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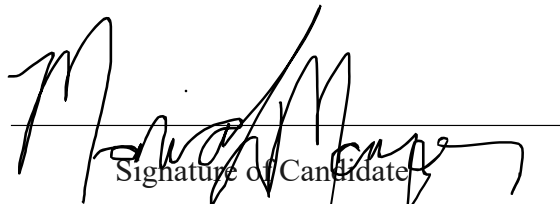
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THE IMPACT OF GRATITUDE INTERVENTIONS ON
SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL HEALTH OF MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

by

Mariah Mayer

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ABSTRACT

A growing body of research reveals that gratitude has the power to benefit one's social-emotional health, subjective well-being, lead to responsible decision-making, social awareness, relationships, longevity, sleep, job satisfaction, student engagement, school support, satisfaction with school, physical health, teacher-student relationship, enhance critical thinking, promote student engagement and assist in developing a healthy school culture. This study delves into the effects of gratitude interventions on social and emotional health for middle school students. Out of the total classes ($N = 29$), nearly half of the classes ($N = 17$) participated in a 15-week intervention, while the nonintervention group ($N = 12$) did not. Over the 15 weeks, the intervention classes practiced gratitude through maintaining a journal, along with weekly quotes, stories, and videos. All classes ($N = 29$) took a pretest survey (week 1) followed by a posttest (week 15). The survey consisted of Dr. Michael Furlong and his colleagues' (2013) Social-Emotional Health Survey (SEHS) and the Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6) developed by Dr. Michael McCullough (2002). The quantitative data analysis revealed significant results for the intervention in the following areas: self-efficacy ($p = .03$), persistence ($p = .01$), gratitude ($p < .01$), GQ-6 ($p < .01$), and specific GQ-6 questions ($p < .05$). Additional findings related to a significance in grade level: self-efficacy ($p < .01$), school support ($p = .04$), peer support ($p < .01$), emotional regulation ($p = .02$), zest: energetic ($p = .01$) and lively ($p = .03$), and specific GQ-6 questions ($p < .05$). For the qualitative data student and parent responses were gathered from open-ended questions (during the intervention and at the end of the survey), student journals, and weekly feedback on student goal sheets student writing samples. Lastly, qualitative results were found for 11 of the 12 blocks of positive psychology: self-awareness, self-efficacy, persistence, family coherence, peer support, school support, gratitude, optimism, emotional regulation, self-control, and empathy. This study contributes to the groundbreaking research of gratitude by exploring how it impacts middle school students' social-emotional health.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
TABLE OF CONTENTS	i
LIST OF TABLES	viii
LIST OF FIGURES	ix
CHAPTER 1	1
Statement of the Problem	4
Purpose of the Study	7
Research Questions (and Hypothesis)	8
Theoretical Framework	8
Broaden and Build Theory	8
The Upward Spiral Model of Lifestyle Change	11
Significance of the Study	12
Definition of Terms	13
Limitations	15
Delimitations	15
Summary	16
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE	17
Introduction	17
Gratitude	18
What is Gratitude?	18
The Stages of Gratitude	20

Gratitude Interventions	21
Barriers to Gratitude	27
The Dark Side of Gratitude	28
Social-Emotional Health	29
The History of Social-Emotional Health	29
What is Social-Emotional Health?	30
Social-Emotional Health and Covitality	30
Social-Emotional Health and Multitiered Systems of Support Interventions	32
Social-Emotional Health and Social-Emotional Learning	33
History of Social-Emotional Learning	34
California and SEL	37
The Impacts of Gratitude on Social-Emotional Health	38
Gratitude and the Five Social-emotional Learning Domains	38
Self-awareness and Subjective Well-being Benefits of Gratitude.....	38
Self-management and Responsible Decision-making Benefits of Gratitude	39
Social-awareness Benefits of Gratitude.....	41
Relationship-skills Benefits of Gratitude	42
More Benefits of Gratitude.....	43
Longevity Benefits of Gratitude	44
Sleep Benefits of Gratitude	45

Job Satisfaction Benefits of Gratitude	46
Student Engagement Benefits of Gratitude	46
School Support Benefits of Gratitude.....	48
Middle School Benefits of Gratitude.....	50
Higher Education Benefits of Gratitude	50
Teacher-student Relationship Benefits of Gratitude	53
Leadership and School Culture Benefits of Gratitude.....	54
Summary.....	55
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	57
Introduction	57
Research Design	57
Setting and Participants	59
Sampling Procedures	59
Before the Intervention.....	59
The Intervention	60
After the Intervention	61
Instrumentation and Measures.....	61
Social-Emotional Health Survey	61
The Gratitude Questionnaire	63
Reliability	65
Strategies for Validating Findings.....	65

Narrative Structure: Phenomenological Theory	65
Plan for Data Collection	67
Classroom Observations	67
Teacher Data Collection	68
Plan for Data Analysis	68
Data Analysis for Coding	68
Anticipated Ethical Issues	71
Summary: Expected Outcomes	71
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS	73
Introduction	73
Quantitative Data Analysis and Qualitative Results	73
Demographics	73
Social-Emotional Health Survey Results per Construct	75
Belief-in-Self: Self-efficacy	76
Belief-in-Self: Self-awareness	78
Belief-in-Self: Persistence	80
Belief-in-Others: School Support	81
Belief-in-Others: Family Coherence	83
Belief-in-Others: Peer Support	84
Emotional Competence: Emotional Regulation	86
Emotional Competence: Empathy	89

Emotional Competence: Behavioral Self-control.....	90
Engaged Living: Optimism	90
Engaged Living: Gratitude	91
Engaged Living: Zest	95
The Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6) Results.....	96
Additional Findings: Grade Point Average	107
Summary.....	108
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION	109
Introduction	109
Summary of the Study	109
Conclusions	110
What is the Relationship between Gratitude and Social-Emotional Health for Middle School Students?	110
How Does Gratitude and Social-Emotional Health Vary by Grade Level?	112
What are Other Outcomes of Gratitude Journals for Middle School Students?.....	112
Limitations.....	113
Delimitations	114
Implications for Practice.....	115
Implications for Districts: MTSS, Tier 1 and 2 Interventions.....	115
Implications for Administrators	116
Implications for Teachers	117

Teaching Gratitude as a Goal	118
Implications for Parents.....	120
Recommendations for Further Research	120
Conclusions	121
Summary.....	122
A Final Reflection on Gratitude	122
REFERENCES	125
APPENDICES	140
Appendix A: First Week of Goals and Gratitude Journal	140
Appendix B: Counting One's Blessings.....	144
Appendix C: Three Good Things	145
Appendix D: The First Week of Teacher's Guide.....	146
Appendix E: Sample of Teacher's Google Slide Presentation	157
Appendix F: Social Emotional Health Survey	159
Appendix G: The Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6) and Gratitude Questions on the SEHS	163
Appendix H: Open-ended Questions Added to the Post-test Survey	165
Appendix I: Permission from Researcher to Use the Social Emotional Survey	167
Appendix J: Permission from the Researcher to Use GQ-6	169
Appendix K: Site Authorization	171
Appendix L: Child Consent form Intervention Class.....	178
Appendix M: Parent INFORMED CONSENT FORM.....	179
Appendix N: Parent INFORMED CONSENT FORM Spanish Version	181

Appendix O: Child Consent Form Nonintervention Class	183
Appendix P: Parent INFORMED CONSENT FORM Nonintervention Class	184
Appendix Q: Passport Power Words	186
Appendix R: Student's Responses After Gratitude (Exit Ticket 2015)	188
Appendix S: Proposed Timelines	193
Appendix T: Observation Procedures	197
Appendix U: Interview Questions	198
Appendix V: Student's Hypothesis	199
Appendix W: SEHS Proctor Protocol	200
Appendix X: 6th Grade and Former Student Results	203

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. 1. BAMS Populations and Study Sample.....	74
Table 2.1. Summary of Mean and Standard Deviation for the GQ-6 Scores of Middle School Students	97
Table 3. 1. Mean Scores of Significant Findings for Intervention	106

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1. Upward Spirals of Positive Emotions That Can Counter Downward Spirals of Downward Spirals of Negativity	10
Figure 2.1. The Broaden and Build Theory.....	11
Figure 3. 1.The Upward Spiral of Lifestyle Change	12
Figure 4. 1. Model of a State of Preparedness.....	22
Figure 5.1.Model-comparing Outcomes of Complaint with Those of Gratitude	23
Figure 6.1. The Social and Emotional Health Survey	62
Figure 7.1. Positive Mental Health and Covitality Model Underlying the Social and Emotional Health Survey.....	63
Figure 8.1. Summary of Means and Standard Deviations for the GP-6 Across Studies	64
Figure 9.1. Collecting Data	67
Figure 10.1. Data Analysis Coding Process	70
Figure 11.1. Pre and Posttest Differences in Means for “I Can Work Out My Own Problems” by Intervention Versus Nonintervention.....	77
Figure 12.1. Pre and Posttest Differences in Means for “I Can Work Out My Own Problems” by Grade Level.....	78
Figure 13.1. Pre and Posttest Differences in Means for “When I try to Solve a Math Problem, I Will Not Stop Until I find a Final Solution” by Intervention Versus Nonintervention	81
Figure 14.1. Pre and Posttest Differences in Means for “At School There Is a Teacher or Some Adult That Wants Me to Do My Best” by Grade Level.....	82
Figure 15.1. Pre and Posttest Differences in Means for “I Have a Friend My Age Who Talks with Me About My Problems” by Grade Level	85
Figure 16.1. Pre and Posttest Differences in Means for “When I Make a Mistake, I Admit it” by Grade Level.....	86

Figure 17.1. Pre and Posttest Differences in Means for “Since Yesterday I Feel Grateful” by Intervention Versus Nonintervention	92
Figure 18.1. Pre and Posttest Differences in Means for Rate Your Current Level of Feeling “Energetic” by Grade Level	95
Figure 19.1. Pre and Posttest Differences in Means for Rate Your Current Level of Feeling “Lively” by Grade Level.....	96
Figure 20.1. Pre and Posttest Differences in Means for GQ-6 by Intervention Versus Nonintervention	98
Figure 21.1. Pre and Posttest Differences in Means for “Long Amounts of Time Can Go by Before I Feel Grateful to Something or Someone” by Intervention Versus Nonintervention	99
Figure 22.1. Pre and Posttest Differences in Means for “Long Amounts of Time Can Go by Before I Feel Grateful to Something or Someone” by Grade Level	100
Figure 23.1. Pre and Posttest Differences in Means for “I Have So Much in Life to be Grateful for” for Intervention Versus Nonintervention	101
Figure 24.1. Pre and Posttest Differences in Means for “I Am Grateful to a Wide Variety of People” by Intervention Versus Nonintervention.....	101
Figure 25.1. Pre and Posttest Differences in Means for “I Am Grateful to a Wide Variety of People” by Grade Level.....	102
Figure 26.1. Pre and Posttest Differences in Means for “I Find Myself More Able to Appreciate the People, Events, and Situations More and More Each Day” by Intervention Versus Nonintervention.....	103
Figure 27.1. Pre and Posttest Differences in Means for “I Find Myself More Able to Appreciate the People, Events, and Situations More and More Each Day” by Grade Level	104
Figure 28.1. Pre and Posttest Differences in Means for “When I Look at the World, I Don’t See Much to be Grateful For” by Intervention Versus Nonintervention	105
Figure 29.1. Pre and Posttest Differences in Means for “When I Look at the World, I Don’t See Much to be Grateful For” by Grade Level	106

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CHAPTER 1

On the last day of the 2013-2014 school year, I facilitated a class discussion to encourage students to reflect on their experiences and growth over the year. Alongside their academic studies, the students had spent the entire year working to develop useful life skills employing a pilot program, The Skills of Independence (LaField, 2013). The Skills of Independence consisted of a list of four notable skills each student worked independently to reach and mature in. Each day, learners set individualized goals to intentionally grow in these four skills:

- Be a self- starter. If you know, something needs to be done, do it before anyone asks you to.
- Make wise use of your time. If you have 5 extra minutes, use them to get your homework done, read or make sure you have everything you need for your next class.
- Be trusted. Do the right thing, even when no one is watching.
- Do not distract others and choose to not be distracted yourself.

While I had worked hard throughout the year to support and facilitate a “whole child” approach to teaching, I still felt that something was missing from The Skills of Independence. As the students reflected upon their school year in our discussion, they shared how setting goals helped them to feel more motivated and propelled them to work harder. However, they too agreed, The Skills of Independence was missing something.

Many ideas were expressed until one student stated, “I know what the skills are missing! They are missing gratitude!” Unanimously, students agreed, the skills were missing gratitude. Moments later, the bell rang, and summer began; causing me to wonder, if something like gratitude could even be taught.

So, during the summer of 2014, I searched for how to teach gratitude and came up with nothing. To date, there is only one book about gratitude and education, and it is directed towards college students (Howell, 2012). Frustrated with my lack of findings and guidance, I continued to wonder how I would teach gratitude. Only two months before this conversation, unbeknownst to my students, I had started my gratitude journal (inspired by Ann Voskamp's book *1000 gifts*). My goal was to write 1,000 things I was grateful for. I figured this would take me the rest of my life. Like most adults, I knew that practice is the pre-requisite to improvement. Therefore, I had my students start a gratitude journal to begin developing a healthy routine and practice of the specific skill of gratitude.

At the beginning of the 2014-2015 school year, a fifth element, gratitude, was added to The Skills of Independence: Be thankful. Choose to be thankful, even when you do not feel like it. Next, students started their gratitude journal in the back of their Science, Math, or Social Studies notebooks. Every day students would write down at least one thing they were thankful for. If they wanted to share what they wrote with the class orally they could. In addition to this, once a week, students participated in 5 minutes of gratitude. Before students would write in their journals, they viewed a video (sample lesson Appendix A). Each week the videos were different. After the video, students were given optional prompts to help get them started. After the prompts were explained, the timer was started, and students were asked to write down, as many things as they could think of in 5 minutes.

At first, this practice was easy, but with time, it became more rigorous to come up with new ideas. There were a couple of guidelines for this activity. First, students needed to write in complete sentences. Next, they needed to explain why they were thankful for that particular person, place, or thing. Finally, they were not to repeat items. Students were also encouraged to

write down quotes they were grateful for. They were also prompted to write about past positive experiences they were grateful for. Students were even encouraged to include adverse circumstances and to reflect on a positive benefit that may have come from it. For example, the teacher even explained, “It is okay to write about everything you are experiencing. In my journal, I have often written: Today I feel just awful! I am thankful for all the times I feel well.”

At the end of the year, students were asked the same questions I had used in the past. Since that year, I had what is called 6/5s, or teaching 120% with no break or prep, I predicted the 200 students’ responses would reflect the increased stress (I had felt), resulting in possibly negative comments. However, the responses were surprisingly positive. Multiple students wrote they were happier, they had become a better person, and they saw the world differently (See Appendix Q). I wondered how students could feel happier in subjects they had previously dreaded.

Through reading, observing, and interviewing, I, a sixth-grade teacher have turned into a doctorate student, gratitude blogger, and researcher. Each morning, I continue to write in my gratitude journal. First, my goal was a 1,000, then 10,000, today I have over 20 thousand things recorded in my gratitude journal. My new goal is never to stop writing, for gratitude continues to transform me, broaden and build who I am, and move my life in an upward spiral.

Since gratitude in adults has been found to enhance “nearly all spheres of human experience,” it may offer similar benefits to children as well (Emmons & Stern, 2013, p. 846). The chapter is organized into the following sections: statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, hypothesis, theoretical framework, significance of the study, definition of terms, limitations, and delimitations.

Statement of the Problem

There are many social and emotional problems in society today. These problems include a lack of emotional health, school violence, bullying, substance abuse, anxiety, depression, suicide, and loneliness (Brown, 2018; Goldman, 2006).

First, a lack of emotional health, a setting of “complaint and dissatisfaction, the opposite of gratitude,” pervades most educational institutions (Howell, 2004, para. 2). This negativity has spread to students, parents, and teachers (Howell, 2004). This atmosphere may be the cause of countless other issues facing society today (Goldman, 2006). Daniel Goleman (2006), an emotional intelligence expert, compares a negative environment to breathing in secondhand smoke, explaining, “the leakage of emotions can make a bystander an innocent casualty of someone else’s toxic state” (p.14). Emotions have a way of influencing, scientist refers to the phenomenon as mirror neurons, explaining these negative emotions are highly contagious and are gradually infiltrating the educational system. Moreover, there are many social and emotional problems in society today (Brown, 2018; Goldman, 2006).

Since Columbine, there have been hundreds of school shootings. According to CNN, on May 9, 2019, the US has already experienced 15 school shootings this year. From Georgia to California, they have occurred across the country at elementary, middle, high schools and universities. To commemorate 20 years since Columbine, ABC news interviewed, John Cohen (2019), a former Department of Homeland Security official. During his career, Cohen’s efforts concentrated on combating mass shootings. He explained that Columbine “absolutely” influenced subsequent shootings. Out of the hundreds that have taken place, 11 have been classified as mass shootings. The FBI defines a mass shooting as four or more victims, not including the suspect, are killed. The 11 are as followed:

- Virginia Tech – April 16, 2007 – 32 victims
- Sandy Hook Elementary School – Dec. 14, 2012 – 26 victims
- Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School – Feb. 14, 2018 – 17 victims
- Santa Fe High School – May 18, 2018 – 10 victims
- Umpqua Community College – Oct. 1, 2015 – 9 victims
- Red Lake Senior High School – March 21, 2005 – 7 victims at the school
- Oikos University – April 2, 2012 – 7 victims
- West Nickel Mines School – Oct. 2, 2006 – 5 victims
- Northern Illinois University – Feb. 14, 2008 – 5 victims
- Santa Monica College – June 7, 2013 – 5 victims
- Marysville Pilchuck High School – Oct. 24, 2014 – 4 victims

The people who conduct school shootings tend to be disaffected mentally unwell individuals searching for a sense of social connection and life meaning. They go online, they look at past attacks and in a perverse way, they connect with not only past incidents but also past attackers,” Cohen said, adding that “the story of the Columbine shooters is a story that resonates with a group of kids that are experiencing similar situations” (ABC News, 2019, April 20).

The National Center for Education Statistics and Bureau of Justice (2017) indicated 20% of students nationwide ages 12-18 experienced bullying close to 30% of students admit to bullying others, 70% have witnessed it, 70.4% of school staff report seeing bullying two or more times a month, 41% witness it once a week or more. Also, the 2017 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) indicates that an estimated 14.9% of high school students were electronically bullied in the 12 months before the survey.

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2018)

nearly 5.1 million adults 18 to 25 struggled with a substance use disorder, 2.5 million had an illicit drug disorder, 4.1 million battled marijuana, and 14.5 million alcohol use disorder. The National Institutes of Health (2018) indicated heroin usage among 18 to 25 years old has doubled in the past decade. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2015) described heroin as an *epidemic* explaining those addicted to alcohol are two times more likely to be addicted to heroin, three times more likely to marijuana, 15 times more likely to be addicted to cocaine and 40 times more likely prescription drugs. The Washington Post (2014) reported of the 2.3 million people incarcerated in the US more than 65% are considered addicted. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (2018) estimates 88,000 people die annually due to alcohol-related causes making it the third leading cause for preventable deaths in the US.

Also, emotional problems include anxiety, depression, suicide, and loneliness. The Pew Research (2018) found 70% of teens consider anxiety and depression to be a major problem. According to the Washington Post, the National Survey of Children's Health (2018) indicated 15.2% of parents reported their child suffered severely from anxiety and 10.7% severe depression. The Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA (2016) explained anxiety plagues nearly 41% of their incoming freshmen, over a 20% increase since 1985. Professor Jean Twenge (2007) at San Diego State University analyzed 77,500 high school and college student's MMPI responses over the decades finding students today five times more likely to be categorized with mental health issues, and six times more likely to have anxiety or depression than during the Great Depression in 1938. Moreover, the National Institute of Health explains, close to a third of 13 to 18-year old students will experience an anxiety disorder (Nutt, 2018).

Next, suicide is a growing public concern. Among persons aged 10-24, suicide is the second leading cause for death taking 5,178 lives in 2012 alone (Sullivan, Amnest, Simon, Luo, ,

& Dahlberg, 2015). In 2016, it took nearly 45,000 lives, equating to one death every 12 minutes (Sullivan et al., 2015). Many people think about suicide in 2016, 9.8 million adults thought seriously about it, 2.8 million made a plan, and 1.3 attempted suicide (Sullivan et al., 2015). Dr. Zais, US Deputy Secretary of education emphasized suicide was an even greater threat than school shootings (personal communication, July 17, 2018). Each year suicide costs our nation nearly 70 million annually in work and medical loss alone (Sullivan et al., 2015).

Since the 1980s, loneliness has doubled, close to 40% of Americans report feeling lonely (Brown, 2018). In a meta-analysis on loneliness, researchers delved into various mortality risks. They concluded all of the following things increase one's odds of dying air pollution, obesity, drinking, and loneliness. Living with air pollution may increase the odds by 5 percent, obesity 20 percent, drinking 30 percent, and loneliness 45 percent (Holt-Lunstad, , Baker, Harris, & Stephenson, 2015).

Furthermore, there are many social and emotional problems in society today related to a lack of emotional health, school violence, bullying, substance abuse, anxiety, depression, suicide, and loneliness (Brown, 2018; Goldman, 2006).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the effects of gratitude interventions on social and emotional health for middle school students. Through this study, students will ascribe meaning as they learn about gratitude, its benefits, and how to practice it. One of the ways students will practice gratitude is by maintaining a gratitude journal. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the meaning middle school students ascribe to experience when maintaining a gratitude journal, and to investigate how gratitude impacts one's social-emotional health.

Research Questions (and Hypothesis)

The research and hypothesis for this study are as follows:

Primary research question:

- What is the relationship between gratitude and social-emotional health for middle school students?

Secondary research questions:

- What are the effects of gratitude journals on social-emotional health for middle school students?
- How does gratitude and social-emotional health vary by grade level?
- What are other outcomes of gratitude journals for middle school students?

Hypothesis: Maintaining a gratitude journal will lead to an increase in student's social-emotional health and overall gratitude.

Theoretical Framework

Broaden and Build Theory

In the past, psychology was primarily focused on the study of negative emotions (Fredrickson, 2013). Studying positive emotions were considered less rigorous, irrelevant, and even misleading, until the International Society for Research on Emotions (ISRE) formed in 1984 (Fredrickson, 2013). Before this, there were a few researchers like Isen (1987) who noted positive emotions to “give rise to an enlarged cognitive context” (p. 222). Curious about Isen's findings, Barbara Fredrickson set out to explore the uncharted waters of positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2013). With countless rejections, her first study took 7 years to publish. Since

1998, Fredrickson has developed two theories: The Broaden and Build Theory and The Upward Spiral Model of Lifestyle Change (Fredrickson, 1998; Fredrickson, 2013).

With the help of colleagues and students at the Positive Emotions and Psychophysiology Laboratory (PEP Lab), Fredrickson has devoted the past thirty years to studying positive emotions (Fredrickson, 1998; Fredrickson, 2013). Due to their frequency, as observed in human behavior, ten positive emotions have been studied. They are joy, gratitude, serenity, interest, hope, pride, amusement, inspiration, awe, and love (Fredrickson, 2013). These positive emotions have uncovered a multitude of results from not only the PEP Lab but many other researchers as well (Fredrickson, 2013). One of the most significant findings from the research was the undo effect a phenomenon describing the effects that positive emotions have on negative ones (Garland, Fredrickson, Kring, Johnson, Meyer, & Penn, D. L. 2010; Fredrickson, 2013). The Figure 1 below demonstrates this phenomenon.

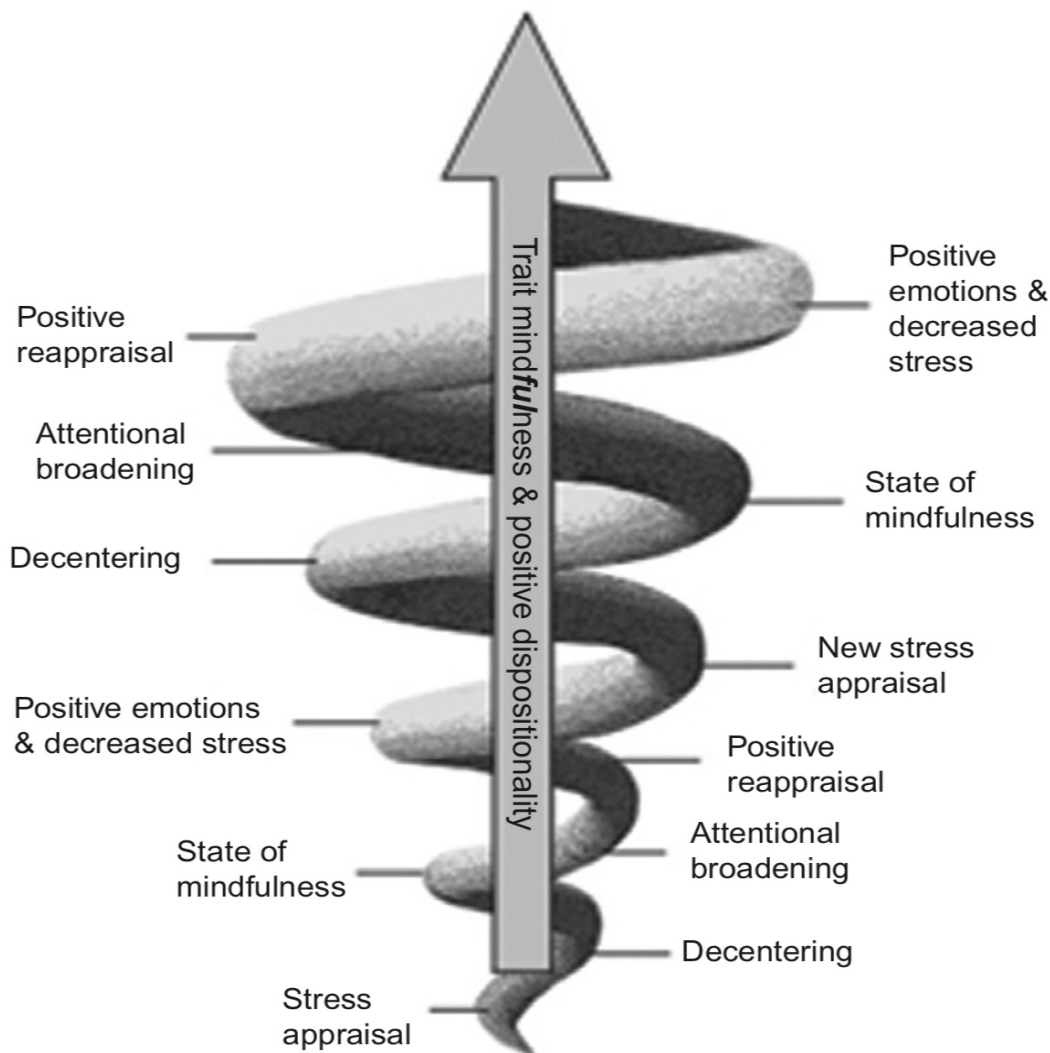


Figure 1. 1. Upward Spirals of Positive Emotions That Can Counter Downward Spirals of Negativity

These positive emotions have also been found to boost resilience, aid in recovering from stress faster, serving as a buffer against depressive symptoms, and even fueling post-crisis growth. Furthermore, positive emotions broaden awareness and are the recipe to discover new knowledge, skills, and alliances. They lead to, “expanding the scope of people’s visual, semantic, and social awareness,” and even “appear to broaden people’s physical demeanor” (Fredrickson, 2013, p. 23). These positive emotions place “people on positive trajectories of

growth” (Fredrickson, 2013, p. 23). An array of research supports the Broaden and Build Theory and ultimately leads one to an Upward Spiral.

