefits of acting considerately could be applied at any level of the educational system. At younger levels the extent of action could be curtailed to look more at community or village contributions, but as I have not worked formally with these age cohorts I can only speculate on what would work best. With late high school students, college level learners or for those in government service however, the above approach to extending happiness could easily be applied in its existing form.

In its current application, learners are involved for fairly long periods and total contact is in the realm of 30 hours. This allows for a very deep engagement and a prolonged development of shared ideas. It is possible to shorten the experience and to facilitate significant learning in much shorter time frames. This inevitably involves some compromising of its potential, but I have run versions of this facilitated learning over weekends, and in short one-off sessions where the emphasis is on the first and third part of the process (identifying valuable outcomes and pathways to those). These have been very well received and the more professional, focused and mature the group, the shorter and more direct the process can be.

Perhaps the greatest applicability for Bhutan though relates to the alignment of this holistic, collaborative and reflective approach with basic Buddhism principles. Both seek to facilitate a fuller flowering of our potential through realising inter-connection, and the importance of bringing all aspects of being into a contributory alignment. The dynamics of both aims to open up learners to deep realisations about the miseries of egotism and conflict, and to open the way to a happier flourishing. None of the specific content of what a better world would look like, what values could contribute to

that, or which courses of action would be most fruitful are pre-determined, but all emerge from the group dynamics themselves. It is therefore a responsive and flexible model that can find easy harmony across cultural boundaries and particularly with Buddhist sensitivities.

In my many trips to Bhutan, I have been party to numerous discussions in which genuine concerns have been voiced about how the country might lose its cultural bearings - as so many others have done. As all nations open up to the influences of foreign commerce, media and politics, there arise real fears that the young in particular may lose their grounding and be tempted into a destructive materialist modernity that rejects traditional values.

The only antidote to this is a resilience rooted in humane insight, and a common sense of positive purpose. Education has a major responsibility in developing this resilience, both formally and informally, and its structuring is of critical importance. There is a real need now - not only in Bhutan - but worldwide, to shift education in a direction that makes it a force for our collective development through facilitating the emergence of a generation of thoughtful, appreciative and purposeful citizens.

The practices outlined in this paper have proven themselves to be effective in facilitating these outcomes, and as part of an integrated and balanced educational effort in Bhutan, they might harbour considerable potential to contribute to a fertile and resilient Gross National Happiness.