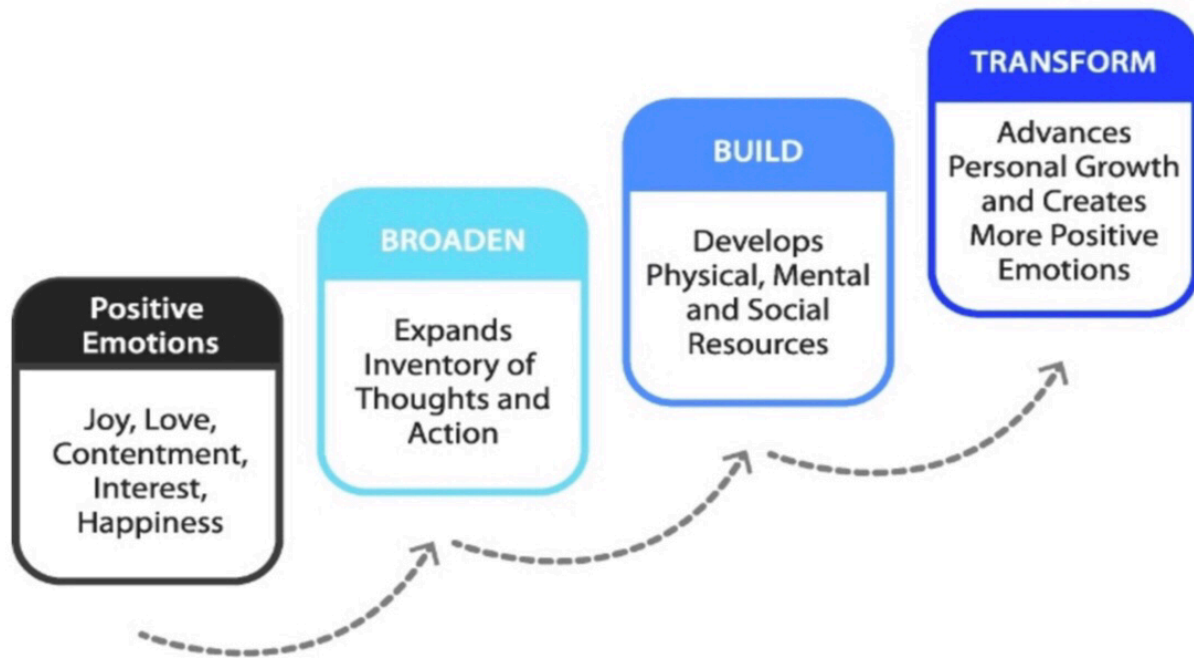


Figure 2. 1. The Broaden and Build Theory

The Upward Spiral Model of Lifestyle Change

Building upon the Broaden and Build Theory, Fredrickson (2013) developed another theory called The Upward Spiral Model of Lifestyle Change. This theory proposes that positive emotions may be the missing link in failed New Year’s resolutions. With the aid of positive emotions, an upward spiral is created resulting, in individuals becoming more “active, curious, socially engaged, and ultimately healthier” (Fredrickson, 2013, p. 37). This upward spiral continues both “biological and psychological resources—namely, vagal tone, oxytocin, resilience, other-focus, and mindfulness,” and even leading to a decrease in inflammation (Fredrickson, 2013, p. 37). These theories support the vital role gratitude could play in broadening and building individuals to an upward spiral of change.

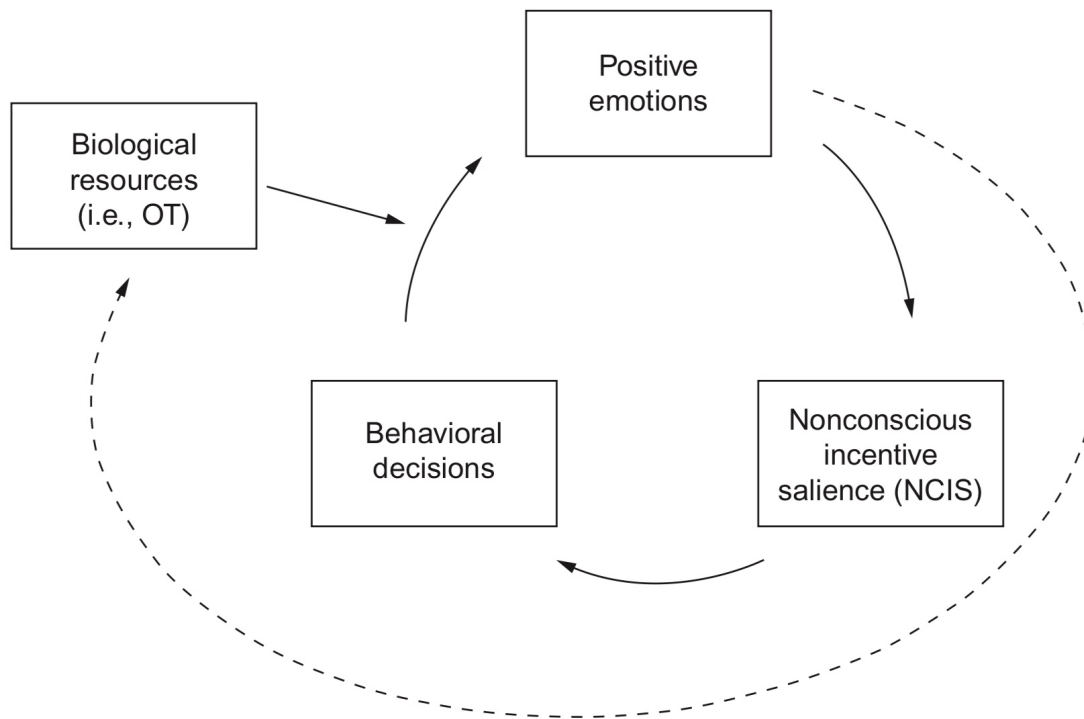


Figure 3. 1. *The Upward Spiral of Lifestyle Change*

Significance of the Study

Over the past three decades, there has been extensive research on the benefits of gratitude (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Emmons & Stern, 2013; Howell, 2012; Jarrett, 2016; Linn, 2015; Yadav, 2015). Most of the research pertains to adults. To date, there is only one book about gratitude and children it is entitled *Making Grateful Kids: The Science of Building Character* by researchers Jeffery J. Froh and Giacomo Bono (2014). In this book, it states, “there’s been little research addressing its development and enhancement in children’s lives” (Bono & Froh, 2014). It goes on to explain, “Aside from several isolated studies that preceded current theorizing on gratitude, the study of gratitude in youth is in its infancy” (Bono & Froh,

2014). Since there is a limited amount of research about gratitude and children, this could add to the growing body of literature. The significance of this study will lead to a deeper understanding of students' experiences with gratitude and will explore how it affects their social and emotional health.

Definition of Terms

Broaden and Build Theory: A theory created by Barbara Fredrickson. It is based on the study of 10 positive emotions: joy, gratitude, serenity, interest, hope, pride, amusement, inspiration, awe, and love. These positive emotions lead to “expanding the scope of people’s visual, semantic, and social awareness,” and even “appear to broaden people’s physical demeanor (Fredrickson, 2013, p. 23).

Covitality: Has been defined as the “synergetic effective of positive mental health resulting from the interplay among positive psychological building blocks” (Furlong, You, Renshaw, O’Malley, & Rebelez, J. 2013a, p. 1013).

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA): “Signed into law on December 10, 2015, by President Barack Obama, the newest federal law that looks to capitalize on the positive momentum in education that has been seen over the past eight years of the Obama administration. This law continues to require high standards, accountability, and annual testing but shifts away from negative consequences tied to test scores. The ESSA provides additional funding for early childhood education and requires safety nets for students who fall behind. An emphasis is placed on local decision making and flexibility rather than a one size fits all model” (Devitt, 2017, p. 12).

Goal-setting Theory: Implies “attainable goals increase motivation because they reinforce effort and persistence, and their accomplishment contributes to a sense of accomplishment and self-efficacy” (Webb & Norton, 2013, p. 138).

Gratitude: Is “a thankful appreciation for what an individual receives, whether tangible or intangible. With gratitude, people acknowledge the goodness in their lives ... As a result, gratitude also helps people connect to something larger than themselves as individuals – whether to other people, nature, or a higher power” (Harvard Medical School, 2011, para. 1).

Languishing students: In traditional testing, these students often go unidentified and are referred to as languishing. Languishing students “do not report experiencing significant mental health challenges but do concurrently report limited psychosocial strengths and resources to support adaptive coping” (Moore, Mayworm, Stein, Sharkey, & Dowdy, 2019, p. 258). They also “self-reported below-average school connection (Moore et al., 2019, p. 276).

Multitiered Systems of Support (MTSS): “Have been recommended as a school-based approach to help all students achieve both academically and behaviorally (Moore et al., 2019).

No Child Left Behind: “Federal law (2002) required states to test students in reading and math in grades 3-8 and twice in high school. Students were expected to meet or exceed state standards by 2014. Schools that did not meet expectations of predetermined growth were subject to heavy sanctions including, financial loss and reorganization or dismissal of faculty and staff” (Devitt, 2017, p. 12).

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL): “Refers to a holistic approach to education, one that addresses not only students’ academic needs but also their development as individuals, classmates, neighbors, and citizens” (National Association of State Board of Education [NASBE], 2013, p. 2).

The Upward Spiral Model of Lifestyle Change: “This model states that positive emotions can both knit people to new positive health behaviors and also raise their overall psychological propensity for a suite of wellness behaviors” (Fredrickson, 2013, p. 37).

Tier 2 Interventions: “Within an MTSS framework, Tier 2 interventions are designed to provide secondary supports to students who did not respond to universal Tier 1 mental and behavioral health approaches, but who are also not currently in need of intensive Tier 3 individualized services (Hawken, Adolphson, MacLeod & Schumann, J. 2009; Moore et al., 2019).

Limitations

Many teachers have limited knowledge of the effects of gratitude, nor do they practice it. To combat this problem, I shared and discussed gratitude research with the participating teachers. I also provided participating teachers with weekly videos and journal prompts for their students. It is difficult to teach something one does not understand; therefore, I sought teachers who have already discovered, or teachers who openly welcomed, the benefits of gratitude. Given this phenomenological nature of this study, the sample size and age of the students may pose a limiting factor for the generalized applicability to other environments.

Delimitations

There are delimitations to this study. First, the number of participants included 11 different classroom teachers, which collectively made up a total of 29 classes. Out of the classes, nearly half were nonintervention classes ($N = 12$) and the other half intervention ($N = 17$). Next, this study utilized only the collective results from sixth, seventh, and eighth-grade classrooms. Generalizing the results of this study to other student populations that do not resemble the students in Capistrano Unified School District (CUSD) should be done with caution.

Summary

Since gratitude in adults has been found to enhance “nearly all spheres of human experience,” it may offer similar benefits to children as well (Emmons & Stern, 2013, p. 846). Given the issues facing society and schools today: lack of emotional intelligence, negativity, and loneliness, gratitude may be the missing link education is looking for (Allen, 2018; Brown, 2018; Goldman, 2006). Based on the Broaden and Build Theory and the Upward Spiral of Lifestyle Change, gratitude may be able to help undo negative emotions and lead students on a positive trajectory (Frederickson, 2013). In summary, the purpose of this study was to discover the relationship between gratitude and social-emotional health by exploring the effects of maintaining a gratitude journal for middle school students. Lastly, this study investigated other outcomes middle school students ascribe to experience when maintaining a gratitude journal.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The fundamental objective is to explore the literature relating to gratitude and its impact on social-emotional health. Gratitude is an attitude, gesture, emotion, habit, virtue, personality trait, mood, intervention, a form of critical thinking, and even a way of life (Emmons, 2007; Fredrickson, 2013). The research suggests that practicing gratitude may result in an array of positive benefits (Ackerman, 2017; Allen, 2018; Emmons, 2007; Frederickson, 2013; Watkins, Woodward, Stone, & Kolts, 2003). There are various gratitude interventions including State of Preparedness, gratitude letters, and gratitude journals to name a few (Emmons, 2004; Howell, 2004; Jarrett, 2016; Watkins et al., 2003). Subsequent studies relating to social-emotional health will be explored utilizing the five Social Emotional Learning (SEL) domains which include self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, social awareness, and relationship skills (DePaoli, Atwell, & Bridgeland, 2017). First, gratitude may affect the development of self-awareness aiding to an individual's level of Subjective Well-being or level of happiness (Ackerman, 2017; Allen, 2018; Emmons, 2007; Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Emmons & Stern, 2013; Moosath & Jayaseelan, 2016; Watkins et al., 2003). Next, gratitude may lead to self-management and responsible decision-making (Emmons & Stern, 2013; Yadav, 2015). Also, gratitude may influence one's social awareness (Emmons, 2007; Jarrett, 2016; McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002; Simmel, 1996). In addition, gratitude can affect relationships (Emmons & Stern, 2013; Frederickson, 2013). By exploring the benefits of gratitude, interventions, and how it has been utilized in the school setting, the researcher seeks to cite how gratitude impacts social bonds, critical thinking, student engagement, and school culture.

This chapter is organized into the following sections: Gratitude, social-emotional health, and how gratitude impacts social-emotional health.

Gratitude

What is Gratitude?

Gratitude is an attitude, gesture, emotion, habit, virtue, personality trait, mood, intervention, a form of critical thinking, and even a way of life (Carr, 2015; Frederickson, 2013). It has been referred to as both the queen and parent of all virtues (Emmons, 2012; Wood, A., Joseph, & Linley, 2007). According to the Oxford Dictionary, it is defined as, “the quality or condition of being thankful; the appreciation of an inclination to return kindness.” The word gratitude comes from the Latin word *gratia*, meaning grace, graciousness, or gratefulness. The other Latin root derivatives are words like “pleasing, kindness, generous, gifts, the beauty of giving and receiving, or getting something for nothing” (Emmons, 2007, p. 4). Harvard Medical School (2011) describes it as “a thankful appreciation for what an individual receives, whether tangible or intangible. With gratitude, people acknowledge the goodness in their lives. As a result, gratitude also helps people connect to something larger than themselves as individuals whether to other people, nature, or a higher power.” It is also “a sense of thankfulness and joy in response to receiving a gift, whether the gift be a tangible benefit from a specific other or a moment of peaceful bliss evoked by natural beauty” (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 554). Two well-known gratitude researchers Robert Emmons and Robin Stern (2013) say, “gratitude has a dual meaning: a worldly one and a transcendent one” (p. 846).

In the worldly meaning, gratitude is a feeling that occurs in interpersonal exchanges when one person acknowledges receiving a valuable benefit from another. Gratitude is a cognitive-affective state that is typically associated with the perception that one has

received a personal benefit that was not intentionally sought after, deserved, or earned but rather because of the good intentions of another person (Emmons & Stern, 2013, p. 846).

Furthermore, “some psychologists further categorize three types of gratitude: gratitude as an affective trait (one’s overall tendency to have a grateful disposition), a mood (daily fluctuations in overall gratitude), and an emotion (a more temporary feeling of gratitude that one may feel after receiving a gift or a favor from someone)” (Allen, 2018, p. 2). Additionally, gratitude’s transcendent meaning is found in almost every religion, “In this attitude, people recognize that they are connected to each other in a mysterious and miraculous way that is not fully determined by physical forces, but is part of a wider, or transcendent context” (Streng, 1989, p. 5).

Two gratitude researchers explain that gratitude helps an individual to rejoice in someone else, reflect upon what others have done, and to look for ways they too might give back to those around them (Emmons & Stern, 2013).

The motivation for doing so resides in the grateful appreciation that one has lived by the grace of others. In this sense, the spirituality of gratitude as opposed to a self-serving belief that one deserves or is entitled to the blessings that he or she enjoys (Emmons & Stern, 2013, p. 847).

It is the choice to look at the good in one’s life and to bring more of that goodness into the lives of others. A shift from self may be how one can truly and genuinely live out one of the greatest commandments, “to love their neighbor as themselves” (Matthew 22:39, NIV). It may lead one to discover their life has “a profound spiritual realization...one that leads people to experience life situations in ways that call forth from them an openness to engage with the world to share and increase the very goodness they have received” (Emmons & Stern, 2013, p. 847).

Gratitude “is the feeling of connection with humanity emerging from a sense of wonder and joy that participating in an intricate network of existence brings” (Emmons & Stern, 2013, p. 847). In fact, “because of its centrality in Christian theology, it would not be an exaggeration to say that gratitude is the heart of the gospel” (Emmons & Kneezel, 2005, p. 140). Karl Barth, a theologian, compared grace and gratitude’s connection to heaven and Earth, explaining grace, as the voice, and gratitude as its echo (Boulton, 2001). The theological word for gratitude is grace (Emmons, 2007). It brings with it grace for living; this divine grace is foundational to almost every religion and has led many to discover a higher source (Emmons, 2012). In John 1:3 NLT, it states, “God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him.” Furthermore, researchers have suggested that individuals who attribute gratitude to a supreme divinity may experience a higher capacity for gratitude (Emmons, 2012; Emmons & Stern, 2013; Emmons & Kneezel, 2005). Furthermore, gratitude is an attitude, gesture, emotion, habit, virtue, personality trait, mood, intervention, a form of critical thinking, and even a way of life (Carr, 2015; Emmons, 2007; Emmons, 2012; Frederickson, 2013).

The Stages of Gratitude

There are two stages of gratitude. The two stages of gratitude to acknowledge and recognize cause an individual to demonstrate the highest form of critical thinking, or depth of knowledge (Emmons, 2007). The first is to acknowledge the goodness in one’s life (Emmons). Acknowledging the good requires the individual to think about the things in life to which they are grateful for (Emmons). Maybe this is why the German philosopher Martin Heidegger used to say, “Denken is Danken,” which means, “*thinking is thanking*” (Emmons, p. 5). Moreover, it is “an effortful state...not for the intellectually lethargic” (Emmons, p. 5). Not surprisingly, this rigorous state has “correlated with more activity in the parietal and lateral prefrontal cortex, areas

of the brain associated with making mental calculations, suggesting that gratitude is a cognitive—not just emotional—process” (Allen, 2018, p. 17). Moreover, practicing gratitude requires the individual to acknowledge the goodness in one’s life an effort full state, thus activating deeper learning and critical thinking (Allen, 2018; Emmons, 2007; Fullan & Quinn, 2016).

The next stage is to recognize (Emmons, 2007). It means, “To cognize or think differently about something from the way you thought about it before” (Emmons, 2007, p. 5). Recognizing leads an individual to realize this goodness lies outside of themselves (Allen, 2018; Emmons, 2012; Watkins et al., 2003). For this reason, recognition may be what causes gratitude to be transformational (Emmons, 2007). Furthermore, to complete the cycle of gratitude, it must be intellectually recognized, willingly acknowledged, and emotionally appreciated. Before gratitude can take place, it requires a sense of thoughtfulness, contemplation, and reflection. One cannot be “grateful without being thoughtful” (Emmons, 2007, p. 6). Furthermore, both stages of gratitude, acknowledging and recognizing take thought, thus activating deeper learning and critical thinking (Emmons, 2007; Fullan & Quinn, 2016).

Gratitude Interventions

State of Preparedness

The State of Preparedness is an intervention used by college professor Kerry Howells. As seen in Figure 4.1, it requires students to identify their innermost attitudes (Howell, 2004).

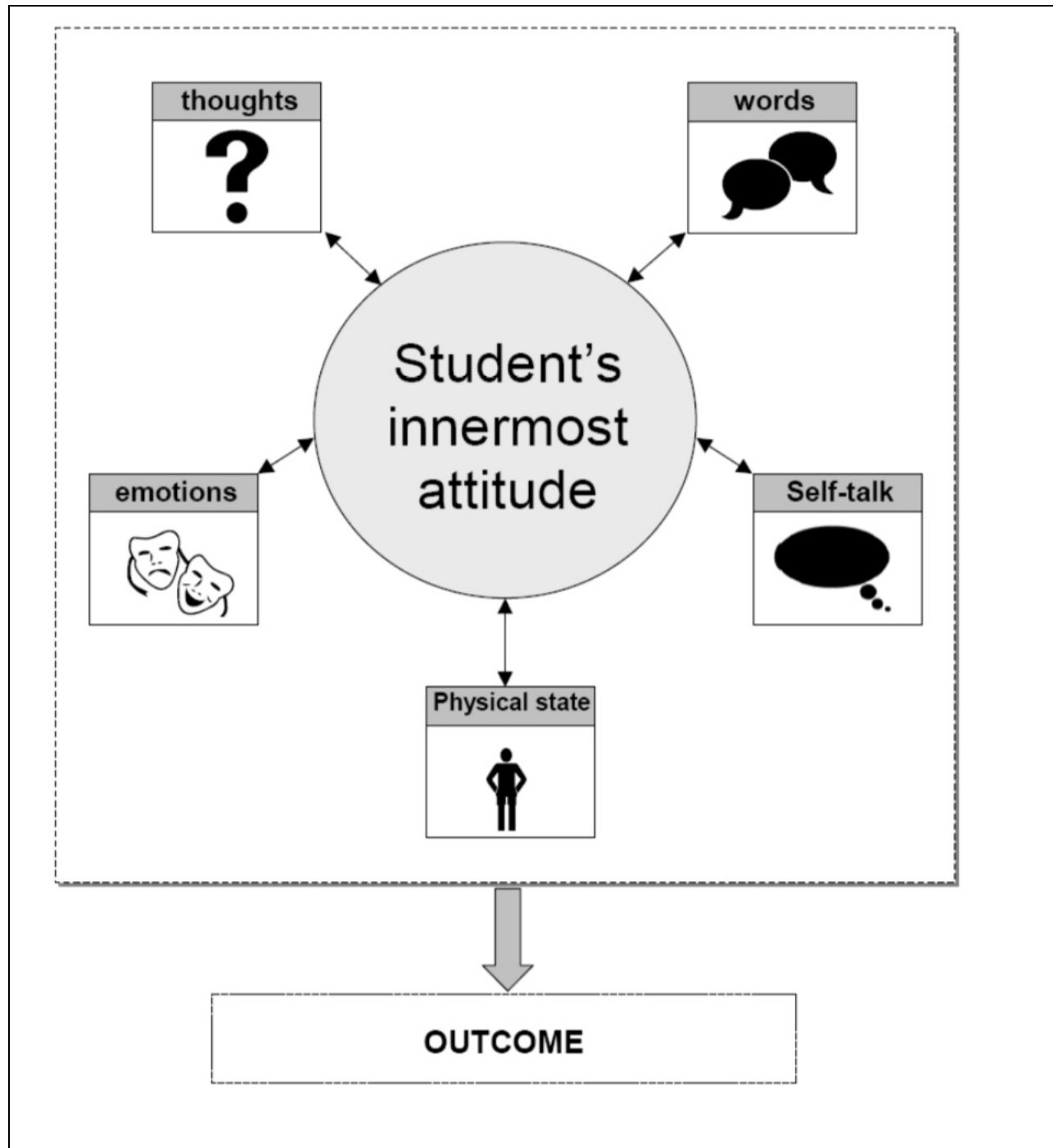


Figure 4. 1. Model of a State of Preparedness

Next, as illustrated in Figure 5.1, students compare the contrasting outcomes of approaching a boring lecture from both the lenses of complaint and gratitude (Howell, 2004). In

addition, they think about how their complaint and dissatisfaction affect their physical state, self-talk, words, thoughts, and emotions (Howell, 2004).

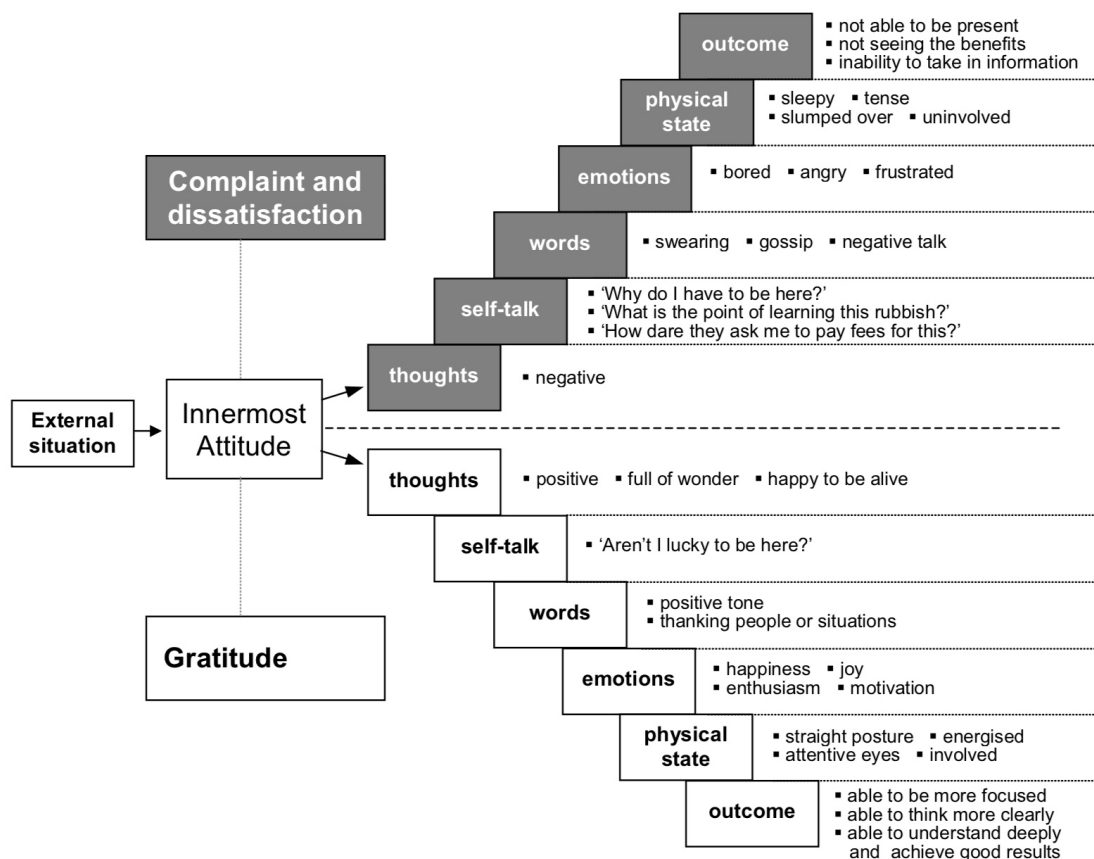


Figure 5. 1. Model-comparing Outcomes of Complaint with Those of Gratitude

Finally, they replace their complaint and dissatisfaction with gratitude and contrast how it may change their physical state, self-talk, words, thoughts, and emotions (Howell, 2004). This activity helps students to realize that their innermost attitudes affect their physical state, self-talk, words, thoughts, and emotions (Howell). One college student reported, “Once I had an innermost attitude of gratefulness, I found the world to be a different place. The class was not as long and I seemed to be more attentive because I was trying to use my time there wisely”

(Howell, para. 1). In summary, this intervention may help students prepare their state of being so that they are able to be more attentive to what they are learning (Howell, 2004; Howell 2013).

Write a Gratitude Letter

Another intervention is to write a letter of gratitude to someone else (Allen, 2018; Jarrett, 2016; Seligman & Steen, 2005; Watkins et al., 2003). Participants are encouraged to thank someone, whom they have received a benefit from, but have never properly expressed gratitude to (Allen, 2018; Jarrett, 2016; Seligman & Steen., 2005; Watkins et al., 2003). The participant is told that the letter will be delivered to the recipient by the researcher within the week, or they are asked to deliver it themselves (Seligman & Steen, 2005; Watkins et al., 2003). Concerned with how the recipient may react, this exercise (should be utilized with caution), for it may produce anxiety in the participant (Watkins et al., 2003). To counter this anxiety, the researcher may want to give the participant a choice as to whether or not the letter is delivered. Results indicate the benefits of practicing gratitude letter writing may linger even after the intervention, leading to an increased sense of well-being, and reduced depression (Jarret, 2016; Seligman & Steen, 2005; Watkins et al., 2003). Moreover, writing a letter of gratitude is an effective intervention (Seligman & Steen, 2005; Watkins et al., 2003).

Maintaining a Gratitude Journal

Journaling is the most common tool used to cultivate gratitude (Emmons, 2004; Allen, 2018). Psychiatrists, counselors, and teachers (Emmons & McCullogh, 2003; Howell, 2012; Young & Hutchinson, 2012) have utilized it. Depending on the purpose, it is used differently in each situation. For example, a counselor “might instruct clients to choose a different letter from the alphabet each day and write five things they are thankful for that begin with that letter” (Young & Hutchinson, 2012, p. 107). Others may encourage focusing on the simple joys in life,

like a cup of hot coffee (Young & Hutchinson, 2012). In education, one professor asked students to write in their journals for a certain amount of time each day (Kim, 2016).

Keeping a journal for as little as “five minutes a day about what we are grateful for can enhance our long-term happiness by over 10%” (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). Robert Emmons and Michael McCullough (2003) conducted three separate studies utilizing gratitude journals to determine the effect of gratitude on one’s well-being. The purpose of their research was to “experimentally investigate the effects of a grateful outlook on psychological and physical well-being” (Emmons & McCullough, 2003, para. 11). These studies compared the differences found focusing on blessings, complaints, or neutral life events, and how they relate to enhanced psychological and physical functioning (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). They predicted that self-guided exercises designed to induce a state of gratitude would lead to a better sense of well-being, compared to focusing on complaints or neutral life events. Study 1 found that weekly listing things that one was grateful for was associated with more, “positive and optimistic appraisals of one’s life, more time spent exercising, and fewer reported physical symptoms” (Emmons & McCullough, 2003, para. 82). Study 2 found higher levels of positive affect utilizing self-guided daily gratitude exercises.

Furthermore, individuals engaging in gratitude practices were more likely to help or support those around them. In Study 3, a group of adults with neuromuscular diseases was selected to participate in gratitude interventions. The study found these practices lead to reductions in negative affect, improved amount of sleep, and the quality of sleep. It also showed the overall well-being of the individual to be enhanced from not only his or her own perspective but also their spouses. Overall, these studies have shown a correlation between the benefits of focusing on gratitude versus complaints or neutral life events. Making an effort to count one’s

blessings consciously and practice gratitude enhances one's self, helping them emotionally and interpersonally. While some recommend journaling daily, practicing gratitude once a week has been reported to be more effective than doing so every day (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2006). Furthermore, journaling is the most common tool used to cultivate gratitude (Emmons & McCullough, 2003).

One way to maintain a gratitude journal is to count one's blessings (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). It was reported first by Robert Emmons and Michael McCulloch (2003). Other researchers (Froh, J., Sefick, & Emmons, 2008; Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2006) have since used it. It is one way to maintain a gratitude journal. The direction is given either in writing or verbally (Appendix A). Moreover, Counting One's Blessing has been reported to result in positive benefits (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Froh et al.; 2008; Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2006).

Another way to maintain a gratitude journal is called three good things (Appendix B). It is expected to take approximately 10 minutes a day. Results indicated subjects in the three good things exercise reported being happier and less depressed up to six months later (Seligman et al., 2005). One researcher and Principal Joseph McDonough (2017) used it in his dissertation on, *Understanding Experiences of Gratitude in Elementary Teachers: Implications for School Leaders*. He asked several teachers to do this practice for one week. At the end of the week, the teacher participated in an interview. The results indicated teachers experienced gratitude through celebrating student success, feeling valued in their work environment, and choosing a positive mindset (McDonough, 2017). Also, the data suggested "gratitude could play a positive role in building and sustaining a positive school climate" (McDonough, 2017, p. 44).

Furthermore, *Three Good Things* is an effective intervention and a way to maintain a gratitude journal (McDonough, 2017; Seligman & Steen, 2005).

Barriers to Gratitude

There are a few barriers to gratitude (Allen, 2018; Emmons, 2010; Gilovich, 2017; Sidon, 2017; Wallace, 2018; Watkins et al. 2003). Some of the barriers to gratitude are adaptation, fear, anxiety, narcissism, and entitlement (Emmons, 2010; Gilovich, 2017; Sidon, 2017; Wallace, 2018). Researcher Gilovich (2017) discovered one of the most significant “barriers to gratitude is adaptation, we get used to things over time and start to take them for granted” (para. 5). In his study, he analyzed consumers’ feelings concerning recent material purchases versus experiential purchases. Respondents were asked to rate how happy and grateful they were with their material purchases compared to their experiential ones. Results indicate, “Respondents felt significantly more grateful for the experiences they had purchased” (Gilovich, 2017, para. 10). Researcher Gilovich concluded subjects “seemed to be less adapted to” the experiences over the material purchases (Gilovich, 2017, para. 10). Next, the researcher analyzed online website reviews. Primarily material purchasing websites such as Amazon were compared with experiential sites like Yelp and Trip Advisor. Over 1,200 surveys were evaluated; there was a stronger correlation between gratitude and experiential purchases than material purchases. The researchers suggested there may be a few reasons experiential purchases rated higher. First, they explained, they make up part of an individual’s identity. For “no matter how much we might appreciate our material possessions; they remain separate from us. Experiences, in contrast, are not detached from us: We are, in part, the sum total of our experiences. What we build up in ourselves endures; it doesn’t diminish over time” (Gilovich, 2017, para. 13). Second, experiences connect people more than possessions do. Explaining, “experiential purchases seem to orient us outward,

making us more kind and helpful; material purchases seem to draw us inward, making us less generous to others” (Gilovich, 2017, para.12). The study concluded: “If you want to cultivate a more grateful disposition, buy more experiences and fewer possessions” (Gilovich, 2017, para. 12). In summary, individuals were more grateful for experiential purchases than material ones, suggesting experiences are less likely to cause an individual to adapt, a barrier to gratitude.

Another barrier to gratitude is fear and anxiety (Allen, 2018; Sidon, 2017; Watkins et al., 2003). Brother David Stein-Rast explains, “All that goes wrong comes from fear. The opposite of fear is trust in life. Say to each other fear not or trust in life. That would make a completely different world” (Sidon, 2017, para. 41). One study found some participants who were asked to write a gratitude letter, experienced a bit of anxiety and fear, concerning how the recipient might respond (Watkins et al., 2003). Moreover, fear and anxiety can be a barrier to gratitude.

Next, entitlement is a barrier to gratitude. “If you deserve everything, if you’re entitled to everything, it makes it a lot harder to be grateful for anything” (Emmons, 2010, para. 21). Dr. Weissbourd explains the self-esteem movement may to be blame, “But what we’re seeing in many cases is the opposite when parents organize lives around their kids, those kids expect everyone else to as well, and that leads to entitlement” (Wallace, 2018, C1). He goes on to explain, “When children are raised to feel entitled to everything, they are left feeling grateful for nothing” (Wallace, 2018, C1). In summary, some of the barriers to gratitude are adaptation, fear, and entitlement (Emmons, 2010; Gilovich, 2017; Sidon, 2017; Wallace, 2018).

The Dark Side of Gratitude

Since gratitude research is still limited, “there is still much that is unknown about how children of different ages experience and develop gratitude” (Allen, 2018, p. 55). While most of the literature on gratitude is positive, there is certainly a dark side to it (Allen, 2018, Gavin,

2004; Jackson, 2016; Kubacka, Finkenauer, Rusbult, & Keijsers, 2011; Morgan, Gulliford & Carr, 2015). When dealing with individuals with disabilities, some felt burdened by gratitude (Galvin, 2004). Other researchers have discovered problems with gratitude in relationships when it is seen as a form of currency, and one or both individuals feel underpaid (Kubacka et al., 2011). Furthermore, gratitude has been considered even harmful and inappropriate especially in a situation of abuse, inequity, or harm (Jackson, 2016). Lastly, if students are taught gratitude, they also need to learn about situations in which they should not feel gratitude for (Allen, 2018; Morgan et al., 2015). Researchers Morgan, Gulliford, and Carr (2015) caution focusing on the benefits of gratitude and have found it may even lead to a decrease in one's gratitude. They encourage interventions to be reflective and to include mixed motives of others. Furthermore, while most of the research is positive about gratitude, however, there is undoubtedly a dark side to be aware of (Allen, 2018, Gavin, 2004; Jackson, 2016; Kubacka et al., 2011; Morgan, Gulliford, & Carr, D. 2015).

Social-Emotional Health

The History of Social-Emotional Health

In the past, to achieve social-emotional health, psychologists primarily focused on the problems. As a result, topics like anxiety, depression, and various disorders were heavily explored. Researchers who sought to focus on the positive struggled to gain attention, were criticized, and were not taken seriously (Fredrickson, 2013). However, things began to change when the *American Psychologist* dedicated its millennial issue to what is now known as positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). This emerging new science redefined social-emotional health to include positive characteristics, emotions, and institutions.

What is Social-Emotional Health?

Social-emotional health is made up of 12 blocks of positive psychology which are self-awareness, self-efficacy, persistence, family coherence, peer support, school support, gratitude, zest, optimism, emotional regulation, self-control, and empathy. These 12 indicators measured make up the four first-order domains: Beliefs-in-self, believe-in-others, emotional competence, and engaged living. These four domains represent the second-order meta-construct called *Covitality*.

Social-Emotional Health and Covitality

Measuring the meta-construct Covitality is a way to determine social and emotional health. Covitality has been defined as the “synergetic effective of positive mental health resulting from the interplay among positive psychological building blocks” (Furlong et al., 2013a, p. 1013). From a statistical point of view, it is the “second-order positive mental health construct accounting for the presence of several co-occurring, first-order positive mental health indicators” (Furlong et al., 2013a, p. 1013). Its opposite would be comorbidity.

Path-model analysis “indicated that covitality was a strong predictor of students’ subjective well-being, operationalized as a composite of life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect” (Furlong et al., 2013a, pp. 1011). Furthermore, findings from additional concurrent validity analyses pointing to a connection between an adolescence’s covitality level being “significantly associated with self-reported academic achievement, perceptions of school safety, substance use, and experiences of depressive symptoms” (Furlong et al., 2013a, pp. 1011-1012).

Researcher Jones et al. (2013) reported this meta-construct was a better predictor of college student’s ability to adjust than individual positive psychological traits such as optimism,

gratitude, hope, and self-efficacy. Another study by Furlong, You, Renshaw, Smith & O'Malley (2013b), reported an elementary student's covitality score was an even better indicator of prosocial behavior, school acceptance, caring relationships and school rejection over individual scores related to "school gratitude, school zest, school optimism, and student persistence" (p. 1013).

Covitality draws from the following theories: The Social-Emotional Theory "which posits that the most important developmental task adolescents face is related to developing and redefining social and emotional competencies that help them succeed in the various interpersonal situations" (Furlong et al., 2013b, p. 1014). Next, the Positive Psychology Theory shows that "social-emotional competencies make the contributions to adolescence ability to living in engaging, purposeful and meaningful lives" (Furlong et al., 2013b, p. 1014). Lastly, the Identity Development Theory connects all of the theories together with social-cognitive, social-emotional, and positive psychology (Waterman, 1982). In addition, it proposes the most challenging fundamental issue for the developing adolescent is answering the following questions: "Who am I?" (Belief-in-self; Stewart & Wang, 2013; Winheller, Hattie, & Brown, 2013), and "How do I fit in?" (Belief-in-others; Aminzadeh, Denny, Utter, Milfont, Ameratunga, Teevale & Clark, 2013; Furlong et al., 2013b).

The first domain belief-in-self is from the Social Emotional Learning (SEL) literature, which is based on self-efficacy, self-awareness, and persistence (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor & Schellinger, 2011; Tough, 2012). The second domain, belief-in-others, is from positive youth development and childhood literature, which make up family coherence, school support, and peer-support (Larson, 2000). Similar to the first construct, the third domain emotional

competence is based on SEL literature (Greenberg, Weissberg, O'Brien, Zins, Fredericks, Resnik & Elias, 2003; Zins et al., 2007).

Lastly, the final domain engaged living draws from the positive youth psychology literature consisting of gratitude, optimism, and zest (Gilman, Huebner, & Furlong, 2009; Kirschman, Johnson, Bender, & Roberts, 2009). The SEHS modified the Resilience Youth Development Module (RYDM), a component of the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS). The CHKS is a tool used to measure both youths' internal assets and external resources (Furlong et al., 2013b; Hanson & Kim, 2007). Moreover, measuring Covitality is a way to determine social and emotional health.

Social-Emotional Health and Multitiered Systems of Support Interventions

Dr. Michael Furlong and his colleagues (2013) developed the universal Social-Emotional Health Survey (SEHS) to determine one's level of Covitality and will be further explained in Chapter 3. To assist the social-emotional needs of a high-school in California, the SEHS was administered to the entire high school, with the focus being on highlighting "the benefit of linking screening data to Tier 2 interventions for students who are at-risk for poor physical health, mental health, and social outcomes" (Moore et al., 2019). In traditional testing, these students often go unidentified and are referred to as languishing. Languishing students "do not report experiencing significant mental health challenges but do concurrently report limited psychosocial strengths and resources to support adaptive coping" (Moore et al., 2019, p. 258). They also "self-reported below-average school connection" (Moore et al., 2019, p. 276). To support these students, the school staff partnered with a local university to implement the Check, Connect, and Respect (CCR), which is an adaptation of Check and Connect (Christenson et al., 2008).

Social-Emotional Health and Social-Emotional Learning

Concern about the social-emotional health of students birthed social-emotional learning (SEL). SEL is considered “a holistic approach to education, one that addresses not only students’ academic needs but also their development as individuals, classmates, neighbors, and citizens” (National Association of State Board of Education, 2013, p. 2). SEL also refers to learning related to character education, conflict resolution, personal healthy behavior, civic engagement, bully prevention, and supporting safe schools and classroom environments (National Association of State Board of Education, 2013). Furthermore, the Chicago-based Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) divides SEL into five competencies: self-awareness, self- management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (DePaoli, et al., 2017). While all 50 states have SEL standards for pre-K, only a few states have adopted SEL standards for pre-K through grade 12. At this time, California does not have standards related specifically to SEL. SEL standards could create a framework for teachers, which could lead to more engagement, safer schools, better relationships, higher motivation, and greater academic success (National Association of State Board of Education, 2013).

The concept of emotional intelligence and “the SEL movement may have appeared at a time when Americans happened to be especially alarmed about the various dangers and difficulties young people face, and especially receptive to the idea that schools can and should do more to address them” (National Association of State Board of Education, 2013, p. 3). The No Child Left Behind Act, which heavily emphasized academics, neglected to “promote civic responsibility and their social, emotional, physical, and mental health” (National Association of State Board of Education, 2013, p. 3). Some believe the federal government’s educational

policy may have “tipped the balances too far in the direction of academics alone, and that correction is needed” (National Association of State Board of Education, 2013, p. 3).

Furthermore, SEL is related to non-academic 21st-century skills (employers are looking for).

Workers need to be able to manage their emotions, work with others, be self-starters, make wise choices, be ethical, honest, and trustworthy (National Association of State Board of Education, 2013). For individuals to take on future leadership positions, SEL will be necessary. High emotional intelligence has been linked to “effective organizational leadership, whether in schools or businesses” (National Association of State Board of Education, 2013, p. 4). Furthermore, given the benefits of gratitude, stakeholders may consider incorporating it into the classroom setting (Ackerman, 2017; Allen, 2018; Emmons, 2007; Frederickson, 2013; Watkins et al., 2003).

History of Social-Emotional Learning

Years ago, the federal government began to recognize the importance of incorporating SEL into the curriculum. On May 8, 2013, the House of Representatives introduced a bill called the Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning Act of 2013. According to H. R. 1875 (n.d.), Congress reported the following findings:

- To succeed in school, students need to be engaged. They need to know how to maintain focus and effort in the face of setbacks, work effectively with others, and be good communicators and problem-solvers.
- Social and emotional skills form a foundation for young people’s success not just in school, but as healthy and caring adults, productive workers, and engaged citizens.
- Not only can these skills be taught, but they can also be taught by regular classroom teachers in schools of every type to students of every background.

- Academic outcomes resulting from social and emotional learning include greater motivation to learn and commitment to school, increased time devoted to schoolwork and mastery of subject matter, improved attendance, graduation rates, grades, and test scores. (5) These positive outcomes increase in students who are involved in social and emotional learning programming by an average of 11 percentile points over students who are not involved in such programming.
- Social and emotional learning programming also results in reduced problem behavior, improved health outcomes, a lower rate of violent delinquency, and a lower rate of heavy alcohol use (para. 2).

This bill is an amendment to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. It added, “train teachers and principals in practices that have demonstrated effectiveness in improving student achievement, attainment, and behavior through addressing the social and emotional development needs of students, such as through social and emotional learning programming” (H. R. 1875 - Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning Act of 2013, n.d., para 3). According to Section 9101 of this act, the term ‘social and emotional learning’ means, “the process through which children and adults acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills associated with the core areas of social and emotional competency” (H. R. 1875 - Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning Act of 2013, n.d., para 4). The following is included to support the definition of SEL in this section:

- Self-awareness and self-management to achieve school and life success, such as identifying and recognizing strengths, needs, emotions, values and self-efficacy, impulse control and stress management, self-motivation and discipline, and goal setting and organizational skills;

- Social awareness and interpersonal skills to establish and maintain positive relationships, such as perspective-taking and respect for others, communication, working cooperatively, negotiation, conflict management, and help-seeking; and
- Decision-making skills and responsible behaviors in personal, academic, and community contexts, such as situational analysis, problem-solving, reflection and personal, and social and ethical responsibility (H. R. 1875 - Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning Act of 2013, n.d., para 5).

In this bill, SEL programming is discussed. It is explained as school-wide activities and classroom instruction that meets the following criteria:

- Integrate social and emotional learning into the school curriculum;
- provide systematic instruction whereby social and emotional skills are taught, modeled, practiced, and applied so that students use them as part of their daily behavior; teach children to apply social and emotional skills to prevent specific problem behaviors such as substance use, violence, bullying, and school failure, and to promote positive behaviors in class, school, and community activities; and establish safe and caring learning environments that foster student participation, engagement, and connection to learning and school (H. R. 1875 - Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning Act of 2013, n.d., para 6).

Although California has begun to explore SEL curriculum, it has yet to fully comply with the Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning Act of 2013. Illinois is one state that has developed and adopted learning goals and standards directly related to SEL for K-12 education. The learning goals adopted by the Illinois State Board of Education (n.d.) include:

- Develop self-awareness and self-management skills to achieve school and life success.
- Use social-awareness and interpersonal skills to establish and maintain positive relationships.
- Demonstrate decision-making skills and responsible behaviors in personal, school, and community contexts (para. 4).

California and SEL

While California has not yet adopted SEL standards, the California Department of Education (CDE, 2018b) has released new principles to guide teaching social and emotional skills. State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson believes, “educators know, and the science confirms that learning is not only cognitive but also social and emotional” (CDE, 2018b, p. 1). Furthermore, Torlakson stated, “these principles are a part of a concentrated effort to improve teaching and learning of social and emotional skills by recognizing that students’ connection to what they are learning is a crucial component of a quality education” (CDE, 2018b, p.1).

To support social and emotional learning in 2016, California created a team of 35 educators to be a part of a planning team in the Collaborating State Initiative, a multi-state learning community, put together by the Collaborative for Academic and Social-Emotional Learning (CDE, 2018b). An essential goal of this team will be to create SEL curriculum and disseminate these resources to California educators (CDE, 2018b). Even though California does not have standards directly related to SEL, principles were created to help stakeholders advance the incorporation of SEL in education (CDE, 2018a). These principles are broken down into 5 categories and discussed in length to establish their relationship to SEL in this CDE document:

adopt the whole child as the goal of education, commit to equity, build capacity, partner with families, and communities and learn and improve (CDE, 2018a).

The Impacts of Gratitude on Social-Emotional Health

Gratitude and the Five Social-emotional Learning Domains

As previously laid out, gratitude impacts one's social-emotional health, which leads to strengthening the five domains of social and emotional learning: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (DePaoli et al., 2017). Research shows gratitude can enhance self-awareness leading to an increase in subjective well-being (Ackerman, 2017; Allen, 2018; Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Emmons & Stern, 2103; Lin, 2015; Moosath & Jayaseelan, 2016; Watkins et al., 2003). Next, gratitude has been reported to have social awareness benefits (Ackerman, 2017; Allen, 2018, Jarrett, 2016; McCullough et al., 2002; Simmel, 1996). In addition, gratitude can enhance relationships (Ackerman, 2017; Emmons, 2010; Emmons & Stern, 2013; Frederickson, 2013). Finally, gratitude may be a way of helping one manage their self, ultimately leading to responsible decision-making (Ackerman, 2017; Emmons & Stern, 2013; Yadav, 2015). Moreover, given the current research and laws, gratitude could be a vehicle for stakeholders to facilitate compliance in the educational setting.

Self-awareness and Subjective Well-being Benefits of Gratitude

Gratitude may aid an individual in the development of self-awareness aiding an individual's ability to raises one's level of Subjective Well-being or level of happiness (Ackerman, 2017; Chen, L., Chen, M., & Tsai, 2012; Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Emmons & Stern, 2103; Kong, Ding, & Zhao, 2015; Lin, 2015a; Moosath & Jayaseelan, 2016; Seligman & Steen, 2005; Watkins et al., 2003). It has even been referred to as an "epiphenomenon of

happiness” (Watkins et al., 2003, p. 441). Gratitude is a crucial psychological characteristic related to well-being (Moosath & Jayaseelan, 2016; Watkins et al. 2003). One qualitative study explored if a simple intervention, gratitude journals, would contribute to the subjective well-being of oncology patients (Moosath & Jayaseelan, 2016). Given their illness, it is often difficult for these patients to get mental health support. For one-month, oncology patients maintained a gratitude journal. At the end of the month, patients engaged in an in-depth interview. One oncology patient undergoing chemotherapy explained, “Cancer, yes, it robs you of all the health and happiness that you enjoyed before, but only if you let it...but I think that happiness can be brought back with gratitude” (Moosath & Jayaseelan, 2016, para. 24). Other patients reported an increase in happiness, hope, and forgiveness. They also believed it created a much-needed distraction from their physical pain and allowed them the opportunity to reflect upon their life.

Researchers Moosath and Jayaseelan (2016) found gratitude in an oncology setting, or any setting may “be a powerful step that one can take towards a fulfilling life” (para. 42). Overall, this study found there is a relationship between gratitude and subjective well-being. Moreover, gratitude may aid an individual in the development of self-awareness contributing to subjective well-being (Ackerman, 2017; Chen et al., 2012, Emmons, 2007; Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Emmons & Stern, 2103; Kong et al., 2015; Lin, 2015a; Moosath & Jayaseelan, 2016; Seligman & Steen, 2005; Watkins et al., 2003).

Self-management and Responsible Decision-making Benefits of Gratitude

Gratitude may be a way of helping one manage their self and lead to responsible decision-making (Emmons & Stern, 2013; Yadav, 2015). It can help an individual to be able to have positive health benefits (Emmons & Stern, 2013). It can lower blood pressure and improve immune function (Emmons & Stern, 2013). In one study, Yadav (2015) looked at the connection

between dispositional gratitude, self-efficacy, exercise, and eating habits. The key question he examined was: “Can dispositional gratitude be a predictor of exercise self-efficacy and efficacy for eating?” They hypothesized self-dispositional gratitude is related to self-efficacy for exercise and self-efficacy for eating habits. Self-efficacy is one’s belief in one’s ability to succeed in specific situations. The results found self-appreciation is a useful predictor of eating and mild predictor of exercising. Gratitude exercises have been reported to increase one’s subjective well-being resulting in a positive state. This study suggests an elevated positive state allows individuals to stick to their exercise and eating habits, regardless of circumstances. Increased exercise and eating habits, may lead to a continual increase and self-efficacy resulting in an upward spiral (Yadav, 2015).

While Yadav suggests positive emotions derived from gratitude increase self-efficacy, there may be more to it. Researcher David DeSteno (2014) analyzed the effect of gratitude’s ability to promote patience or will power. Individuals were asked to think of either neutral, happy, or grateful moments. Those who thought of happy or neutral moments demonstrated a preference for immediate payments, compared to those who thought of a grateful moment. Participants who thought of a grateful memory were asked to forgo \$63 instant payment, immediate payment, opting for a higher amount of \$85 in three months. The neutral and happy groups only required \$55 on average, forgoing future gain. More exciting, participants’ patience correlated directly to the amount of gratitude. “Even more telling was the fact that any given participant’s degree of patience was directly related to the amount of gratitude he or she reported feeling” (De Sento, 2014, para. 5). Positive emotions were not enough to enhance patience. Happy participants were just as impatient as those with neutral conditions. The influence of gratitude was quite specific. “Having an alternative source of patience one that can come from

something as simple as reflecting on an emotional memory offers an important new tool for long-term success. And that itself is something to be grateful for” (DeSteno, 2014, p.1). Moreover, gratitude may be a self-management tool to help individuals develop patience and make responsible decisions.

Social-awareness Benefits of Gratitude

Gratitude has been reported to have social awareness benefits (Ackerman, 2017; Allen, 2018; Emmons, 2007; Jarrett, 2016; Kong et al., 2015; Lin, 2015a; McCullough et al., 2002; Simmel, 1996). Simmel (1996) argues that gratitude is the most essential cohesive element for society. It is the “moral memory of mankind,” in that when we are grateful to somebody or for something, we tend to hold this in our being like a memory that needs to be acted upon whenever the opportunity arises (p.45). Gratitude is the bridge connecting one human being with another: “If every grateful action, which lingers on from good turns received in the past, were suddenly eliminated, society (at least as we know it) would break apart” (Simmel, 1996, p. 45). One of the reasons gratitude contributes to one’s social awareness is it rewires the brain and helps an individual to understand other points of view (Jarrett, 2016). After engaging in gratitude activities, researchers have studied the impact it has on the brain. Researcher Jarrett (2016) discovered, “these neural-activity patterns appeared somewhat distinct from those that usually appear when brain-scan subject’s complete tasks associated with emotions like empathy or thinking about other people’s points of view, which is consistent with the idea that gratitude is a unique emotion (p. 1). Also, gratitude impacts how individuals treat one another (Ackerman, 2017; Allen, 2018; Emmons, 2007; Jarrett, 2016). “The researchers described these ‘profound’ and ‘long-lasting’ neural effects as ‘particularly noteworthy,’ and they highlighted that one of the main regions that showed this increased sensitivity — the ‘pregenual anterior cingulate,’”

(Jarrett, 2106, p. 1). This region is “known to be involved in predicting the effects of one’s own actions on other people — overlaps with a key brain region identified in the only previous study on the neurological footprint of gratitude” (Jarrett, 2106, p. 1).

With as little as one gratitude exercise, the brain has been shown to change. With this in mind, findings reveal if an individual makes more of an effort to be grateful, the feeling may come spontaneously later. Moreover, it helps to understand another outcome, “that gratitude can spiral: The more thankful we feel, the more likely we are to act pro-socially toward others, causing them to feel grateful and setting up a beautiful, virtuous cascade” (Jarrett, 2016, p. 1). In summary, gratitude has social awareness benefits (Ackerman, 2017; Allen, 2018; Jarrett, 2016; Kong et al., 2015; Lin, 2015a; McCullough et al., 2002; Simmel, 1996, Watkins et al., 2003).

Relationship-skills Benefits of Gratitude

Gratitude can enhance relationships (Ackerman, 2017; Allen, 2018; Emmons, 2007; Emmons, 2010; Emmons & Stern, 2013; Frederickson, 2013). Dr. Emmons has been studying gratitude for over two decades (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Emmons, 2010; Emmons & Stern, 2013; Emmons & Tsang, 2013). He and his colleagues have conducted a series of studies where people have cultivated gratitude through keeping a journal (Emmons & McCullogh, 2003). Even though participants generally maintain a journal for as little as three weeks, the results are significant (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). Those who practice gratitude consistently report physical, physiological, and social benefits (Emmons, 2010). He reports the most significant being the social (Emmons, 2010). He explains gratitude is a “relationship-strengthening emotion because it requires us to see how we’ve been supported and affirmed by other people” (Emmons, 2010, para. 3). Also, the relationship benefits of gratitude are “more helpful, generous, and compassionate, or forgiving, more outgoing and feel less lonely and

isolated” (Emmons, 2010, para. 2). Moreover, gratitude can enhance relationships (Emmons, 2010; Emmons & Stern, 2013).

More Benefits of Gratitude

There are many benefits to gratitude (Ackerman, 2017; Allen, 2018; Frederickson, 2013; Watkins et al., 2003). According to Dr. Emmons, the leading gratitude expert, reports gratitude has noteworthy transformational components (Emmons, 2007). First, “it allows us to celebrate the present” (Ackerman, 2017, para. 7). Emotions can quickly adapt; gratitude causes individuals to renew their appreciation for what they already have (Ackerman, 2017; Allen, 2018; Gilovich, 2017). It helps one participate in life, magnifying its pleasure, rather than adapting to its goodness (Ackerman, 2017). Next, gratitude helps to block or even reverse negative emotions (Ackerman, 2017; Allen, 2018; Frederickson, 2013; Lin, 2015b). Emotions like “envy, resentment, and regret that can destroy our happiness” (Ackerman, 2017, para. 10). It is challenging to maintain gratitude and be envious at the same time; they do not coincide (Ackerman, 2017; Allen, 2018). Besides, “grateful people are more stress-resistant” (Ackerman, 2017, para. 12). When people are grateful, they can recover quicker (Ackerman, 2017; Allen, 2018; Frederickson, 2013). It also helps to guard against post-traumatic stress and anxiety (Frederickson, 2013). Grateful people have a higher sense of self-worth (Ackerman, 2017; Allen, 2018). When an individual becomes aware of the contribution’s others have sewn into their life, it raises their sense of value and can transform the way they see themselves (Ackerman, 2017; Allen, 2018, Emmons, 2007, Howell, 2012; Watkins et al., 2003).

Next, other studies have discovered gratitude’s benefits to increasing the following: spirituality, happiness, wellbeing, likability, giving, social support, friendship, self-esteem, positive emotions, family relationships, managing, decision making, sleep, mental

health, exercise, marketing, and meaning at work (Ackerman, 2017; Allen, 2018, Emmons, 2007; Emmons & Stern, 2013; Lim, 2017 Raggio & Folse, 2009; Watkins et al., 2003; Wood et al., 200). Next, gratitude has been proven to lessen or decrease symptoms of materialism, suicidal behavior, impatience, stress, depression, and blood pressure (Ackerman, 2017; Allen 2018; Emmons & Stern, 2013; Lin, 2015b; Watkins et al., 2003). Also, gratitude has been reported to help an individual recover from substance abuse and enhance recovery from coronary health events (Ackerman, 2017; Allen, 2018). Overall, gratitude can improve one's emotional, social, personality, career, and overall health (Ackerman, 2017; Allen, 2018; Fredrickson, 2013). According to researchers, it may be an "important component to the good life" (Watkins et al., 2003).

Other studies have looked at the benefits in adolescents and children and have discovered "that more grateful adolescents are more interested and satisfied with their school lives, are more kind and helpful, and are more socially integrated" (Allen, 2018, p. 4). One study conducted with middle school students found a link between gratitude and school satisfaction (Froh et al., 2008). In addition, a few studies have reported: "that gratitude journaling in the classroom can improve students' mood and that a curriculum designed to help students appreciate the benefits they have gained from others can successfully teach children to think more gratefully and to exhibit more grateful behavior" (Allen, 2018, p. 5). Furthermore, there are many benefits to gratitude (Ackerman, 2017; Allen, 2018; Frederickson, 2013; Watkins et al., 2003).

Longevity Benefits of Gratitude

Gratitude may lead to longevity. One study evaluated the diaries of nuns (Danner, Snowdon, & Friesen, 2001). Each diary was coded to look for positive and negative emotions. First, words relating to the experience of positive emotions were amusement, contentment,

gratitude, happiness, hope, interest, love, and relief. Also, negative words were explored relating to anger, contempt, disgust, disinterest, fear, sadness, and shame. The first example from Sister 2, demonstrates a high positive emotion she writes,

God started my life off well by bestowing upon me a grace of inestimable value. The past year...has been a very happy one. Now I look forward with eager joy to receiving the Holy Habit of Our Lady and to a life of union with Love Divine (Danner et al., 2001, p. 806).

Another sister, whose tone is considered less positive, wrote:

I was born on September 26, 1909, the eldest of seven children, five girls, and two boys. My candidate year was spent in the Motherhouse, teaching Chemistry and Second Year Latin at Notre Dame Institute. With God's grace, I intend to do my best for our Order, for the spread of religion and for my personal sanctification (Danner, et al., 2001, p. 806).

Moreover, results reported a strong correlation with longevity and positive emotions.

Interestingly, nuns, who were more positive and grateful lived close to a decade longer.

Furthermore, one's gratitude and positivity may lead to longevity (Danner et al., 2001).

Sleep Benefits of Gratitude

Gratitude has benefits related to sleep. In one study, researchers set out to determine how one's gratitude affected sleep (Wood, Joseph, & Linley, 2008). The results indicated gratitude is "uniquely related to total sleep quality, subjective sleep quality, sleep latency, sleep duration, and daytime dysfunction" (Wood, et al, 2008, p. 46). The study also explained how pre-sleep cognitions affect sleep. For example, a grateful person is "less likely to think negative and worrying thoughts, and more likely to think positive thoughts" (Wood et al., 2008, p. 46). Also, the study found that pre-sleep thoughts relating to worry or negative thoughts impaired and

reduced the quality of sleep. Also, “it appears that positive pre-sleep cognitions have a positive effect on sleep and that gratitude facilitates these thoughts, leading to superior sleep quality” (Wood et al., 2008, p. 46). Moreover, one’s gratitude can lead to many benefits related to sleep.

Job Satisfaction Benefits of Gratitude

Gratitude can be institutionalized and can add to job satisfaction (Waters, 2012). Institutionalized gratitude is when gratitude is enacted in and through an organization (Waters). It can be members giving thanks to each other, recognition, or even awards (Waters). One study set out to determine if an employee’s perceptions of dispositional, state, and institutionalized gratitude impacted job satisfaction (Waters). In this study, employees underwent some training through a series of professional development workshops on positive psychology run by the researcher (Waters). They also engaged in expressing gratitude to their coworkers (Waters). The results of this study found that institutionalized gratitude is useful because the individual “may not feel gratitude themselves but will still experience improvements in job satisfaction through the positive influence of a grateful culture” (Waters, para. 5). Also, “beyond the influence of dispositional and state gratitude upon job satisfaction, the degree to which a workplace culture expresses and reinforces gratitude is also likely to influence job satisfaction” (Waters, para. 5). In conclusion, institutionalized gratitude can add to overall job satisfaction (Waters).

Student Engagement Benefits of Gratitude

Grateful students are more satisfied with their school life and seem to have a higher capacity to be engaged in the learning process (Allen, 2018). Utilizing gratitude in schools may be an aid in addressing the perplexing issue of student engagement (Allen). Student engagement is often referred to as a student’s ability to focus in class and is considered a vital component in

“effective classroom instruction” (Bernhardt & Hopper, 2016, p. 78). When utilized in higher education, one university student commented that being grateful during class helped them to be more alert in the presentation and to learn more. They explain,

Often, I feel lethargic during lectures, and although I am hearing what is being said, I am not properly listening and taking in the content. I find that now, however, when I am grateful, that cloudiness in my head is gone and I can listen a whole lot better, without having to try so hard (Howell, 2012, p. 19).

Another college student stated gratitude helped them to focus more, “When I was zoning out because I was bored or ungrateful, then gratitude would help my focus” (Wilson, 2016, para. 25). After practicing gratitude, many students from Westmont College have expressed similar themes relating to being more focused in class, and on their tests (Wilson, 2016). One student wrote, “Practicing gratitude right before an exam eased my anxiety and I could think and focus better on the exam” (Wilson, 2016, para. 24). Additionally, Robin McCarthy and Doc Childre found the emotion of appreciation not only improves health but also enhances one’s cognitive ability. They discovered a “significant increase in positive emotional well-being, classroom behaviors, and academic performance” (Howell, 2012, p. 19). Lastly, Kerry Howell, a college professor explains,

The importance of this profound practice is overlooked in most teaching and learning pedagogy, with due consequence not only for the increased impetus that gratitude could bring to the university community, but also the added dimension it could give to the academic learning process itself (Howell, 2004, p. 1).

Utilizing Gratitude in her instruction, students have reported:

- Enhancement of the academic thinking process, and a deeper understanding of concepts;
- Able to be more engaged, less distracted;
- Greater motivation;
- Improved learning strategies;
- Increased confidence and improved quality of life;
- Increased sense of interconnectedness (Howell, 2004, p. 6).

Furthermore, college professors, who have incorporated gratitude into their classroom setting have observed a wide variety of benefits (Howell, 2004; Kim, 2006; Wilson, 2016). First, it increases student engagement and motivation (Howell, 2004; Kim, 2006; Wilson, 2016). Next, it has been reported to “enhance the academic thinking process” (Howell, 2004, p. 9). In addition, students claim a greater ability to focus and remain alert in class and on exams (Wilson, 2016). Moreover, gratitude increases one’s confidence, and a sense of interconnectedness, leading to an improved quality of life (Howell, 2004). In summary, practicing gratitude in the classroom can bring a wide variety of benefits (Howell, 2012; Kim, 2006; Wilson, 2016).

School Support Benefits of Gratitude

One study sought to test the effectiveness of implementing a gratitude journal and the relation to school support or a child’s sense of school belonging (Diebel, Woodcock, Cooper, & Brignell, 2016). A sense of belonging at school involves, “a commitment to school and I believe the school is important. It also includes a positive perception of the teacher-pupil relationship, relationship with peers, and opportunities to be involved in school life” (Diebel et al., para. 9). The rate of student dropout is inversely related to a sense of school belonging, student

engagement, positive relationships, intrinsic motivation, and academic achievement. If students feel positive about school, they are more likely to go daily and furthermore graduate. Gratitude plays a vital role in contributing to the student's well-being (McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons, & Larson, 2001). By adopting a simple intervention, like writing a gratitude journal it is cost-effective, easy to implement, and beneficial (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). Advocates of positive psychology state, "simple intentional activities can be more effective in promoting well-being compared to striving to change their circumstances" (Diebel et al., 2016, para. 1). Most studies relating to gratitude involve adults (Emmons, 2003). This study is one of three dealing with students. Studies in the past have reported gratitude's potential "to enhance positive emotions, life satisfaction, and reduce levels of negative affect" (Diebel et al., 2016, para. 3). Gratitude has also been associated with more significant emotional support, prosocial behavior, and quality of relationships (Emmons, 2012). Past studies have compared a gratitude journal to hassles; the researchers reported that this is not effective because it gives exaggerated results (Emmons, 2003). In this study, the control group wrote about neutral life events. The average age of the students was nine years four months. The study found that gratitude diary intervention has a beneficial effect on both "gratitude towards school and SoSB (sense of school belonging)" (Diebel et al., 2016, para. 28). This study supports that gratitude can promote "positive emotions, social well-being and potentially academic ones" (Diebel et al., 2016, para. 32). Finally, this study recommends adopting a School-wide gratitude intervention system to promote "prosocial behavior, SoSb, positive relationships, and well-being," which researchers believe would lead to a thriving school environment (Diebel et al., 2016, para. 33). Furthermore, implementing a gratitude journal positively benefits a student's gratitude regarding school support and SoSB (Diebel et al., 2016).

Middle School Benefits of Gratitude

Implementing gratitude in middle school resulted in benefits (Froh et al., 2008; Froh, Yurkewicz, & Kashdan, 2009; Froh, Bono, & Emmons, 2010; Froh, Emmons, Card, Bono, & Wilson, 2011). First, grateful students had greater satisfaction with school (Froh et al., 2008). One study took the results of students in Grades 6 and 7. Out of the 221 subjects, they were further divided into three separate groups. The gratitude group participated in the intervention called “Counting Your Blessings”. All students were enrolled in a mandatory curriculum and were asked to participate. In both the post-test and the 3-week follow up, the gratitude group reported having “greater satisfaction with their school experience” (Froh et al., 2008, p. 229). Since school satisfaction has been linked to both social and academic success (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002), incorporating counting one’s blessings for as little as two weeks may be able to “counter a negative cognitive appraisal of academic experience and possibly mitigate other potential negative outcomes (e.g., poor grades, absenteeism)” (Froh et al., 2008, p. 229). Another study demonstrated that gratitude aids in their overall physical health (Froh et al., 2009). It also aids in helping students feel like they belong (Froh et al., 2010). Also, it helps to reduce materialism (Froh et al., 2011). Moreover, implementing gratitude in middle school may lead to many benefits (Froh et al., 2008; Froh et al., 2009; Froh et al., 2010; Froh et al., 2011).

Higher Education Benefits of Gratitude

When practiced in higher education, gratitude has been reported to increase student engagement, focus, and resilience in learning (Choi-Kim, 2016; Howell, 2012; Wilson, 2016). Professor Grace Choi-Kim (2016) wanted to investigate how gratitude influenced students in a semester college course, so she invited 17 of her Mongolian college students to practice gratitude. They were required to study and implement gratitude practices throughout one

semester. During the first three classes, they were lectured on the benefits of gratitude, exposed to gratitude literature, and instructed to write at least one entry in their gratitude journal every day. They were also asked to write a thank-you letter to someone whom they had not expressed specific thanks to. The letter needed to be approximately 350 words. Every other week students were invited to share the insights they gained through these practices. On the last day of the course, students shared a reflective paper they wrote. On their final paper, they were asked to examine any changes in their inward attitude and transformational experience because of practicing gratitude. Students reported the “quality of their lives became substantially, psychologically, physically, spiritually and cognitively better, along with relationships that were strengthened” (Choi-Kim, 2016, para. 28). At first, some students had difficulty keeping a journal. One student explained, “If I look at my life and the situation I am in, I have nothing to be thankful. It makes me feel more miserable and hopeless” (Choi-Kim, 2016, para. 20). They went on to view their journal as a sort of garbage can one that they began to pour all of their frustration and anger. However, after they let all of their “filthy emotions,” they felt more “connected” and “in the present.” After three months of consistently writing in their journal, this individual describes feeling more confident and better equipped to face reality instead of avoiding it. Also, they even reported sleeping better, explaining they were more refreshed.

Furthermore, this student declared keeping a gratitude journal was like a “miracle medicine” and concluded they were thankful for not only their professor but the assignment as well (Choi-Kim, 2016, para. 20). Another student with a terminal illness explains described they had unbearable pain. Their pain was not a physical one, but rarer entailed emotional scars. These scars they believed were what caused them to be critical and complain. They felt no confidence in themselves. Their home life was difficult, and as a result of their horrible

relationship with their parents, they had to be raised by their grandmother. Unfortunately, after their grandmother passed away, they were forced to move back home. They explain their professor and her encouragement to be grateful had a healing effect on her entire life. Today this student has completely recovered from her terminal illness and is an assistant pastor at a local church (Choi-Kim, 2016).

Another professor at Westmont College Jane Wilson (2016) wondered if practicing gratitude would help student's ability to focus and remain resilient when learning felt challenging. She discovered that students who were reminded to practice gratitude over the course of time, sent through text messages, experienced the benefits of focus, resilience, and learning, compared to those who did not receive the reminders. Dr. Wilson (2016) found the following emerging themes:

- Positive and calm attitude
- Lessened stress
- Focus in learning
- Effort amidst challenges
- Appreciation for reminders (para. 22-28)

One student reported a shift in her attitude. She comments, “I noticed life gets a bit brighter, my entire attitude changes...I found that practicing gratitude gave me a more positive outlook on learning” (Wilson, 2016, para. 23). This study is “an encouragement to educators” to provide class time to help students cultivate gratitude (Wilson, 2016, para. 32). Furthermore, when practiced in higher education, gratitude has been reported to increase student engagement, focus, and resilience in learning (Choi-Kim, 2016; Howell, 2012; Wilson, 2016).

Teacher-student Relationship Benefits of Gratitude

The social and emotional health of the teacher impacts the student and teacher relationship. Since emotions are contagious, a teacher's mood and level of gratitude matter, potentially influencing and changing their students. Over the past 10 decades, science has discovered a phenomenon called mirror neurons. In emotions, these neurons explain why when three strangers are in the same room, the one who is the most expressive, will cause their mood to jump in under two minutes (Iacoboni, 2008). In a classroom, the most emotionally expressive individual is typically the teacher. With this in mind, consider the effect they may have on their students if they are negative (Goldman, 2006). Since emotions are contagious, a teacher's mood matters, potentially influencing and affecting their own students, in either a positive or a negative manner (Goldman, 2006; Fredrickson, 2013). Furthermore, a grateful teacher may be able to influence their students scientifically speaking (mirror neurons) and through direct instruction.

When a teacher intentionally teaches about gratitude, it can help strengthen the teacher-student relationship (Howell, 2004, Wilson & Harris, 2015). Jane Wilson, a college professor, has spent her 40-year career helping students of all ages engage in the joy of learning (Wilson & Harris; 2015). One of the ways she promotes a positive relationship with her students is through teaching them about gratitude (Wilson & Harris; 2015). In one study, Wilson and her colleague Harris (2015) conducted research on gratitude and teachers. The teachers who participated in gratitude practices were able to bring their increasing levels of positivity and calmness to the classroom environment (Wilson & Harris, 2015). The four activities utilized were gratitude at the threshold, breathe and focus, gratitude notes, and gratitude journals (Wilson & Harris, 2015). Gratitude also helped to create a stronger bond between the student and teacher relationship, reporting an increase in responding to requests (Wilson & Harris, 2015). Dr. Wilson explains,

“Practicing gratitude can strengthen our ability to handle difficult situations; grateful heart helps us remain positive, calm, alert, focus, and appreciative of the opportunity to learn” (Wilson, 2015, para. 10). Moreover, gratitude has been reported to aid in the relationship between students and teachers (Howell, 2004, Wilson & Harris, 2015).

Leadership and School Culture Benefits of Gratitude

One-way leadership can promote social-emotional health is to encourage gratitude (McDonough, 2017). One researcher and Principal Joseph McDonough (2017) used the intervention “Three Good Things” in his dissertation on *Understanding Experiences of Gratitude in Elementary Teachers: Implications for School Leaders*. Teachers were asked to do this intervention for one week. After completing the intervention, he interviewed the teachers. The themes to emerge were:

- In the form of gratitude as a contrasting experience to negativity,
- The role of perception and choice regarding teachers’ perspectives on their schools
- The significance of feeling valued (McDonough, 2017, p. 52)

At first, many of the teachers explained practicing gratitude was difficult, but became more natural with practice. All teachers reported gratitude helped them in some way. Many of them described practicing gratitude made them more aware of the little things in their life; they had once overlooked. Because of this intervention, many gained a new sense of self-worth.

Moreover:

The data suggested that gratitude could play a positive role in building and sustaining a positive school climate through a dedicated focus on positive perspectives, recognizing teachers' roles in student success, and promoting a sense of value in the daily work of teachers (McDonough, 2017, p. 44).

Furthermore, McDonough recommended for all principals and leaders to promote gratitude explaining it would ultimately lead to a positive school climate.

Summary

In summary, gratitude is an attitude, gesture, emotion, habit, virtue, personality trait, mood, intervention, a form of critical thinking, and even a way of life (Emmons, 2012; Frederickson, 2013). The research suggests practicing gratitude may result in an array of positive benefits (Frederickson, 2013; Watkins et al., 2003). First, gratitude may aid an individual in the development of self-awareness aiding an individual's ability to raise one's level of Subjective Well-being or level of happiness (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Moosath & Jayaseelan, 2016; Seligman & Steen, 2005; Watkins et al., 2003). Next, gratitude may be a way of helping one manage their self and lead to responsible decision-making (Emmons & Stern, 2013; Yadav, 2015). Also, gratitude has been reported to have social awareness benefits (Jarrett, 2016; McCullough et al., 2002; Simmel, 1996). In addition, gratitude can enhance relationships (Emmons, 2010; Emmons & Stern, 2013; Frederickson, 2013). There are various gratitude interventions; State of Preparedness, gratitude letters, and gratitude journals to name a few (Emmons, 2004; Howell, 2004; Jarrett, 2016; Watkins et al., 2003). If gratitude interventions are utilized in the classroom and among school leaders, they can strengthen social bonds, enhance critical thinking, promote student engagement, and assist in developing a healthy school culture

(Choi-Kim, 2016; Howell, 2012; McDonough, 2017; Wilson, 2016). In conclusion, the literature on gratitude supports its ability to raise one's social and emotional health making, it a possible vehicle to strengthen Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) competencies.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The fundamental objective of this study tests the research questions related to middle school students' experience in maintaining a gratitude journal. The methodology used to test the defined research questions is presented in this chapter, which is organized into the following sections: research design, setting, and participants, sampling procedures, instrumentation and measures, reliability, strategies for validating findings, narrative structure, data collection, data analysis, ethical considerations, and summary.

Research Design

To better understand how students' experience gratitude in schools, a mixed-methods approach was used. For the quantitative study, a Google Forms survey was administered which consisted of two parts: The Social-Emotional Health Survey (SEHS) and the GQ-6 survey (Appendix F, G). Before conducting the surveys, the researcher obtained permission (Appendix I, J). All students took the same survey before and after the intervention.

Primary research question:

- What is the relationship between gratitude and social-emotional health for middle school students?

Secondary research questions:

- What are the effects of gratitude journals on social-emotional health for middle school students?
- How does gratitude and social-emotional health vary by grade level?
- What are other outcomes of gratitude journals for middle school students?

A phenomenological structure was used to conduct the study, which enabled me “to uncover the essence of an individual’s experience” (Merriam, 2009, p. 93). Of the two types of phenomenological studies, hermeneutical and transcendental, I chose to use transcendental phenomenology to give “textural description of the experiences of the persons (what participants experienced), a structural description of their experiences (how they experienced it in terms of the conditions, situations, or context), and a combination of the textural and structural descriptions to convey an overall essence of the experience” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.78). Through open-ended questions in the post-survey, student writing, student journals and parent feedback, this transcendental phenomenological analysis sought to explain the meaning middle school students ascribe to their experience when maintaining a gratitude journal.

Also, this was a sequential explanatory design “in which qualitative data collection and analysis is followed by a quantitative phase” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p.402). In this study, the quantitative portion of the study was used “to confirm, determine, or expand on qualitative findings” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 402). The primary purpose was to test the instrument, so there is a greater “emphasis on the quantitative part of the study: Qual – QUANT” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 402).

During the intervention, students’ journals and responses were collected. After the intervention, the same survey was given as a posttest, with the addition of a few open-needed questions, which were compiled and coded and will further be explained in Chapter 4 (Appendix H).

Setting and Participants

From Capistrano Unified School district, participants were middle school teachers ($n = 11$) and students from grade 6 ($n = 243$), 7 ($n = 238$), and 8 ($n = 151$); the students' ages ranged from 10 to 14 years old. Out of the participating teachers, 46% were intervention ($n = 6$), and 54% were nonintervention ($n = 7$). These teachers collectively taught a total of 29 different classes of students. Nearly half of the classes ($n = 17$) engaged in the intervention ($n = 383$). The other half of the classes ($n = 12$) only did the pretest and posttest surveys ($n = 250$). Also, the researcher did the intervention with her classes ($n = 5$), but separated the results, to use possibly as a reference or benchmark. To further aggregate results this researcher separated the results of former students: Mayer ($n = 243$) and non-Mayer ($n = 343$). Collectively, the sample size represents a wide variety of students ($N = 632$). Excluding the Mayer and non-Mayer classes ($N = 159$) the sample size was ($N = 475$).

Sampling Procedures

First, I created a curriculum to assist teachers in teaching gratitude by putting together a year's worth of quotes, stories, and videos. Next, I recruited teachers who wanted to incorporate social-emotional learning into their classroom, however, many of the teachers who had originally agreed to participate found themselves overwhelmed with the beginning of a new school year and backed out. So, I had to recruit all of the teachers ($n = 11$) from my school site.

Before the Intervention

Before the pretest could be administered, permission was obtained from the Concordia International Research Board. Next, the researcher obtained permission from the Capistrano Unified School District, as well as site authorization from the principals of each of the middle schools (Appendix K). Each teacher was given a teacher's guide (Appendix D), word of the

week posters, quote of the week posters, a hard copy of the student journal and a Google Slide presentation (Appendix E).

After teachers understood each component of the intervention, they were invited to observe a lesson. Initially, some teachers still did not feel comfortable doing the first lesson, so I taught their class, and helped them until they felt comfortable to continue on their own.

After teachers were trained, all classes filled out an Informed Student Consent Form (Appendix L, O). To ensure students understood, each of the participating teachers read the consent forms aloud and answered questions that arose. The students were informed that they were not required to participate and would not be penalized. In addition, they could stop participating at any time. After students signed the consent forms, each teacher collected them and stored them in a secure location. Next, Parent Informed Consent Forms were sent home (Appendix M, N, P). Once all forms were collected, they were stored in a secure location. Once permission was granted, trained proctors administered the survey to the students, following a script that insured consistency of practice and implementation (Appendix W). Three separate Google classrooms titled Gratitude intervention, nonintervention, and the Researcher, were utilized to manage all of the data. The survey took approximately 15 minutes. If students chose to participate in the study, they were given a cookie, or treat.

The Intervention

For 14 weeks, students in the intervention classrooms maintained a digital goal and gratitude journal (Appendix A). As explained in the section above, each week, students were exposed to a new word, or passport power word (Appendix Q). Throughout the week, the teachers utilized the Google slides which had the word of the week, quote of the week, journal prompts and videos (Appendix E).

At the beginning of the week, the teacher introduced the word of the week (passport power word), the quote of the week, read a story and prompted students to set a goal pertaining to the word of the week. In the middle of the week, students watched the video and were given five minutes to write in their journals. If students wanted to share something they wrote in their journal, they were given an opportunity. At the end of the week, students reflected upon what they had learned and how they progressed in their goal for the week.

After the Intervention

All students took the same posttest survey, adhering to the same protocols as the pretest. Each student who took the survey was also given a treat (cookie). If a student had an allergy to the treat other non-edible items were available.

If a student was absent for the posttest, or unable to complete the survey during the study, call slips were sent out and additional time was provided until all students completed the posttest. Students who took the survey late still received a cookie. In addition, I also asked parents for voluntary feedback, which was incentivized by offering students a prize of a cookie, muffin, or donut if they returned the feedback form.

Instrumentation and Measures

Social-Emotional Health Survey

The purpose of utilizing the Social-Emotional Survey (SEHS) was to answer the research questions: “What is the relationship between gratitude and social-emotional health? What are the effects of gratitude journals on social-emotional health?” The SEHS measures the 12 psychological building blocks of positive mental health, as related to an adolescent, which are self-awareness, self-efficacy, persistence, family coherence, peer support, school support, gratitude, zest optimism, emotional regulation, self-control, and empathy. The 12 indicators

measured make up the four first-order domains: Belief-in-self, belief-in-others, emotional competence, and engaged living. These four domains represent the second-order meta-construct called covitality, or the “synergetic effective of positive mental health resulting from the interplay among positive psychological building blocks” (Furlong et al., 2013b, p. 1013). From a statistical point of view, it is the “second-order positive mental health construct accounting for the presence of several co-occurring, first-order positive mental health indicators” (Furlong et al., 2013b, p. 1013). Its opposite would be comorbidity.

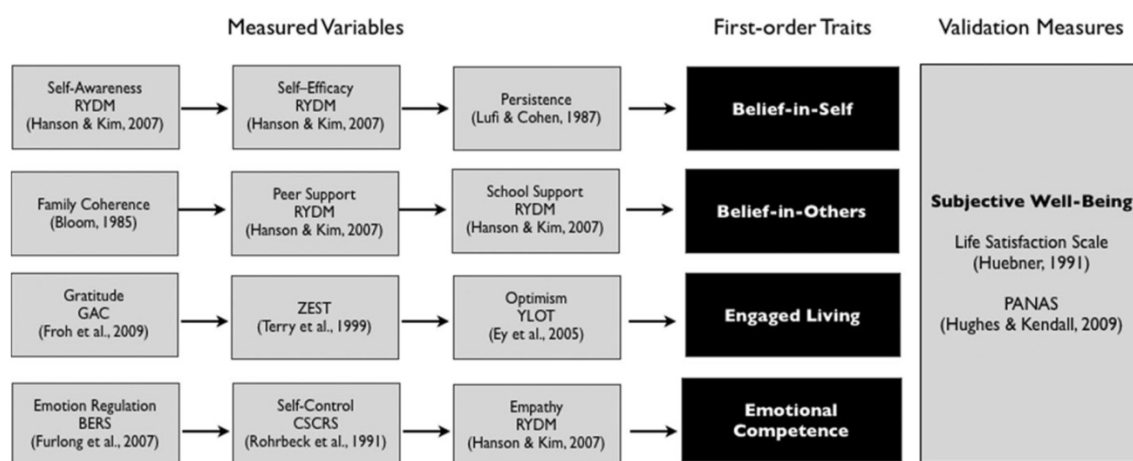


Figure 6. 1. The Social and Emotional Health Survey

The first study to investigate the construct of covitality and the SEHS consisted of a sample of 4,189 students in grades 8,10, and 12 (Furlong et al., 2013b, p. 1011). Findings from “confirmatory factor analyses, invariance analysis, and latent means testing all supported the theoretical model underlying the SEHS, indicating that the second-order covitality model was the best fit for both males and females” (Furlong et al., 2013b, p. 1011). The SEHS has been condensed to use for school purposes and consists of 36 questions. Using a Likert Scale, participants are asked to respond to the statements with: 5 Completely true (very much like me), 4 somewhat true (mostly like me), 3 agree (somewhat like me), 2 somewhat not true (not like me)

at all), 1 completely not true (not like me at all). There are three questions for each of the positive building blocks (Appendix F).

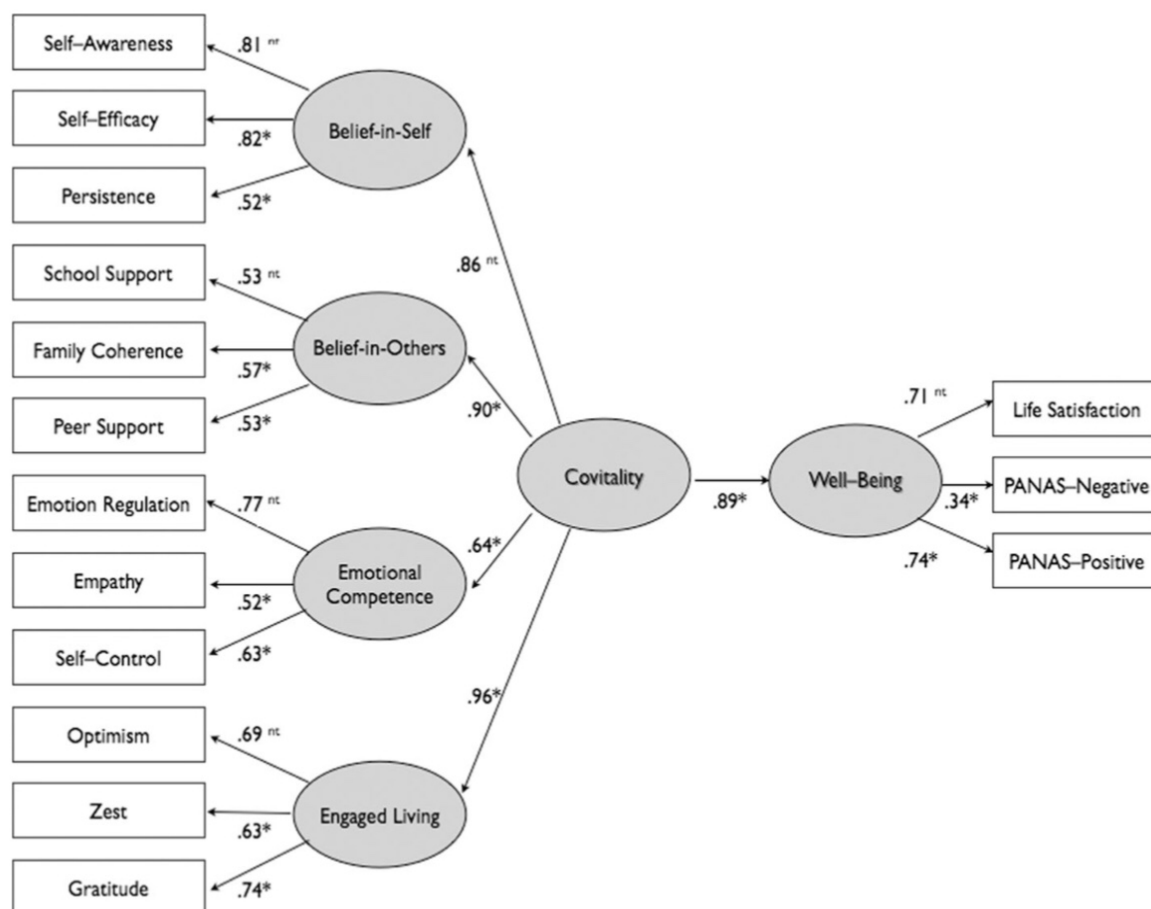


Figure 7.1. Positive Mental Health and Covitality Model Underlying the Social and Emotional Health Survey

The Gratitude Questionnaire

The Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6) sought to answer the research question: “What is the relationship between gratitude and social-emotional health? (Does maintaining a gratitude journal lead to an increase in gratitude?)” The GQ-6 is a self-report six-item questionnaire that designed to evaluate the differences an individual experiences gratitude in their daily life (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; McCullough et al., 2001; McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang,

2002). Since its creation, many stakeholders from various countries have utilized it, adding a wealth of research literature to its credibility, validity, and reliability (Figure 8.1). It is made up of six different questions (Appendix F) that are rated on a seven-point scale as that are phrased both positively (1,2,4,5) and negatively (3 and 6). In an effort to maintain consistency with the ratings, I changed the scale from seven points to five. Using a Likert Scale, participants are asked to respond to the statements with: 5 Completely true (very much like me), 4 somewhat true (mostly like me), 3 agree (somewhat like me), 2 somewhat not true (not like me at all), 1 completely not true (not like me at all).

Study	N	Sample	M	SD
Andersson, Giacalone, & Jurkiewicz (2007)	603	Business school graduate students	38.50	3.67
*Chen, Chen, Kee, & Tsai (2008)	608	Taiwanese college students	28.55	5.25
*Chen & Kee (2008)- Study 1	169	Taiwanese senior high school athletes	28.68	4.50
*Chen & Kee (2008)- Study 2	265	Taiwanese senior high school athletes	27.54	4.56
Giacalone, Paul, & Jurkiewicz (2005)	133	Adult volunteers	37.99	4.41
Kashdan & Breen (2007)	144	US college students	36.68	5.13
Kashdan, Mishra, Breen, & Froh, (2009)- Study 2a	214	US college students(<i>Female</i>)	36.22	4.58
		US college students(<i>Male</i>)	34.13	7.11
Kashdan, et al. (2009)- Study 2b	76	Older adults (<i>Female</i>)	36.98	4.75
		Older adults (<i>Male</i>)	35.76	4.05
Kashdan, et al. (2009)- Study 3	190	US college students(<i>Female</i>)	36.80	5.39
		US college students(<i>Male</i>)	34.83	5.52
Kashdan, Uswatte, & Julian (2006)	75	PTSD group	22.1	9.4
		Non-PTSD group	33.7	7.0
McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang (2002)- Study 1	238	US college students	35.52	5.28
McCullough, et al. (2002)- Study 2	1,228	Adult volunteers (age 18-75)	36.9	4.92
McCullough, et al. (2002)- Study 3	156	US college students	34.92	5.16
McCullough, Tsang, & Emmons (2004)- Study 1	96	Adult volunteers (age 22-77)	35.58	5.76
McCullough, et al. (2004)- Study 2	112	US college students	37.86	3.90
Neto (2007)	152	Portuguese college students (<i>Female</i>)	32.34	5.46
(used 5-point scale)		Portuguese college students (<i>Male</i>)	30.75	4.96
Strelan (2007)	275	Australian college students	34.35	5.03
Wood, Maltby, Gillett, Linley, & Joseph (2008)-Study 1	156	British college students (Time 1)	28.97	8.26
		(Time 2)	29.57	8.71
Wood, et al. (2008)-Study 2	87	British college students	35.13	4.40

Figure 8. 1. Summary of Means and Standard Deviations for the GP-6 Across Studies

As seen in the above table, researchers Lynne Anderson, Robert Giacalone, and Carol Jurkiewicz reported an overall higher score on the GQ-6 for US white-collar business employees.

Their findings revealed a greater sense of hope and gratitude were strongly correlated to a greater responsibility toward employee and social issues, but not economic, safety, and quality issues. Even though GQ-6 scores vary among persons, it is still considered a valid measure to determine an individual's overall gratitude.

Reliability

To ensure reliability, the researcher trained each of the classroom teachers. Each classroom maintained the same curricular standards and goals, but the intervention classrooms implemented the same curriculum and intervention strategies. Each class took five minutes a week to watch a gratitude video and another five minutes to write in their journals.

Strategies for Validating Findings

Prior to the study, I spend time observing the phenomenon of middle school students maintaining a gratitude journal. Creswell and Poth (2018) believe this to be an effective strategy to ensure validity because it gives the researcher “prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field” (p. 260). Next, the researcher collaborated with the participants. Through the course of the study, students, parents, and teachers were encouraged to give feedback. Before students started their journals, they wrote and orally shared their hypothesis of how gratitude would affect children compared to adults. When the investigator involves the participants in the study it is “more likely to be supported and findings used” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 261).

Narrative Structure: Phenomenological Theory

To ensure validity, one of the driving phenomenological questions asked, “What is the phenomenon experience of maintaining a gratitude journal like for middle school students?”

(Creswell & Poth, 2018). Joseph Maxwell (2013) refers to validity as “the correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account” (p.122). Since each person is different, the researchers looked for both positive and negative experiences, knowing they may find a counterhypothesis for their experience (Maxwell, 2013). To ensure accurate conclusions, multiple researchers assisted in evaluating the information (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Maxwell, 2013).

Since the researcher had spent over five years observing and studying this phenomenon, it assisted in “generating a rich, thick description” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 260). Observation provided “a direct and powerful way of learning about people’s behavior and the context in which this occurs” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 102). This “prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field” helped to validate the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 260). It also allowed the researcher to “check and confirm observations and inferences” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 125). Lastly, interviews helped gain further “description of actions and events—often the only way, for events that took place in the past or for situations to which you can’t gain observational access” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 102).

Plan for Data Collection

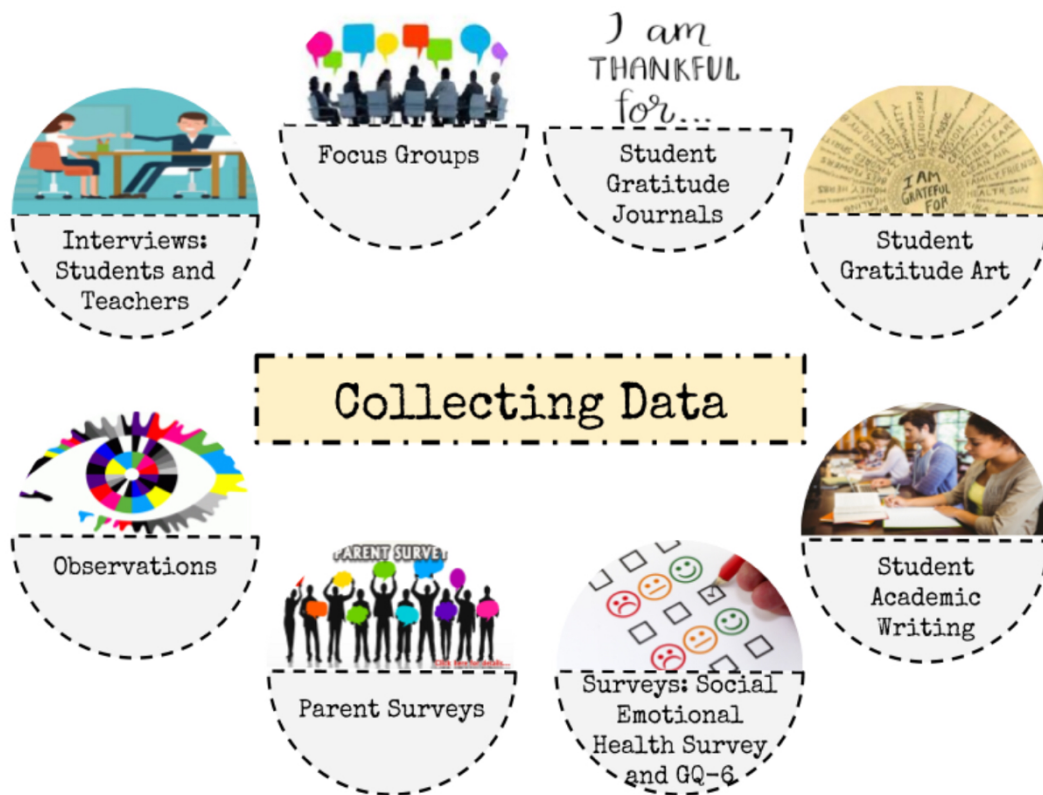


Figure 9. 1. Collecting Data

Classroom Observations

In addition to collecting gratitude journals and surveys, I observed this phenomenon by going into the other teacher's classrooms taking on the role of a participant-observer and even observer to a participant (Appendix T; Creswell & Poth, 2018). So, I could capture this phenomenon, memos were written on 3 x 5 cards or the computer. These memos helped in "serious reflection, analysis, and self-critique" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 20). Next, memos were tagged and used later for additional information (Maxwell, 2013).

Teacher Data Collection

I had each teacher record the interventions on a spreadsheet weekly. This enabled me to monitor the frequency of each of the interventions. Although some teachers chose not to do all of the interventions all of the teachers had students maintain gratitude journals.

Plan for Data Analysis

After the pre-test was administered, two separate spreadsheets were made one for the intervention classes and another for the nonintervention class. Before numbers were calculated, the students who did not wish to participate were removed. Next, I verified that all students answered all of the 40 questions. To ensure that no data was missing, I had my colleagues also reviewed the information (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Maxwell, 2013). To ensure confidentiality, students' names were replaced with ID numbers and were put in order. If a student missed either the pre or post-test, their information was removed. Next, two columns were added to each of the spreadsheets of each question. Not only were each of the questions compared, but a total pre and post-covitality score, and a total GQ-6 was calculated. In addition, the results were further analyzed by using Statplus, with a variety of statistics including *t*-Tests, ANOVA's correlations, and descriptive analysis.

Data Analysis for Coding

The methodology for data analysis was concerned with examining the essence of the phenomenon of how students experience gratitude. Creswell (2013) stated, "data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing and organizing the data for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes, and finally representing the data in figures, tables, or a discussion" (p. 180). Using coding and finding emergent themes, the researcher will blend the data analysis model of grounded and phenomenological theory:

- Collect data: interviews, gratitude journals, open-ended survey questions (parent and student), and student goal sheets
- Initial read through
- Open coding
- Axial coding
- Clustering (look for redundancy, decide on synonymous words)

Example: thankful, grateful, appreciate

- Themes
- Selective/Organizational themes and substantive categories
- Social-emotional Health:
 - self-awareness
 - self-efficacy
 - persistence
 - family coherence
 - peer support
 - school support
 - gratitude
 - zest
 - optimism
 - emotional regulation
 - self-control
 - empathy

- Substantive categories: ideas that do not fit into the above criterion
- Explain the phenomenon (Maxwell, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018)

Since this researcher sought to connect gratitude with one's social-emotional health, the coding was based upon the 12 building blocks of positive psychology: Self-awareness, self-efficacy, persistence, family coherence, peer support, school support, gratitude, zest optimism, emotional regulation, self-control, and empathy. This is referred to as organizational categories or selective coding (Maxwell, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018). These categories include belief-in self, belief-in others, emotional regulation, and engaged living. This type of coding helped to address the student's broad experiences and assisted in ordering the data (Maxwell, 2013). Also, a substantive category was added: Grade Point Average, so that this finding would not be lost or underdeveloped (Maxwell, 2013).

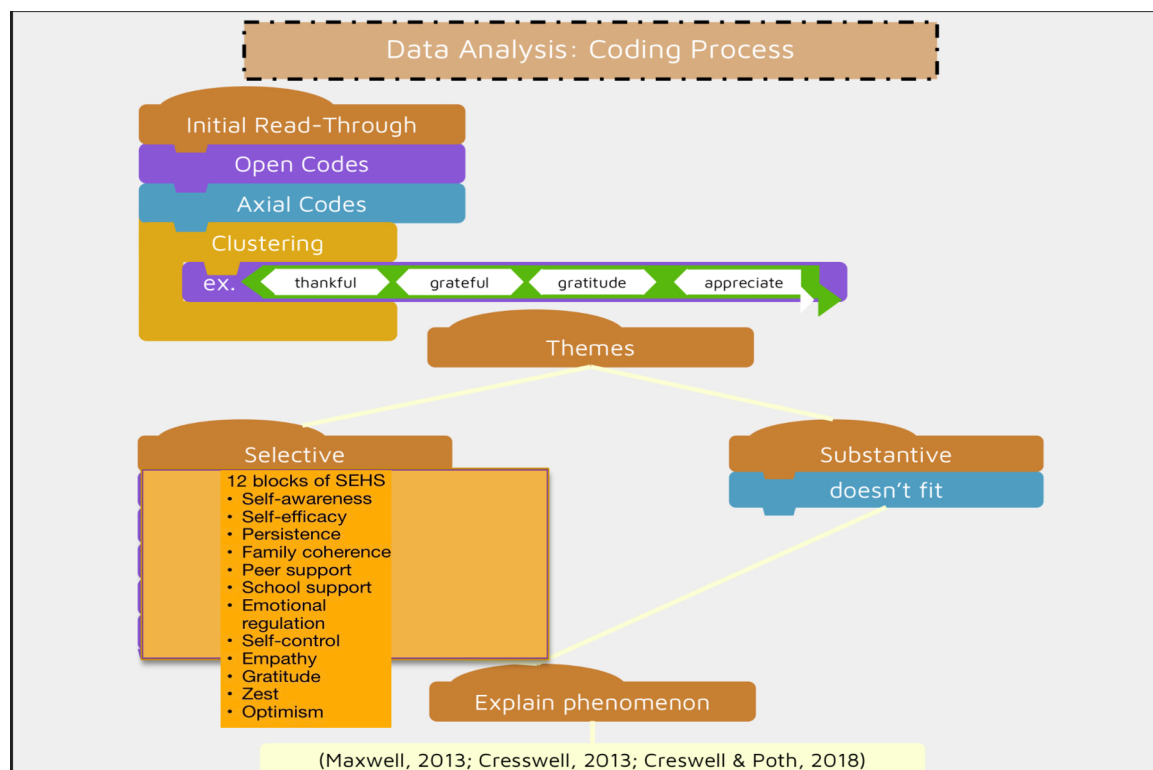


Figure 10. 1. Data Analysis Coding Process

Anticipated Ethical Issues

The three main ethical issues include “respect for persons (i.e., privacy and consent), concern for welfare (i.e., minimize harm and augment reciprocity), and justice (i.e., equitable treatment and enhance inclusivity)” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 149). First participants needed to be protected; this was done by utilizing student’s identification numbers as opposed to their names (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Since this study dealt with minors, students needed to understand and be aware of the purpose of the study and to give their consent. Additionally, parents needed to give consent. The researcher did not pressure teachers or students to participate. If a student did not want to anticipate they were not penalized. The investigator treated all persons equitably and created validity by having “an ethical relationship with research participants through such standards as positioning themselves, having discourses, encouraging voices, and being self-reflective” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 258).

Next, the researcher does not foresee any anticipated harm. To ensure justice and validity, the investigator treated all persons equitably and maintained “an ethical relationship with research participants through such standards as positioning themselves, having discourses, encouraging voices, and being self-reflective” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 258). In conclusion, the researcher anticipated the ethical issues by showing respect for persons, concern for welfare, and justice (Creswell & Poth, 2013).

Summary: Expected Outcomes

On Wednesday, November 7, 2018, the researcher asked her class to make a hypothesis on how kids experience gratitude compared to adults (Appendix R). After reading over 100 responses, the researcher consolidated all of the student’s responses to the following statements:

My hypothesis for kids experiencing gratitude compared to adults are kids will be impacted more because their minds are open, they are more receptive, and they will be able to practice it longer. It will also help them to be happier and live longer.

Utilizing a gratitude intervention, the outcomes of this study are expected to offer significant benefits to subjects. As students learn and practice gratitude, we can expect other beneficial outcomes such as psychological wellbeing, physical health, and academic performance. In conclusion, the researcher hypothesizes that maintaining a gratitude journal will lead to an increase in students' gratitude, and overall social-emotional health (Covitality).

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of gratitude interventions on middle school students' social-emotional health and gratitude. The intent of this study was achieved by comparing the difference in middle school students' pretest and posttest scores on the Social-Emotional Health Survey (SEHS) and the Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6). After a 14-week intervention of maintaining a gratitude journal, results were compared between the intervention and nonintervention group. The data analysis results are presented within this chapter: (a) quantitative results, (b) qualitative results, and (c) limitations and delimitations.

Quantitative Data Analysis and Qualitative Results

Demographics

Capistrano Unified School District (CUSD) has close to 4,000 employees, making it the largest employers in South Orange County (CUSD, 2018). Stretching out over 195 square miles, it is the second-largest school district in Orange County, 8th largest in the state and 78th in the country; CUSD currently has 47,385 students (CUSD, 2018). The participants included in this study are from Bernice Ayer Middle School (BAMS), one of ten middle schools in CUSD. BAMS is made up of 925 students 52.5% females ($n = 486$) and 47.5% males ($n = 439$). Table 1 illustrates how the students represented a generalized sample of the school in demographics, gender, age, and grade (University of Huddersfield, 2012). However, generalizing the results of this study to other students' populations unlike CUSD should be done with caution.

Since I used participants from their school site, it may appear to be convenience sampling, but is a form of purposeful selection (Maxwell, 2013). As explained in Chapter 3,

since I needed participants who had experienced the phenomenon of maintaining a gratitude journal, a purposeful selection was most appropriate (Maxwell, 2013).

Table 1. 1

BAMS Populations and Study Sample

Characteristics		Study		BAMS	
Gender		<i>n</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
	Female	333	53	486	52.5
	Male	299	47	439	47.5
Ethnicity					
	White	416	66	529	57.2
	Hispanic	172	27	316	34.2
	Asian	27	4.2	27	3
	American Indian	5	4	8	1
	Black	6	.09	6	.06
	Other	3	.4	50	5.6
Age					
	10	13	2	13	1.4
	11	224	35.4	224	24
	12	240	38	325	35
	13	138	22	250	27
	14	17	2.6	113	12.6
Grade					
	6	243	38.4	290	31
	7	238	37.6	320	35
	8	151	24	315	34

As seen in Table 1.1, out of the 632 subjects, 53% were female ($n = 333$) and 47% were male ($n = 299$). Out of the 632 subjects, 60% were White ($n = 416$), 27% Hispanic ($n = 172$), 4% were Asian ($n = 26$), 0.9% were African American ($n = 6$), 1.4% were Native American, and 0.3 were mixed or other ($n = 3$). Out of the total 632 subjects, 38.4% were in 6th grade ($n = 243$), 37.4% were in 7th grade ($n = 238$), and 24% were in 8th grade ($n = 151$). As seen in Table 1.1, out of the 632 subjects, 2% were 10 years old ($n = 13$), 35% were 11 years old ($n = 224$), 38% were 12 years old ($n = 240$), 22% were 13 years old ($n = 138$), and 3% were 14 years old ($n = 17$).

Social-Emotional Health Survey Results per Construct

The SEHS measures the 12 positive psychological building blocks. The 12 blocks are self-awareness, self-efficacy, persistence, family coherence, peer support, school support, gratitude, zest, optimism, emotional regulation, self-control, and empathy. These 12 in turn make up four main constructs: Belief-in-self, belief-in-others, emotional competence and engaged living. Using a Likert Scale, participants are asked to respond to the statements with: 5 Completely true (very much like me), 4 somewhat true (mostly like me), 3 agree (somewhat like me), 2 somewhat not true (not like me at all), 1 completely not true (not like me at all).

All participants in the intervention ($n = 383$) and nonintervention ($n = 250$) took the same pretest/posttest, with 14 weeks of intervention for the former group. Next, the posttest and pretest differences in mean (ΔM) were aggregated. Using the difference in mean from the post and pretest results, ANOVAs were run for each of the SEHS constructs ($N = 12$), each SEHS question ($N = 36$), and the GQ-6 for the following: Intervention, ethnicity, gender, and grade level.

The qualitative results follow the quantitative and have been categorized according to the

12 positive psychological building blocks (SEHS). These results add a rich narrative to understanding this phenomenological study, which sought to understand the meaning middle school students ascribed to experience when maintaining a gratitude journal.

To collect data, I had students maintain a digital journal in their Google Classroom. This enabled me to see what students were writing and provided for additional data. Next, at the end of each week, I collected weekly student feedback on the student's goal sheets. About midway through the intervention students were allowed to voluntarily respond to the following questions: "Describe your experience with keeping a gratitude journal, how would you describe gratitude, how does experiencing gratitude affect your perspective on life, why should gratitude be taught in schools and is there anything else you would like to add?"

After the study, each of the intervention students answered the following questions: "Describe your experience with keeping a gratitude journal, how would you describe gratitude, what situations have supported you experiencing gratitude, what situations have hindered experiencing gratitude, and is there anything else you would like to add?"

Belief-in-Self: Self-efficacy

The construct self-efficacy is made up of the following questions: "I can work out my problems, I can do most things if I try, and there are many things that I do well." For "I can work out my own problems," a one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect for intervention, $F(1,631) = 4.39, p = 0.03$ (see Figure 11.1). The difference in the mean score increased for the intervention group ($N = 383, \Delta M = 0.15$) compared to the nonintervention group ($N = 250, \Delta M = 0$).

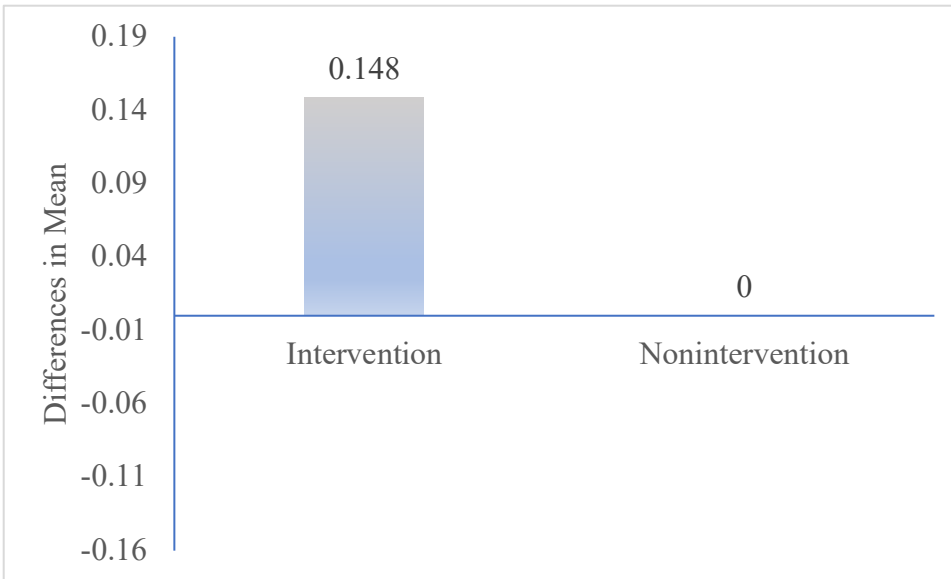


Figure 11. 1. Pre and Posttest Differences in Means for “I Can Work Out My Own Problems” by Intervention Versus Nonintervention

Next, a one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect for grade level, $F(2, 629) = 8.3, p < .01$ (see Figure 12.1). Grade 6 ($N = 243$) had the highest increase ($\Delta M = 0.26$), grade 7 ($N = 238$) changed nominally ($\Delta M = 0.004$), and grade 8 ($N = 151$) decreased (-0.05), suggesting self-efficacy may lessen with age.

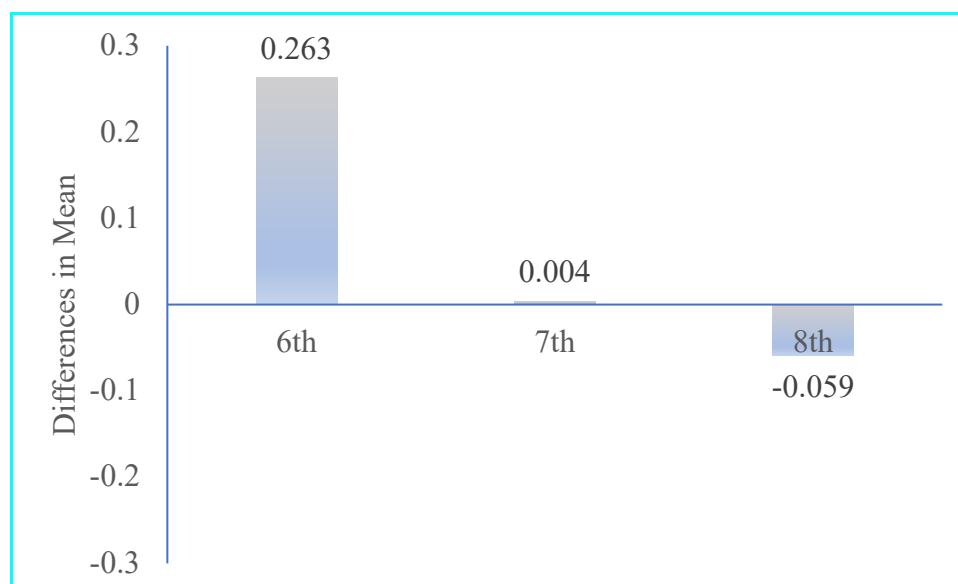


Figure 12. 1. Pre and Posttest Differences in Means for “I Can Work Out My Own Problems” by Grade Level

As students practiced gratitude, many reported having a greater sense of self-efficacy. A frequent phrase emerged from their experience--- they felt they had become “a better person.” One student shared, “I believe it has made me a better person in so many different ways” (student 341). Some students expressed having a greater capacity for life, I can “grasp a deeper perspective on life” (student 341). One student five years later came back to express his gratitude for this practice. He said,

When I was in your class, I was “average”, but after your class, I started to “accelerate. Now as a Junior I am in all accelerated classes. Looking back, I now realize how much this gratitude journal really helped me to grow intellectually, develop a growth mindset, and to believe in myself (T. McColloch, personal communication, August 28, 2019).

Belief-in-Self: Self-awareness

The construct self-awareness is made up if the following questions: “There is a purpose to my life, I understand my moods and feeling, and I understand why I do what I do.” As

students grew in gratitude, they gained a greater self-awareness of what they had and could do. They shared being grateful for their “arms,” “legs,” “ability to exercise,” “pencils,” “pets,” and “water” to name a few. In their journal, one student wrote:

Before I never thought that I could be grateful for a chair. Writing about it made me realize that life without this beloved chair, would be hard.” She went on to add “writing about it makes me realize its uses, and why I need it. I see a perspective of just being thankful, nothing else. For I know that many, many people have much less than me (student 558).

“It has helped me see the world in a differently. I used to not care about the small stuff like being able to walk, having a nice house...I realized how lucky I am to have these so basic and everyday things” (student 240). Practicing gratitude “has made me become more thoughtful. I write every week the small things that I’m grateful for” (student 191). Other students explained,

Since keeping a journal, I’ve become more aware of what’s happening around me, the good and the bad. Writing it down, I realize that some of my “problems” are really small in the big picture, and there’s just so much more I’ve been taking for granted;” gratitude has changed “the way I view the world. Every moment is either a new memory or a learning experience. With gratitude, I’ve realized how precious my life is and how lucky I really am (student 145).

Experiencing gratitude and having a gratitude journal “really made me pay attention to all of the little things in life that the average person might not think much of” (student 248).

My experience with keeping a gratitude journal is that it’s making me more appreciative, for a wide variety of things. It has made me more grateful for what I obtain that others might not, and not what I do strive to possess or what I have none of (student 257).

My journal has “made me realize just how many things I take for granted. I really enjoyed it and I feel everyone should do it to become thankful; Expressing gratitude positively affected my perspective on life. It made me realize how lucky I am... I feel like it has made me a happier person (student 30).

If gratitude were taught in schools, it would “make kids, (like me) more aware of the real world, and it will simply make school a better place” (student 259). Gratitude should be taught in schools,

...because it can help a lot in truly every situation. I feel like people, and especially kids my age, aren’t aware of how much they have, and how great of a life they really live.

The practice and teaching of gratitude would really help (R, Hersh, personal communication, March 06, 2019).

Belief-in-Self: Persistence

The construct persistence is made up of the following questions: “When I do not understand something, I ask the teacher again and again until I understand, I try to answer all the questions asked in class and when I try to solve a math problem, I will not stop until I find a final solution.” For “when I try to solve a math problem, I will not stop until I find a final solution,” a one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect for intervention, $F(1,631) = 6.415, p = .01$ (see Figure 13.1). The difference in the mean score decreased for the intervention group ($N = 383, \Delta M = -0.25$) compared to the nonintervention group ($N = 250, \Delta M = 0.008$).

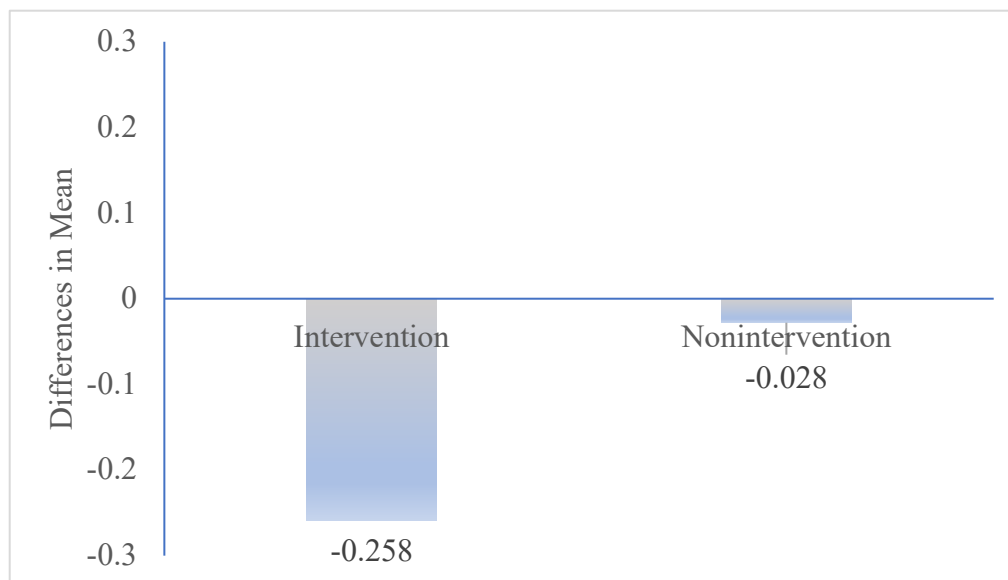


Figure 13. 1. Pre and Posttest Differences in Means for “When I try to Solve a Math Problem, I Will Not Stop Until I Find a Final Solution” by Intervention Versus Nonintervention

After learning about persistence, one student wrote on his goal sheet,

I learned that in life you can never give up and you shouldn’t expect every attempt to be perfect. Also, just like physics, it’s easier to knock something over than to lift it back up, like emotions. Learning a new word each week, helps me to understand it better and makes it easier to be grateful! (K. Snavelly, personal communication, January 17, 2020).

Belief-in-Others: School Support

The construct school support encompasses the following questions: “At school there is a teacher or some adult that wants me to do my best, listens to me, and believes I will be successful.” For “at school there is a teacher or some adult that wants me to do my best,” a one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect for grade, $F(2,629) = 3.298, p = 0.04$ (see Figure 14.1). Grade 6 ($N = 243$) increased ($M = 0.004$), while grade 7 ($N = 238, M = -0.15$) and grade 8 ($N = 151, M = -0.27$) went down revealing school-support may lessen with age.

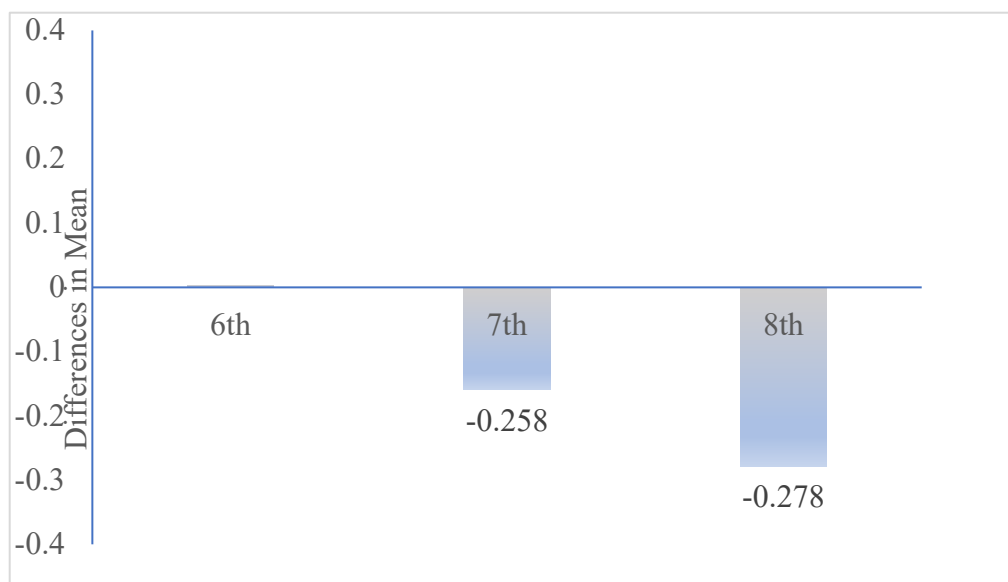


Figure 14. 1. Pre and Posttest Differences in Means for “At School There Is a Teacher or Some Adult That Wants Me to Do My Best” by Grade Level

Also, students in the intervention began to notice and appreciate their teachers. At the end of class, many students began to thank their teachers. A student explains, “I am thankful for my teachers because they help me learn more than I thought I could” (student 30). One student on her weekly goal sheet wrote a note to her teacher, “[t]hank you for teaching me how to be happier and a better person” (student 354).

One intervention teacher explained,

I teach gratitude to my class because I believe if I want students to really do something and know how to do it right then I should Model it for them every day, so I do it first. Practicing gratitude with my students also helps me connect with them. I get to learn more about them this way. I think more teachers should practice gratitude with their students because it keeps everything in perspective, it helps both teachers and students start the day calmer and helps everyone appreciate the classroom environment more. In a nutshell it helps the school and everyone in it! (T. Cummings, personal communication,

April 27, 2020).

Even two years after the intervention, one teacher observed, “I have really noticed a difference in our 8th graders the last few years - in relation to having an attitude of gratitude!” (J. Stephens, personnel communication, May 10, 2019).

Belief-in-Others: Family Coherence

The construct family coherence encompasses the following questions: “My family members really help and support one another, There is a feeling of togetherness in my family, and my family really gets along well with each other.” After students wrote in their journals, they were allowed to orally share what they had written, as it was not uncommon for students to share about their families. One entry (161) included gratitude towards her parents,

I am thankful for parents. I love them so much and I am so grateful for the incredible life they have given me. They have given me everything, and without them I wouldn't even be here today. They give me a home, clothes, food, water, and most of all, they give me life...They allow me to choose my passions, and choose activities that I want to do. They help me when I am struggling with anything, including school, activates, and much more. They teach me how to be a good person, and they are incredible role models for me.

They will help me choose my path when I am older, and they are always proud of me for all of my accomplishments. I am so thankful for them (student 409).

Another student wrote practicing gratitude enabled them to be “happier and more thankful for life and my family” (student 326).

Once students began to notice how gratitude had impacted their own life, they began to share it with their families. One student explained she has “loved every second” of keeping a gratitude journal and recommends it to her family and friends who don't practice it at school.

Another student got their entire family (including their grandparents) to start a gratitude journal. Also, a family before dinner passed around a “thankful candle,” and everyone would say what they were “thankful for before eating” (student 240). This student even encouraged other classmates to practice gratitude with their families saying, “it is an easy thing to do even if you don’t have a candle.”

After practicing gratitude, one student traveled to Vienna, Austria all by herself to stay with her grandma. When the student got there, she,

...told her [grandma] everything I knew about gratitude and how much it had changed my life. She [grandma] started keeping a journal in German, and just after a couple of weeks, I noticed how much happier and carefree she seemed. Seeing her happier in just a matter of weeks really proved to me how important gratitude is, and that it can really make a difference in people’s lives. Because of this, I believe gratitude should be shared with everyone because they all deserve a chance to be happy... (student 145).

Belief-in-Others: Peer Support

The construct peer support encompasses the following questions: “I have a friend my age who really cares about me, I have a friend my age who talks with me about my problems, and I have a friend my age who helps me when I’m having a hard time.” For I have a friend my age who talks with me about my problems, a one-way ANOVA revealed that the effect of the participant’s grade level was a significant effect for grade, $F(2,629) = 5.169, p < .01$ (see Figure 15.1). Grade 6 ($N = 243$) increased ($\Delta M = 0.29$), while grade 7 ($N = 238, \Delta M = -0.029$) and grade 8 ($N = 151, \Delta M = -0.145$) went down suggesting peer-support may lessen with age.

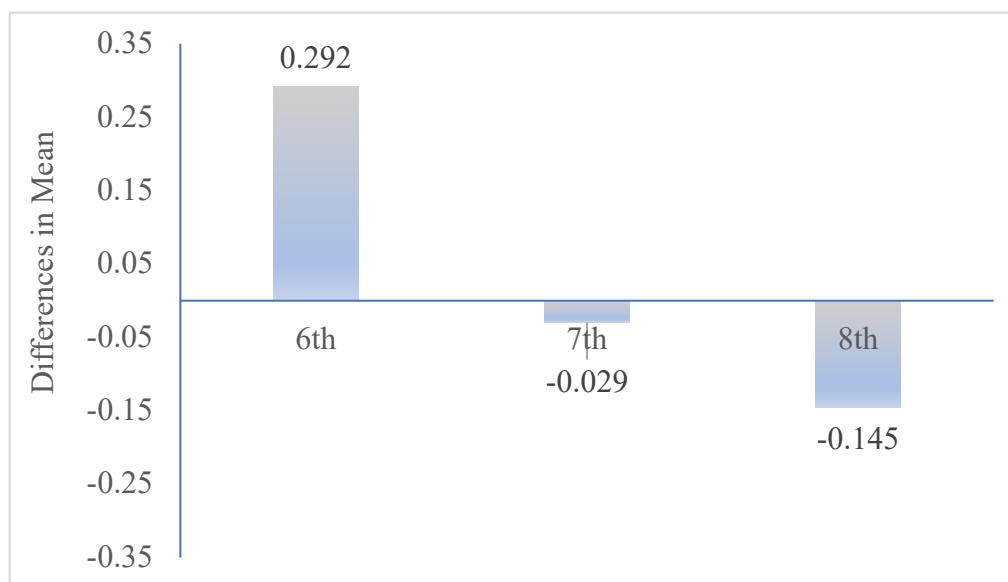


Figure 15. 1. Pre and Posttest Differences in Means for “I Have a Friend My Age Who Talks with Me About My Problems” by Grade Level

When students orally shared what they had written in their journals, many developed a new appreciation for their friends. One student wrote (entry 163):

I am thankful for all of my friends. They mean so much to me and I love them all so much. I am thankful for the times we fight because it shows that we will stick together no matter what. My friends make me smile, laugh, and they make my life so much better than it would be without them. I care so much about each and every one of them and I hope that they know that. They are incredible, smart, kind, funny, and amazing people who me learn and they push me to work as hard as I can. I know, they believe in me, and they believe that I can reach my goals which really motivates me. I believe in them too, and I hope they are able to pursue their dreams and aspirations. I thank them for always being there for me in the hardest of times. It makes me realize people all around the world who have helped me in some way or made my life more enjoyable. I realize how many people have helped me, and I want to show appreciation towards them (student

409).

Gratitude should be taught in school so “kids can learn to be more appreciative, and not beg for something that they want, but possibly give something that they have no need of owning to someone else” (student 257).

Emotional Competence: Emotional Regulation

The construct emotional regulation encompasses the following questions: I accept responsibility for my actions, When I make a mistake, I admit it, and I can deal with being told no. For when I make a mistake, I admit it. A one-way ANOVA (Fisher LSD) revealed a significant effect for grade, in particular between 6th grade and 8th grade, $p = .02$ (see Figure 16.1). Grade 6 ($N = 243$) decreased the most ($\Delta M = -0.272$), next grade 7 ($N = 238$, $\Delta M = -0.205$) and finally grade 8 ($N = 151$, $\Delta M = -0.013$), revealing as grade level increases, so do emotional regulation, or taking ownership for one’s mistakes.

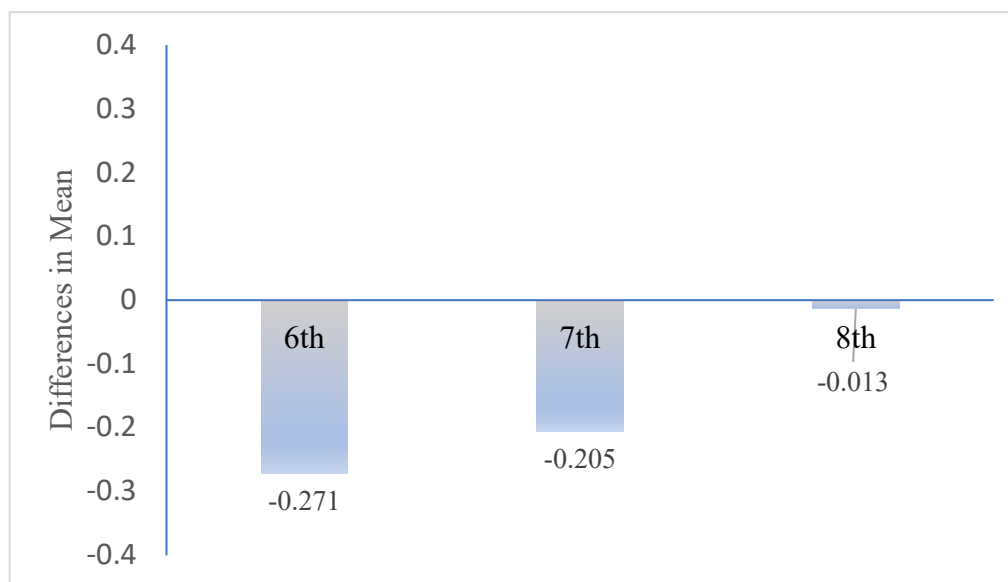


Figure 16. 1. Pre and Posttest Differences in Means for “When I Make a Mistake, I Admit it” by Grade Level

Gratitude helped many students to become more aware of their emotions and to learn how to regulate them positively. Many shared practicing gratitude helped them learn how to become “happy.” It also helped students to manage stress. As one student explained gratitude being “a way to escape without turning to drugs or alcohol. It’s a way to be happier and more motivated in general” (student 145). Keeping a gratitude journal

...is great, I look forward to [it]...I think that it is a great way to express happiness within just a couple of minutes of writing time. I often look at it when I am having a bad day and it improves my mood fantastically (student 353).

Others explain it helped them to “not be sad about the things I don’t have” (student 598), and to “think about things and laugh” instead of allowing themselves to become upset (student 450).

Gratitude helped students to express their feelings,

I love the numbered gratitude journal. It has helped me a lot because of the concept and it feels like you are telling someone but you’re not. It feels good to get things off your chest in private (student 322).

“I usually like to hide my feelings. But after doing this gratitude journal I feel I’ve opened up about certain things” (student 558). Gratitude should be taught in schools because “it relieves you from all this stress like homework, tests, schoolwork piled on to you, and many other stressful things outside of school as well” (student 243); it would “make students who are going through a lot positive and grateful” (student 191).

After a middle school student in this district committed suicide, one parent felt compelled to send this email, “I want you to know that his gratitude journal is STILL next to his bed with over 280 entries.” This simple idea “made such a difference in my son’s life. Considering some

of the recent events with middle schoolers (student suicide), this idea is even more relevant” (A. Adams, personnel communication, March 9, 2019). Another parent in an email wrote,

My son recently lost his grandma last month and he used his gratitude journal which you taught him to use in order to cope. It helped him to document their lovely memories together and to remember to focus on the good things he has in life. He ended up volunteering to do a eulogy at her funeral. The gratitude journal made it really easy for him to put together his speech (C. Nebrida, personnel communication, May 13, 2019).

Emotional Competence: Empathy

The construct empathy encompasses the following questions: "I feel bad when someone gets their feelings hurt, I try to understand what other people go through, and I try to understand how other people feel and think." None of the factors were significantly related to empathy, $p > .05$.

Many explained growing in empathy towards others. In fact, with this in mind, many students shared they thought teaching gratitude in schools would help the prevalent bullying problem. One student shared, "It would help stop bullying" (student 450). Another explained, "gratitude should be taught in schools because it can stop bullying and help kids become more positive people" (student 278). If gratitude were taught in schools "kids will start to help each other" (student 259) and would "become kind" (student 326). Also, many students became more aware of the people around them. One student shared,

Over the past few months, gratitude helped the little acts of kindness others have done for me stand out because it made me feel very grateful for those people. If everyone on earth practiced gratitude, there would be fewer conflicts, and the world would be a much happier place (A. Roemer, personal communication, March 6, 2019).

One student elaborates, "I would describe gratitude as the quality of being thankful; showing how far you will go to help someone or something" (student 524).

Some for the first time noticed what others had contributed to their life and as a result, wanted to help others (or pay it forward). In one student's journal (entry 77) they write,

I am grateful for the term pay it forward. It gives me a confidence boost and watching the video of everyone just doing small things to help one another was transforming to watch. I was fully inspired by how they were not focusing on themselves but realizing

other people's needs.

She goes on to explain, “Just a small little act can cause a chain reaction of people being nice to each other. I hope that someday we can all live in a life like that, just paying it forward” (student 558). Another student states, “It can make others happy, including yourself, when you project your gratitude around others” (student 257).

Emotional Competence: Behavioral Self-control

The construct self-control encompasses the following questions: “I can wait for what I want, I don’t bother others when they are busy, and I think before I act.” None of the factors were significantly related to behavior self-control, $p > .05$.

For the intervention students, many observed a greater sense of self-control in their lives. They reported learning how to manage their thoughts, behavior, and ability to focus in school. It helps me to keep my mind, “clear of negativity and regret,” “better manners,” and a more “focused mindset of the tasks that are given in school” (student 524).

Engaged Living: Optimism

The construct optimism encompasses the following questions: “Each day I look forward to having a lot of fun, I usually expect to have a good day, and overall, I expect more good things to happen to me than bad things.” None of the factors were significantly related to optimism, $p > .05$.

Another theme to emerge was a shift in perspective from negative to positive. One student shared, gratitude was “a way of reprogramming your mind to think happy and positive thoughts” (student 259). Another wrote, “I have also been thinking positive and keeping a clear mind of negative things” (student 524). Many explained they had “become a better person.” They saw “the world as a better place. Also, it teaches you to look for the positive in all

situations” (student 243). It has “made my life a whole lot better” (student 598). Gratitude “for me, is what changes my attitude, and makes me think of the bright side in every tough situation.” (R. Hersh, personal communication, March 6, 2019). It has helped me to “look for the good in things in life” (student 598).

Just practicing gratitude,

...for a small amount of time at least once a week can positively change your perspective of the world. Rather than fretting on what you don’t have, you can be thankful for what you do have, which improves your mood and makes you a happier person (A. Roemer, personal communication, March 6, 2019).

Experiencing gratitude affects my perspective on life, because “it helps me see the better in the world, and it keeps me from feeling bad for myself if I’m not perfect or don’t own something, but, instead, it lets me be grateful for what I have or look like” (student 257). Gratitude should be taught in schools because “it will make most of the students change their perspective in life from negative to positive” (student 598).

Engaged Living: Gratitude

This gratitude construct asks participants to rate themselves: “Since yesterday I feel grateful, thankful, and appreciative.” For “since yesterday I feel grateful,” a one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect for intervention, $F(1,631) = 6.85, p < .01$ (see Figure 17.1). The difference in the mean score decreased for the intervention group ($N = 383, \Delta M = -0.25$) compared to the nonintervention group ($N = 250, \Delta M = -0.028$).

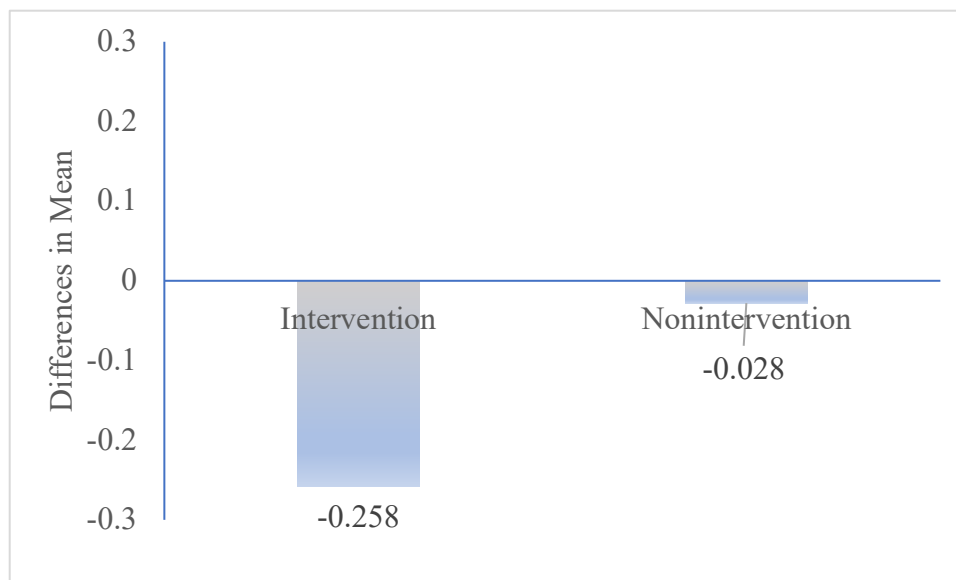


Figure 17. 1. Pre and Posttest Differences in Means for “Since Yesterday I Feel Grateful” by Intervention Versus Nonintervention

“What is gratitude?” Regarding gratitude, students were asked to define it, explain their experience, and were asked if it should be taught in school. When students were asked to define gratitude, they had a wide variety of definitions. Many connected gratitude to their own personal happiness. “Gratitude plays a very essential role in having a happy life” (A. Roemer, personal communication, March 6, 2019). “Gratitude is something that makes you happy” (student 52). Others defined it as being “thankful for the small little things (student 524),” “kind,” and “to realize how fortunate you are,” (student 259).

Gratitude is being grateful. Being grateful is realizing how much effort someone has put into something, or just reflecting on how it made your life easier, or better. Gratitude is the act of showing how thankful you are for something or someone in your life because it made an impact on you (student 558).

It is “not saying everything around you is good, because it’s not. Gratitude is the way you view and react to the world and what’s happening it. It’s just appreciating what you

already have, and what life has already given you” (student 145).

Gratitude “shows me that I have a great life. It also shows me that others are not so fortunate. It propels me to be grateful” (student 227). It is “more than just being thankful for something it’s feeling the thankfulness in your heart and your soul. It’s more like living the gratitude” (student 278).

“What is your experience with gratitude?” Students had a lot to share about their experience with maintaining a gratitude journal. Some themes to emerge were a love for the practice and a desire to share it, a shift in perspective, and a way to become “happier” or a “better person.” One student shared she “loved every second” of keeping a gratitude journal and recommends it to her family and friends who don’t practice it at school. She believes it is something she is “planning on continuing for the rest of her life,” because it has made her “a better person” (student 341). Another stated, “when I look back at what I’ve written, it makes me remember how grateful I really am for those things.” It is “a beneficial practice that makes life seem better than before” (student 598).

My experience of having a gratitude journal has been truly amazing! Every single time that I write an entry, it makes me feel happy, and it puts me in a better mood. This gratitude journal has helped me ‘count my blessings’, and it has helped me to keep memories forever. This has helped me to understand how fortunate I am, and now I will never take things for granted. Even when I am done with 6th grade, I will keep writing entries (student 259).

In their journal (entry 181) a student writes, “I am grateful for my gratitude journal” (student 353). Another student in their journal (entry 331) explains, “I personally have loved doing my gratitude journal. Keeping a gratitude journal has been so fun. Sometimes I feel that I

need to write a lot, and other times I just want to write something short and sweet.”

Gratitude just lifts me up and makes my day. When I was mad, I started thinking about how amazing it is that we can see and smell and have fresh drinking water. When I think of these things, I realize that there is nothing to get mad about because I get to be on this earth. I would describe gratitude as a tool. Gratitude is like a strong word for being thankful. Gratitude can be used to make you happy and more importantly to make other people happy. Always be grateful because we don’t even know how bad life can be for other people. When I think of gratitude, I think to myself and say thank you. Gratitude is amazing. Gratitude will lift up a student and should be taught to other kids. Gratitude has honestly changed my life. I will keep writing in my journal (student 343).

Before entering middle school (4th grade) one student was encouraged by her older sister, a sixth grader, to start a gratitude journal; four years later she shares,

I have kept a gratitude journal for 4 years (1 for each year, so a total of 4). I started in 4th-grade, because my sister encouraged me to. Now, every single night for the past 4 years I have written at least 2 things that I’m thankful for. Either basic things, or happy things I did that day. Having this journal has helped me realize and appreciate everything. Whenever I’m sad or am not in the best frame of mind, I read over my entries from the times I felt most happy, and it genuinely brightens my mood and just makes me feel thankful. It takes me back to the best times in my life and the happiest memories that I’ve had (R. Hersh, personal communication, March 6, 2019).

Should gratitude be taught in school? All students who were asked if gratitude should be taught in school responded with a “Yes!” As seen above, some of the responses have been woven into the other 11 building blocks. Here is one additional response:

Gratitude should most definitely be taught in schools because it is a life skill. All the skills being taught to us are meant to help us when we get older. It is the most important skill that we need! When we are older the thing that we need most is being able to make the best of any situation. The only way that you are going to be able to do this is by showing gratefulness. If everyone practiced gratitude it would spread through you and encourage yourself and others to do good deeds, help others around you, and it will definitely make you a happier person. If kids started to learn gratitude in school, this could be our future (student 558).

Engaged Living: Zest

The construct zest asked participants to rate how much they have the following feelings right now: “Energetic, active, and lively.” For “energetic,” a one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect for grade, $F(2,629) = 4.69, p = 0.01$ (see Figure 18.1). Grade 6 ($N = 243$) increased ($M = 0.004$), while grade 7 ($N = 238$) stayed the same ($M = 0$) and grade 8 ($N = 151$, $M = -0.41$) went down suggesting feeling energetic may lessen with age.

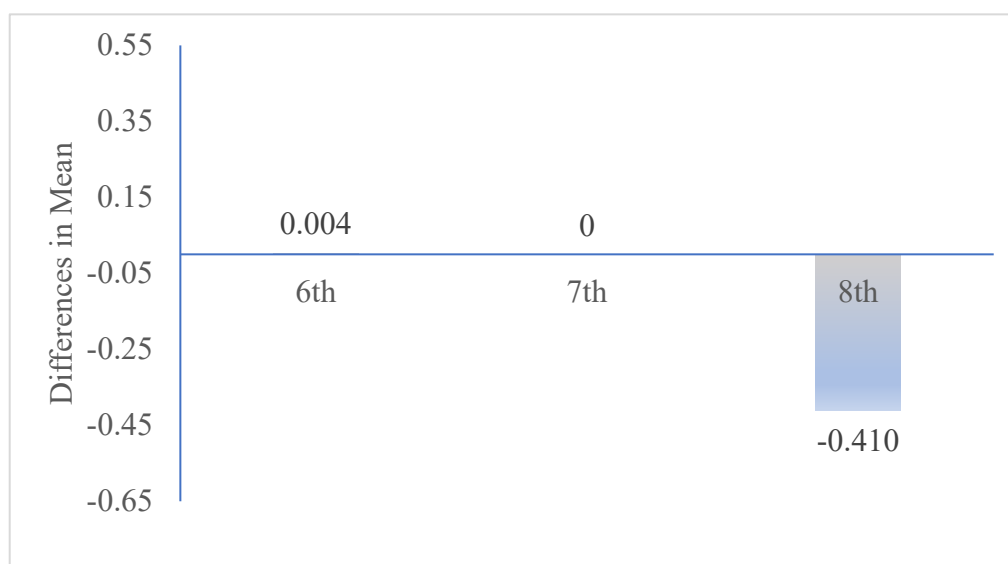


Figure 18.1. Pre and Posttest Differences in Means for Rate Your Current Level of Feeling “Energetic” by Grade Level

For “lively,” a one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect for grade, $F(2,629) = 3.39$, $p = 0.03$ (see Figure 19.1). Grade 6 ($N = 243$) increased ($\Delta M = 0.02$), while grade 7 ($N = 238$) stayed the same ($\Delta M = -0.008$), and grade 8 ($N = 151$, $\Delta M = -0.30$) went down suggesting feeling lively may decrease with age.

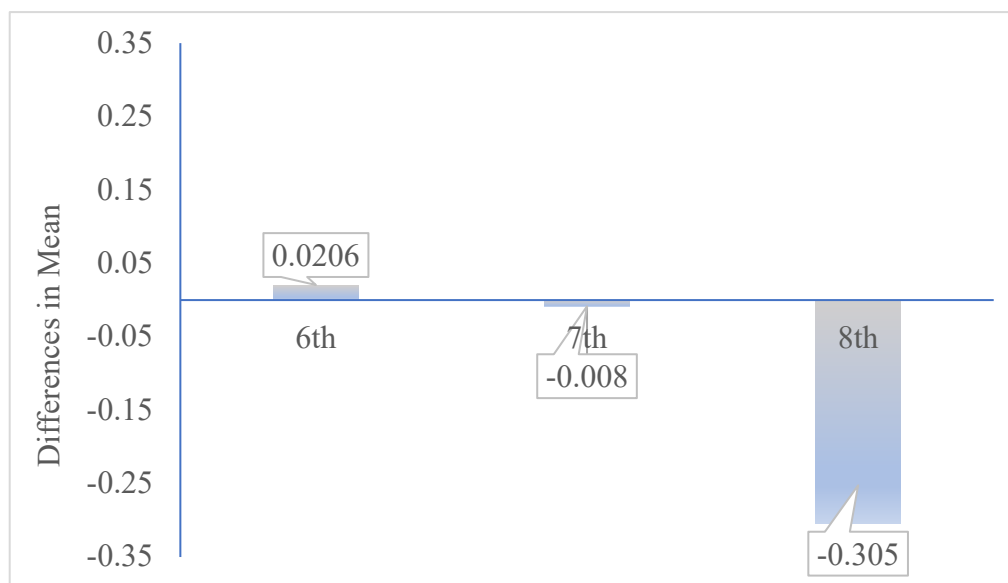


Figure 19. 1. Pre and Posttest Differences in Means for Rate Your Current Level of Feeling “Lively” by Grade Level

The Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6) Results

The Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6) is made up of six different questions: “I have so much in life to be grateful for; If I had to list everything that I felt grateful for, it would be a very long list; When I look at the world, I don’t see much to be grateful for; I am grateful to a wide variety of people; As I get older, I find myself more able to appreciate the people, events, and situations more and more each day; Long amounts of time can go by before I feel grateful to something or someone.” Using a Likert Scale, participants are asked to respond to the statements with: 5 Completely true (very much like me), 4 somewhat true (mostly like me), 3 agree

(somewhat like me), 2 somewhat not true (not like me at all), 1 completely not true (not like me at all).

As seen in Table 2.1, GQ-6 results revealed middle school females ($M = 24.32$, $SD = 3.58$) have a higher score than middle school males ($M = 23.57$, $SD = 3.77$). For grade level, 6th grade students ($M = 24.02$, $SD = 3.82$) scored the highest, then 7th grade students and finally 8th grade students ($M = 23.14$, $SD = 3.99$). It is important to note, while some of the 8th grade students had the intervention two year prior (grade 6), none of them were currently participating in the gratitude curriculum.

Table 2. 1

Summary of Mean and Standard Deviation for the GQ-6 Scores of Middle School Students

Student	<i>N</i>	<i>MEAN</i>	<i>SD</i>
Male	299	23.57	3.77
Female	333	24.32	3.58
6 th Grade	243	24.32	3.59
7 th Grade	238	24.02	3.82
8 th Grade	151	23.14	3.99

For the GQ-6, a one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect for intervention, $F(1,631) = 249$, $p < .01$ (see Figure 20.1). The difference in the mean score was greater for the intervention group ($N = 383$, $\Delta M = -0.1$) compared to the nonintervention group ($N = 250$, $\Delta M = -1.097$). This highlight the importance of integrating gratitude into curricular activities.

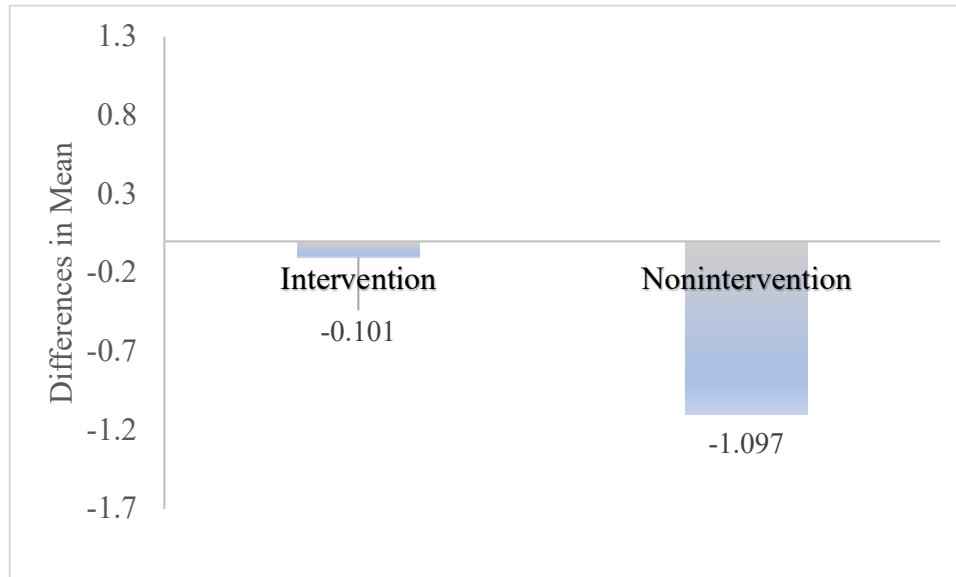


Figure 20.1. Pre and Posttest Differences in Means for GQ-6 by Intervention Versus Nonintervention

For “long amounts of time can go by before I feel grateful to something or someone,” a one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect for intervention, $F(1,631) = 249, p < .01$ (see Figure 21.1). Since this is a reverse score (negatively worded) the score was reversed scored, to ensure clarity the mean was adjusted before it was graphed. The difference in the mean score was greater for the intervention group ($N = 383, \Delta M = 0.33$) compared to the nonintervention group ($N = 250, \Delta M = -1.492$).

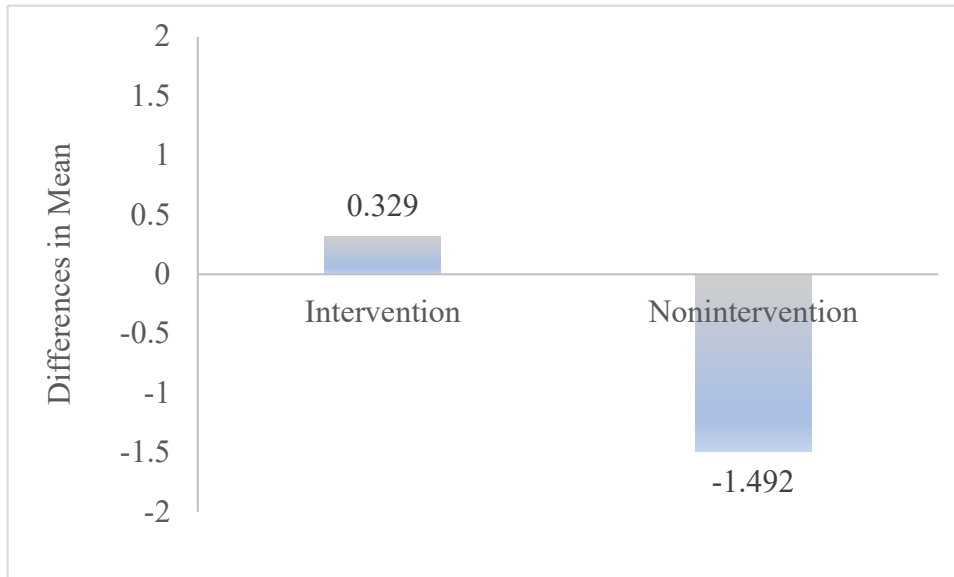


Figure 21. 1 . Pre and Posttest Differences in Means for “Long Amounts of Time Can Go by Before I Feel Grateful to Something or Someone” by Intervention Versus Nonintervention

In addition, for “long amounts of time can go by before I feel grateful to something or someone,” a one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect for grade, $F(1,631) = 13, p < .01$ (see Figure 22.1). Since this is a reverse score (negatively worded) the score was reversed scored, to ensure clarity the mean was adjusted before it was graphed. Grade 6 ($N = 243, \Delta M = 0.16$) decreased the least, while grade 7 ($N = 238, \Delta M = -0.23$), and finally grade 8 ($N = 151, \Delta M = -1.01$), suggesting as age increases so does the time between feeling grateful to something or someone.

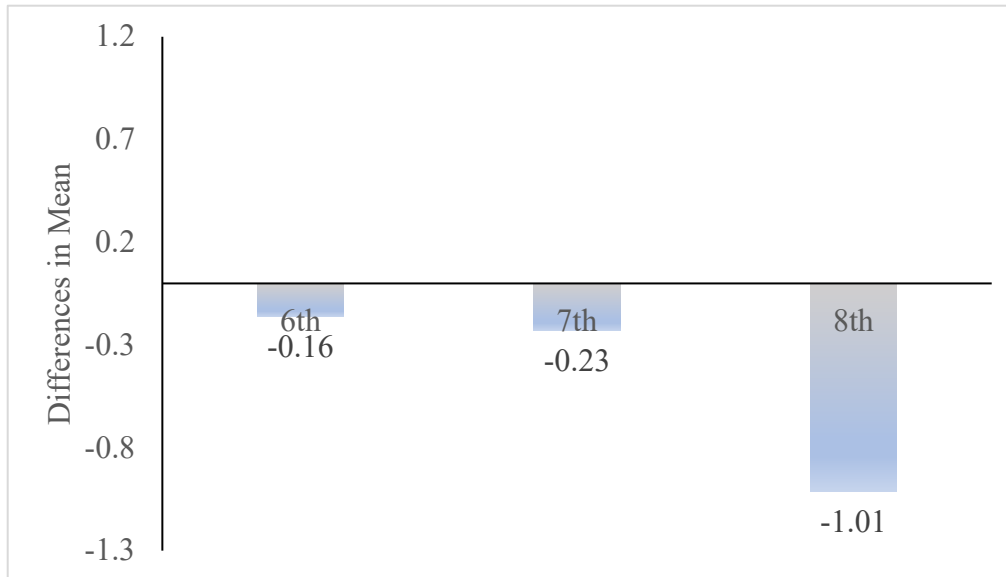


Figure 22.1. Pre and Posttest Differences in Means for “Long Amounts of Time Can Go by Before I Feel Grateful to Something or Someone” by Grade Level

For “I have so much in life to be grateful for,” a one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect for intervention, $F(1,631) = 4.25, p = 0.04$ (see Figure 23.1). Since this is a reverse score (negatively worded) the score was reversed scored, to ensure clarity the mean was adjusted before it was graphed. While both groups decreased, the intervention group ($N = 383, \Delta M = -0.06$) went down less, compared to the nonintervention group ($N = 250, \Delta M = -1.23$).

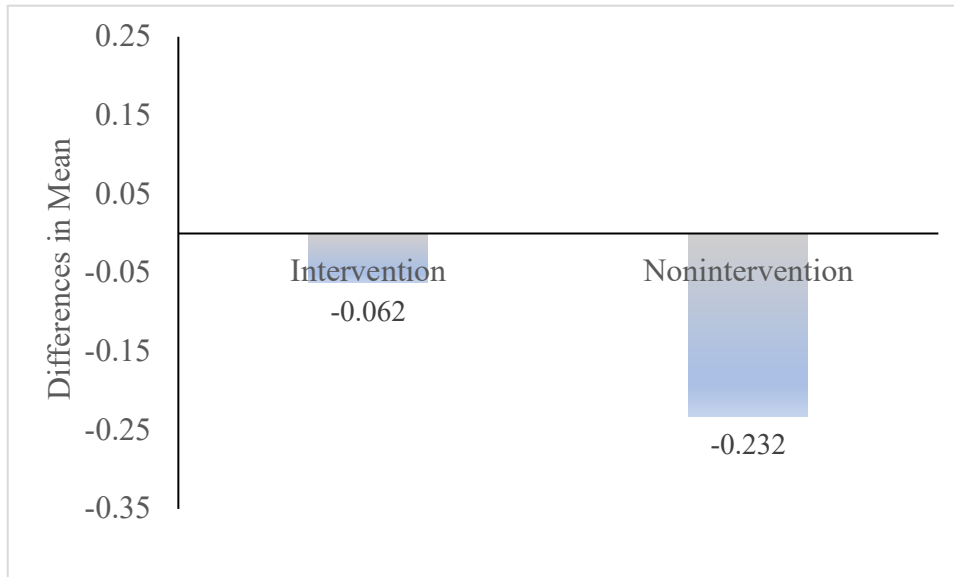


Figure 23.1. Pre and Posttest Differences in Means for “I Have So Much in Life to be Grateful for” for Intervention Versus Nonintervention

For “I am grateful to a wide variety of people,” a one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect for intervention, $F(1,631) = 4.25, p = 0.04$ (see Figure 24.1). While both groups decreased, the intervention group ($N = 383, \Delta M = -0.05$) went down less, compared to the nonintervention group ($N = 250, \Delta M = -0.248$).

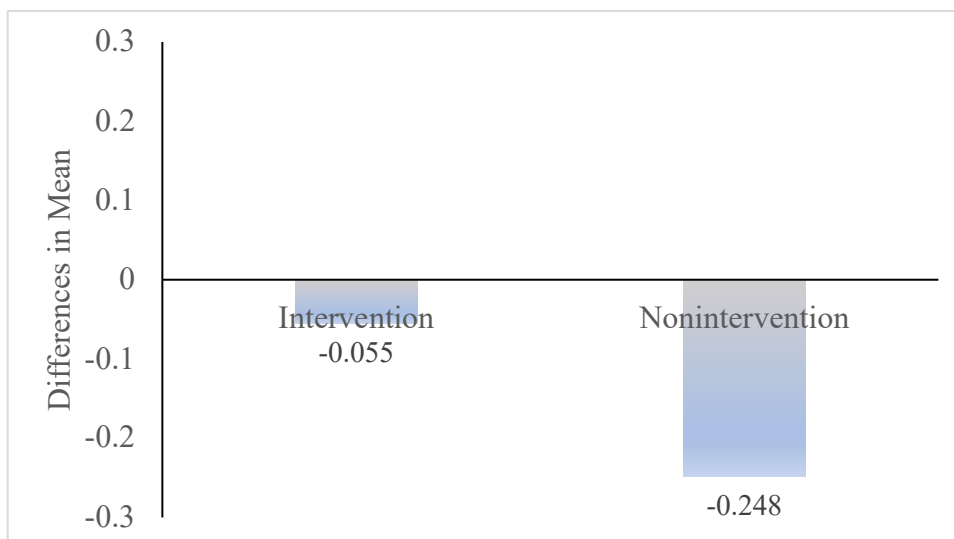


Figure 24.1. Pre and Posttest Differences in Means for “I Am Grateful to a Wide Variety of People” by Intervention Versus Nonintervention

For “I am grateful to a wide variety of people,” a one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect for grade, $F(2,629) 4.14, p = 0.02$ (see Figure 25.1). Grade 6 ($N = 243$) slightly grew ($M = 0.12$), next grade 8 ($N = 151, \Delta M = -0.22$), and grade 7 ($N = 238$) went down ($\Delta M = -0.21$), suggesting grade 7 may signify a time when gratitude for students decreases the most.

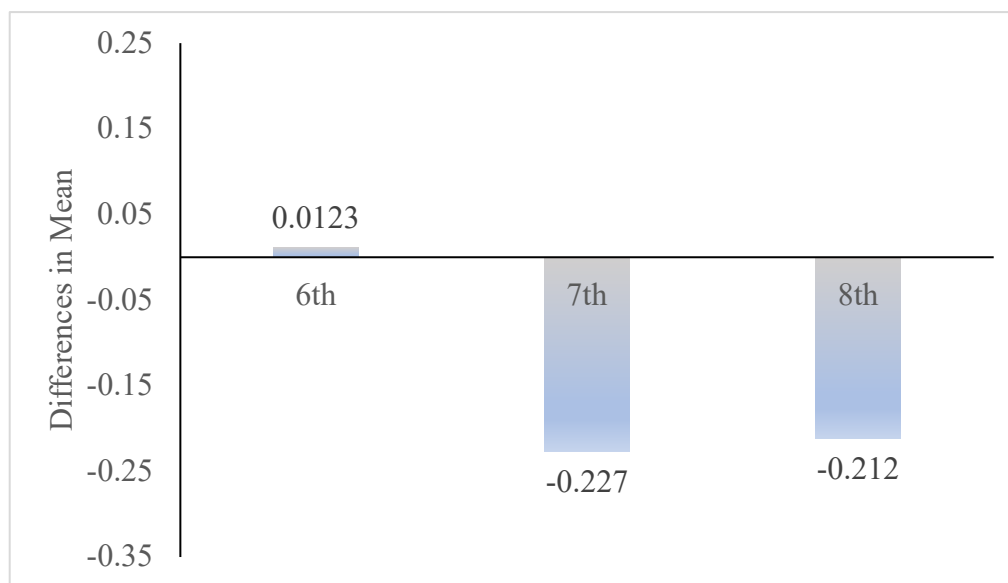


Figure 25.1. Pre and Posttest Differences in Means for “I Am Grateful to a Wide Variety of People” by Grade Level

For “I find myself more able to appreciate the people, events, and situations more and more each day,” a one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect for intervention, $F(1,631) = 1,201, p < .01$ (see Figure 26.1). While both groups decreased, the intervention group ($N = 383, \Delta M = -0.21$) went down less, compared to the nonintervention group ($N = 250, \Delta M = -3.876$).

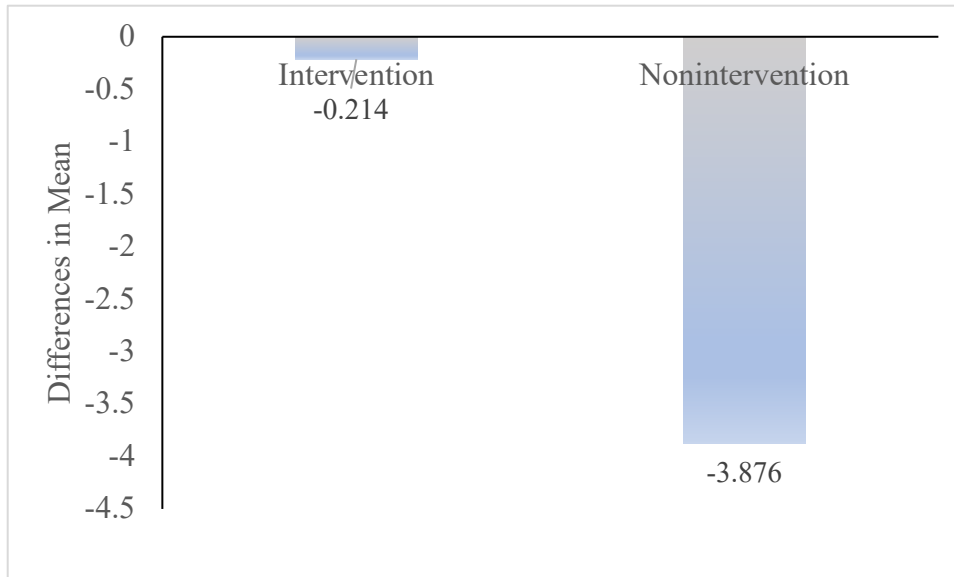


Figure 26.1. Pre and Posttest Differences in Means for “I Find Myself More Able to Appreciate the People, Events, and Situations More and More Each Day” by Intervention Versus Nonintervention.

For “I find myself more able to appreciate the people, events, and situations more and more each day,” a one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect for grade, $F(1,631) = 249, p < .01$ (see Figure 27.1). Grade 6 ($N = 243$) decreased the least ($\Delta M = 0.16$), while grade 7 ($N = 238$) next ($\Delta M = -0.23$), and finally grade 8 ($N = 151, \Delta M = -1.01$), suggesting as age increases so does the time between feeling grateful to something or someone.

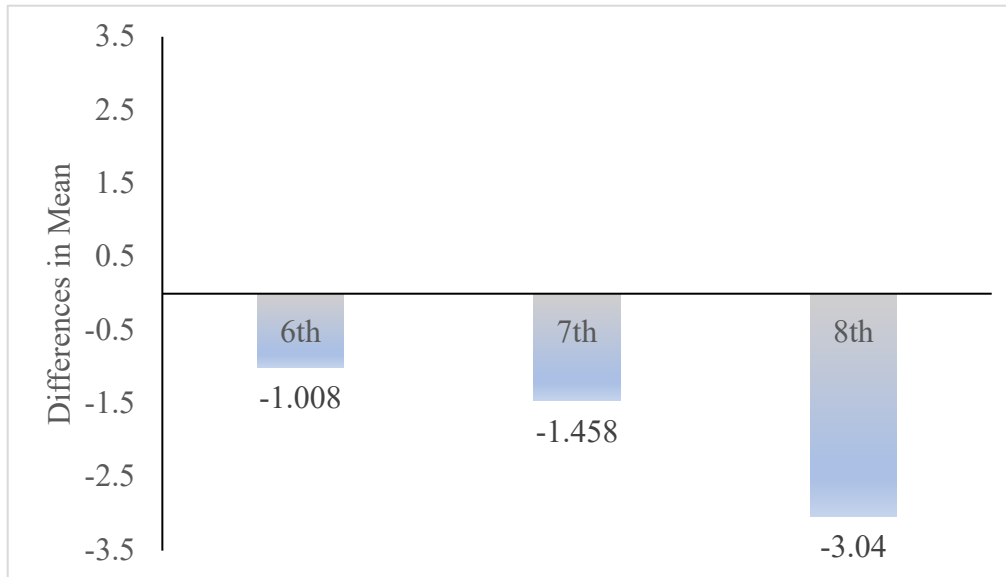


Figure 27.1. Pre and Posttest Differences in Means for “I Find Myself More Able to Appreciate the People, Events, and Situations More and More Each Day” by Grade Level

For “when I look at the world, I don’t see much to be grateful for,” a one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect for intervention, $F(1,631) = 185.09, p < .01$ (see Figure 28.1). Since this is a reverse score (negatively worded) the score was reversed scored, to ensure clarity the mean was adjusted before it was graphed. While both groups decreased, the intervention group ($N = 383, \Delta M = -0.15$) went down less, compared to the nonintervention group ($N = 250, \Delta M = -1.736$).

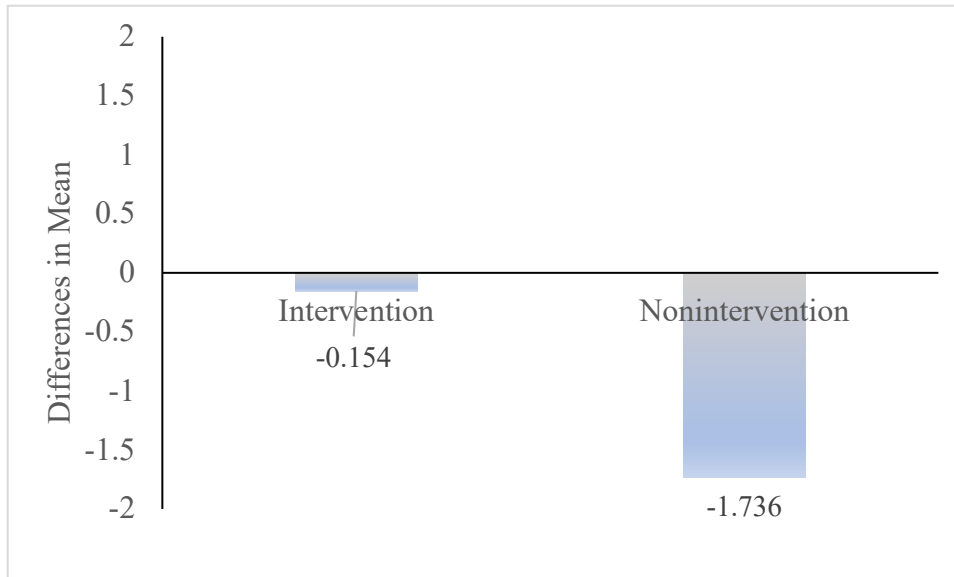


Figure 28.1. Pre and Posttest Differences in Means for “When I Look at the World, I Don’t See Much to be Grateful For” by Intervention Versus Nonintervention

For “when I look at the world, I don’t see much to be grateful for,” a one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect for grade, $F(2,629) = 13, p < .01$ (Figure 29.1). Since this is a reverse score (negatively worded) the score was reversed scored, to ensure clarity the mean was adjusted before it was graphed. Grade 6 ($N = 243$) decreased the least ($\Delta M = -0.51$), while grade 7 ($N = 238$) stayed the same ($\Delta M = -0.72$), and grade 8 ($N = 151, \Delta M = -1.34$) went down suggesting students feel less grateful with age.

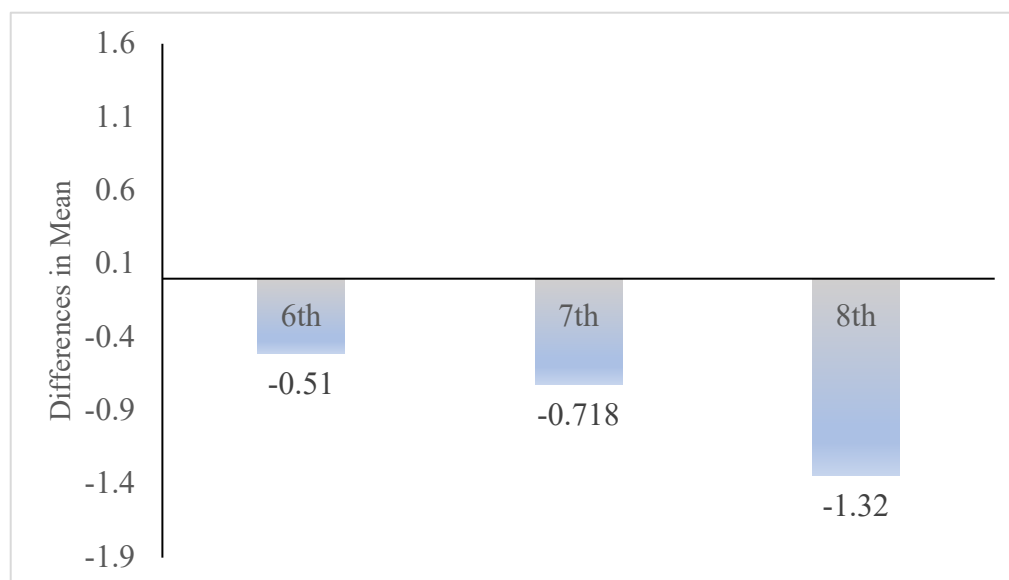


Figure 29.1. Pre and Posttest Differences in Means for “When I Look at the World, I Don’t See Much to be Grateful For” by Grade Level

As seen in Table 3.1, results for the intervention indicated a significance related to self-efficacy ($p = .03$), persistence ($p = .01$), gratitude ($p < .01$), GQ-6 ($p < .01$), and specific GQ-6 questions ($p < .05$).

Table 3 1.

Mean Scores of Significant Findings for Intervention

Construct	Δ MEAN
Self-efficacy: “I can work out my problems.”	
Intervention ($n = 383$)	0.15
Nonintervention ($n = 250$)	0
Persistence: “When I do not understand something, I ask the teacher again and again until I understand.”	
Intervention ($n = 383$)	-0.24
Nonintervention ($n = 250$)	0.08
Gratitude: “How much do you have this feeling right now: Grateful.”	

Intervention ($n = 383$)	-0.25
Nonintervention ($n = 250$)	-0.28
Overall GQ-6	
Intervention ($n = 383$)	-0.10
Nonintervention ($n = 250$)	-1.097
GQ-6: “Long amounts of time go by before I feel grateful for something (reverse score).”	
Intervention ($n = 383$)	0.3
Nonintervention ($n = 250$)	-1.4
GQ-6: “I have much to be grateful for.”	
Intervention ($n = 383$)	-0.06
Nonintervention ($n = 250$)	-0.23
GQ-6: “I am grateful to a wide variety of people.”	
Intervention ($n = 383$)	-0.054
Nonintervention ($n = 250$)	-0.24
GQ-6: “I find myself able to appreciate the people, events, and situations more and more each day.”	
Intervention ($n = 383$)	-0.214
Nonintervention ($n = 250$)	-3.876
GQ-6: “When I look at the world, I don’t see much to be grateful for.”	
Intervention ($n = 383$)	-0.154
Nonintervention ($n = 250$)	-1.736

Additional Findings: Grade Point Average

Others explained, improving academically, gratitude was the key to helping them excel. If gratitude were to be taught in schools, it would help students “get better grades, and so much more” (student 259).

Summary

In summary, the purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of gratitude interventions on middle school students' social-emotional health and gratitude. The intent of this study was achieved by comparing the difference in middle school students' pretest and posttest scores on the Social Emotional Health Survey (SEHS) and the Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6). The difference in the ANOVA ran for each of the SEHS constructs ($N = 12$), each SEHS question ($N = 36$), and the GQ-6 for the following: intervention, ethnicity, gender, and grade level. Quantitative results indicated a significance related to self-efficacy ($p = .03$), persistence ($p = .01$), gratitude ($p < .01$), GQ-6 ($p < .01$), and specific GQ-6 questions ($p < .05$). Additional findings related to a significance in grade level: self-efficacy ($p < .01$), school support ($p = .04$), peer support ($p < .01$), emotional regulation ($p = .02$), zest: energetic ($p = .01$) and lively ($p = .03$), and specific GQ-6 questions ($p < .05$). Qualitative results were found for 11 of the 12 blocks of positive psychology: Self-awareness, self-efficacy, persistence, family coherence, peer support, school support, gratitude, optimism, emotional regulation, self-control, and empathy.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of gratitude interventions on middle school students' social-emotional health and gratitude. This was measured by comparing the difference in middle school students' pretest and posttest scores on the Social Emotional Health Survey (SEHS) and the Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6), as well as parent responses and student responses to open-ended questions. The discussion is presented in this chapter: (a) summary of the study, (b) implications for practice, (c) recommendations for further study, (d) conclusions, and (e) summary.

Summary of the Study

This study delves into the effects of gratitude interventions on social and emotional health for middle school students. Out of the total classes ($N = 29$), nearly half of the classes ($N = 17$) participated in a 15-week intervention, while the nonintervention group ($N = 12$) did not. Over the 15 weeks, the intervention classes practiced gratitude through maintaining a journal, along with weekly quotes, stories, and videos. All classes ($N = 29$) took a pretest survey (week 1) followed by a posttest (week 15). The survey consisted of Dr. Michael Furlong and his colleague's (2013b) Social Emotional Health Survey (SEHS) and the Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6) developed by Dr. Michael McCullough (2002). The quantitative data analysis revealed significant results for the intervention in the following areas: Self-efficacy ($p = .03$), persistence ($p = .01$), gratitude ($p < .01$), GQ-6 ($p < .01$), and specific GQ-6 questions ($p < .05$). Additional findings related to a significance in grade level: Self-efficacy ($p < .01$), school support ($p = .04$), peer support ($p < .01$), emotional regulation ($p = .02$), zest: energetic ($p = .01$) and lively ($p =$

.03), and specific GQ-6 questions ($p < .05$).

For the qualitative data student and parent responses were gathered from open-ended questions (during the intervention and at the end of the survey), student journals, weekly feedback on student goal sheets, and student writing samples. Lastly, qualitative results were found for 11 of the 12 blocks related to positive psychology: Self-awareness, self-efficacy, persistence, family coherence, peer support, school support, gratitude, optimism, emotional regulation, self-control, and empathy.

Conclusions

Research demonstrates gratitude has the ability to affect one's social emotional health by increasing self-awareness raise Subjective Well-being or happiness (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Moosath & Jayaseelan, 2016; Seligman et al., 2005; Watkins et al., 2003), manage self and lead to responsible decision-making (Emmons & Stern, 2013; Yadav, 2015), benefit social awareness (Jarrett, 2016; McCullough et al., 2002; Simmel, 1996) and enhance relationships (Emmons, 2010; Emmons & Stern, 2013; Frederickson, 2013).

What is the Relationship between Gratitude and Social-Emotional Health for Middle School Students?

This study found similar results to the research finding a relationship between gratitude and social emotional health for middle school students. First, the quantitative data analysis revealed significant results for the intervention in the following areas: Self-efficacy ($p = .03$), persistence ($p = .01$), gratitude ($p < .01$). Next, qualitative results were found for 11 of the 12 blocks related to positive psychology: Self-awareness, self-efficacy, persistence, family coherence, peer support, school support, gratitude, optimism, emotional regulation, self-control, and empathy.

In the area of persistence, the intervention group actually went down. One possible explanation could be how increasing one's gratitude, develops a greater sensitivity to the needs of others (see Figure 11). With this in mind, the first question "when I do not understand something, I ask the teacher again and again until I understand," could be perceived as bothersome and possibly even insensitive to the teacher's needs. Given the student's in the intervention increased in "I can work out my own problems," one could conclude, students become more independent and may be able to solve problems on their own to a greater degree relying more on their increased ability to utilize critical thinking skills. The next question "I try to answer all the questions asked in class." In middle school, when a student tries to answer all of the questions in class, they are often looking to impress the teacher, which can often result in annoying others. When one's gratitude grows, they again become more aware of others over themselves leading to a possible decrease in questions to the teacher. Lastly the statement, "I try to solve a math problem, I will not stop until I find a final solution" went down for the intervention. One reason for this could be when one becomes more grateful, they develop a greater sense of acceptance for the world around them, with this realization, the individual may be able to "let things go" easier, gaining what is often referred to as "grace for living." As Saint Augustine so beautifully wrote and Brother David reiterated, "All is grace, all is a gift" (Sidon, 2017).

In addition, for "since yesterday I feel grateful," the intervention group also went down. A reason for this result could be the intervention group, took a week off from maintaining their gratitude journal before they took the posttest, causing them to not "feel" as grateful as they typically do (see Figure 20.1).

What are the Effects of Gratitude Journals on Social-Emotional Health for Middle School Students?

This study found similar results to the research finding a relationship between gratitude and maintaining a gratitude journal for middle school students. The quantitative data analysis revealed significant results for the intervention in the following areas: GQ-6 ($p < .01$) and specific GQ-6 questions ($p < .05$). For the qualitative data, some themes to emerge were a love for the practice and a desire to share it, a shift in perspective from negative to positive, and a way to become “happier” or a “better person.”

How Does Gratitude and Social-Emotional Health Vary by Grade Level?

Additional findings related to the impact of gratitude on social emotional health found a significance in grade level: Self-efficacy ($p < .01$), school support ($p = .04$), peer support ($p < .01$), emotional regulation ($p = .02$), zest: energetic ($p = .01$) and lively ($p = .03$), and specific GQ-6 questions ($p < .05$). As seen in Table 2.1, for grade level the GQ-6 revealed, 6th grade students ($M = 24.02$, $SD = 3.82$) scored the highest, then 7th grade students and finally 8th grade students ($M = 23.14$, $SD = 3.99$). It is important to note, while some of the 8th grade students had the intervention two year prior (grade 6), none of them were currently participating in the gratitude curriculum.

What are Other Outcomes of Gratitude Journals for Middle School Students?

Lastly, other outcomes reported a connection between maintaining a gratitude journal and excelling academically. One reason for this could be students developed an appreciation for their school, learning and teachers. In addition, they also explained gratitude enabled them to manage stress and helped them being to focus more in class, all of which could lead to better grades.

This study adds to the growing literature of scientific data on gratitude by exploring its

social-emotional health benefits. When students practiced gratitude, they reported greater awareness and appreciation for their life, others, and what they had been given. There is evidence to show that self-awareness may increase self-efficacy, leading students to become happier and better people. Gratitude helped students cope with stress shifting their perspective from negative to positive. The increase in optimism may lead to an increased ability to focus and excel in learning.

These findings are worthy of consideration in education. Educators may consider embedding gratitude practices in the classroom in hopes of enhancing student's social-emotional health and academics. It is important to note, students in sixth grade had additional benefits, implying the need to integrate this practice in the early middle school or late elementary years. This study serves as an encouragement to provide class time to support the growing social-emotional needs of the whole child and adds to the groundbreaking research of gratitude by exploring how it impacts middle school students' social-emotional health.

Limitations

There are many limitations to this study. First, there was a limited number of participating teachers, lack of teacher training, fidelity in implementation, and time. First there were a limited number of participating teachers for both the intervention ($n = 6$) and nonintervention groups ($n = 7$). Next, due to multiple teachers dropping out of the study at the last minute, teachers did not receive adequate training. As explained in Chapter 3, the training consisted of the researcher meeting individually with each of the teachers and going over the provided material. Also, fidelity in implementation was an issue. Unfortunately, not all of the participating teachers practiced gratitude, and even though there were quite specific components to the intervention, each teacher did it differently. Only the teachers who worked closely with

the researcher ($n = 3$) maintained the intervention in its entirety. Out of the 17 intervention classes only eight maintained a digital journal. All of the other teachers' students wrote in their notebooks. For example, one teacher changed some of the videos explaining she was going "rogue." Another teacher did not wish to show any of the videos or read the stories, so she left them out. She also did not maintain the digital journal but rather had the students write what they were grateful for each day as bell work in their notebooks. One of the reasons for this adjustment was she did not have Chrome books, so she was not able to have her students maintain the journal created for the intervention. Next, another teacher, did the entire intervention into one day, she would have students write the quote in their notebooks and answer the beginning of the week. If she had time, she would show the video. After the video, she would ask students to finish answering the questions and if they had time, they would write what they were grateful for; some of her students explained they felt rushed and often did not have enough time to even finish the questions, much less have time to write in their journal. Lastly, another limitation to this study was time. Since the intervention started at the beginning of the school year, the original teachers who had volunteered nearly a year in advance canceled, explaining they did not have time to maintain the intervention and they were quite stressed with the new school year. There was also a limited amount of classroom instructional time and teacher planning time. Teachers explained they felt tremendous pressure to cover their curriculum, so having one more thing to do resulted in an increased amount of stress. Also, the length of the intervention was limited (15 weeks). To fully implement the intervention, it would take a complete school year. In conclusion, these are the limitations of this study.

Delimitations

There are delimitations to this study. First, the number of participants was only 632

students. Next, this study utilized only the results of only 29 different 6th, 7th and 8th-grade classrooms. Out of the classes, nearly half were nonintervention classes ($N = 12$) and the other half intervention ($N = 17$). Generalizing the results of this study to student populations that do not resemble the students in Capistrano Unified School District (CUSD) should be done with caution. Lastly, only 13 teachers participated in this study. In conclusion, these are the delimitations of this study.

Implications for Practice

Implications for Districts: MTSS, Tier 1 and 2 Interventions

A district might consider adopting this intervention in all of its middle schools. It may consider beginning with sixth grade, and consecutively adding a new grade level each year. The bulk of the intervention would be in sixth grade. For sixth grade, the intervention found a specific impact to self-awareness ($p = .03$), persistence ($p = .04$), school support ($p = .001$), family coherence ($p = .03$), GQ-6 ($p < .001$), teacher ($p < .001$), and GPA ($p < .001$) (See Appendix X). Even if the school does not continue in seventh or eighth grade, the impact of the intervention demonstrated results up to two years later in discipline related to warnings ($p = .01$) and suspension ($p = .01$), and also to the GQ-6 ($p = .002$), and specific GQ-6 questions ($p < .05$) (See Appendix X).

The first year of implementation could focus on training all of their English or Social Science sixth grade teachers. For it is crucial for the district to ensure teacher buy-in. Teacher training should be part of the teacher's workday. One full day of training should include training on the purpose of the intervention and universal testing, why to implement the intervention (the research), when to implement the intervention, and materials and resources to support the curriculum.

The second year of implementation would continue to support the sixth-grade teachers and also add training for 7th grade teachers and the third year to 8th grade teachers. This training would support these teachers to continue giving time to their students to write in their journals. Each school site could determine how to continue to support student's social-emotional health in 7th and 8th grade. Part of each school's plan should provide students with class time to set weekly goals, write in their journal, and reflect upon their week.

As part of their already multi-tiered support system (MTSS), each middle school should also determine how to support their students who need even more support. If the middle school has a built-in intervention time, a possible idea would be to recommend students for Tier 2 interventions. A Tier 2 intervention could be implemented by the school counselor. In a smaller setting, students would be guided in their discussion and given time to write in their journals. If students need further support the school counselor could follow up with individualized Tier 3 support interventions.

For students who may be high in strengths and low in risk (thriving), enrichment opportunities may include allowing students to use their enrichment time to write in their journals. Enrichment teachers would need to have Chrome books to allow students to write in their journals.

Also, each district must support the social-emotional health of their administrators, teachers, and parents. Districts could support administration, teachers, and parents by offering workshops of how to maintain a gratitude journal. The district may also consider having a parent's night to educate parents on the intervention.

Implications for Administrators

The administrator's support is key to the success of any intervention, and, in fact,

according to the research, “they haven’t found a school that was effective that didn’t have a strong instructional leader” (Crow, 2012, para. 43). Since the administrator is considered the lead learner in the school, it is recommended for the principal to nurture their social emotional health by maintaining their own gratitude journal.

To support the intervention, administrators could share the word of the week to the school, staff, and parents. Administrators may also consider supporting the social-emotional health of their staff, by giving them time during a staff meeting or staff development to express gratitude to their colleagues. The principal may consider even putting together a committee to support this. One principal even encourages her staff to all keep their own gratitude journal (S. Golbaf, personal communication, April 4, 2020). Another administrator encouraged his teachers to practice Three Good Things (McDonough, 2017).

Implications for Teachers

For all educators, taking students to a higher Depth of Knowledge (DOK) is a daily goal. Scaffolding the DOK level often takes time, and multiple lessons. Deeper learning is “clarifying learning goals, having a precision in pedagogy and shifting practices through capacity building” (Fullan & Quinn, 2016, p. 80). Deeper learning involves “new knowledge to solve real-life problems and incorporates a range of skills and attitudes” (Fullan & Quinn, 2016, p. 83). It focuses on the well-being of the whole student and incorporates what is called the 6Cs (Fullan & Quinn). The 6Cs are communication, critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, character, and citizenship (Fullan & Quinn). It embraces John Dewey’s philosophy that education is “preparation for life, it is life” (Fullan & Quinn, p. 87). Deepening learning encourages the teacher to be an activator, and for students to take an active role in their own education (Fullan and Quinn, 2016). Deepening learning is “the core strategy for affecting student results” (Fullan

and Quinn, 2016, p. 107).

The two stages of gratitude to acknowledge and recognize cause an individual to demonstrate the highest form of critical thinking, or depth of knowledge (Emmons, 2007). Furthermore, both stages of gratitude, acknowledging and recognizing, take thought, thus activating deeper learning and critical thinking, which will ultimately affect student's results (Emmons, 2007; Fullan and Quinn, 2016).

Teaching Gratitude as a Goal

There is a need for students to be motivated, engaged, and focused (Webb & Norton, 2013); one way to do this is by having students set goals (King, 2000; Lafield, 2013; Webb & Norton). Setting life goals has also been reported to have health benefits (King, 2001). According to Latham and Pinder (2005), ever since 1990, the most dominant theory in motivation is goal setting. For goals to motivate performance, they must maintain the following elements: "They must be specific, be challenging, be committed to by the individual, and be ones the [student] believes he or she can attain" (Webb & Norton, pp. 137-138). The goal-setting theory implies, "Attainable goals increase motivation because they reinforce effort and persistence, and their accomplishment contributes to a sense of accomplishment and self-efficacy" (Webb & Norton, 2013, p. 138). Moreover, setting goals will aid in increasing interest, motivation, and student engagement (Lafield, 2013; Webb & Norton, 2013).

To bring the benefits of goals into the classroom setting, one middle school teacher began each class period with having students set a goal for the period (Lafield, 2013). Using the Skills of Independence as a framework enabled students in creating attainable, strategic, and relevant goals (Lafield). The Skills of Independence are:

- “Be a self- starter. If you know, something needs to be done, do it before anyone asks you to.”
- “Make wise use of your time. If you have five extra minutes, use them to get your homework done, read or make sure you have everything you need for your next class.”
- “Be trusted. Do the right thing, even when no one is watching.”
- “Do not distract others and choose not to be distracted by others” (Lafield).
- “Be thankful. Choose to be thankful even when you do not feel like it.”

One way to reap the benefits of both The Goal Setting Theory and gratitude is for students to make goals relating to what they are grateful for. After reading the objective agenda, a student might write they are grateful to learn or gain a deeper understanding of the new concept being taught that day. Teaching gratitude as a goal may aid in overall student engagement, and motivation, thus leaving a student in a positive trajectory for life (Frederickson, 2013; Lafield, 2013; Webb & Norton, 2013). One student who practiced goals and gratitude in 6th grade, three years later wrote a letter to her teacher explaining how it had affected her middle school years. She writes,

You taught me things no other teacher did. Not only did you teach me about history, but you also taught me things about life. You taught me to appreciate the little things about life and to set goals. Every week five minutes of gratitude taught me there is so much to be thankful for. Even though it was only five minutes, it had a huge impact on my life to this day. You have inspired me to make goals in no matter what I do, and it has allowed me to accomplish a lot in life, so far. Thanks to you, I was able to have a successful middle school experience of goal setting and gratitude. [This student earned not only the

Superintendents' Award, but also the Presidential Award, a grade point average of 3.875 to 4.0 for three consecutive years and 2700, or above on the Smarter Balance State testing.] Thank you for teaching me some things that I am so glad to be able to carry with me through high school. (T. Kaminski, personal communication, May 17, 2019)

The Skills of Independence may be taught in any order, but to increase motivation, the teacher may wish to begin with the last one first: Choose to be thankful, even when you do not feel like it. It is recommended for the student to only focus on one goal a day, or even one per week as this enables students to gain small successes and gain confidence in themselves. Once a student chooses their goal, they may write it down in a journal, or on a goal sheet (Appendix C). Next, orally sharing their goal with a partner or the class further reinforces it. This can all occur in the time it takes for the teacher to take attendance. Moreover, utilizing the goal theory with gratitude may be an effective way to reap the benefits of gratitude, while increasing motivation at the same time (Fredrickson, 2013; Lafield, 2013; Webb & Norton, 2013).

Implications for Parents

If the district is implementing this intervention, it is recommended for all middle school parents to understand this intervention and to be given an opportunity to nurture their social-emotional health. One way to do this is by maintaining a gratitude journal. Additionally, parents can daily nurture their own child's sense of gratitude starting at any age. A recommended resource is a book written by Jeffery Froh and Giacomo Bono (2014) entitled: *Making Grateful Kids: The Science of Building Character*.

Recommendations for Further Research

For future study, it is recommended to investigate the causal factors for decline in

gratitude and social emotional health for middles school students. Also replicating this study with a greater sample size of teachers, students, schools, and districts. For teachers, a sample size of at least 100 teachers is recommended, it would not be necessary for all of the teachers to test all of their students. For students, doing the same intervention with various grade levels both above (grade 9-12) and below (grade 4-5) middle school is recommended. This study should also be expanded to multiple schools and districts. Finally, this study needs to be lengthened in time from 15 weeks to a full year if possible.

Conclusions

This study adds to the growing literature of scientific data on gratitude by exploring its social-emotional health benefits. When students practiced gratitude, they reported greater awareness and apperception for their life, others, and what they had been given. There is evidence to show that self-awareness may increase self-efficacy, leading students to become happier and better people. Gratitude helped students cope with stress shifting their perspective from negative to positive. The increase in optimism may lead to an increased ability to focus and excel in learning.

These findings are worthy of consideration in education. Educators may consider embedding gratitude practices in the classroom in hopes of enhancing student's social-emotional health and academics. It is important to note, students in sixth grade had additional benefits, implying the need to integrate this practice in the early middle school or late elementary years. This study serves as an encouragement to provide class time to support the growing social-emotional needs of the whole child.

Summary

Since gratitude in adults has been found to enhance “Nearly all spheres of human experience,” this suggests similar benefits to children as well (Emmons & Stern, 2013, p. 846). Given the issues facing society and schools today including a lack of emotional intelligence, negativity, and loneliness, gratitude may be the missing link education is looking for. Based on the broad and build theory and the upward spiral of lifestyle change, gratitude may be able to help undo negative emotions and lead students on a positive trajectory.

In summary, the purpose of this study was two-fold. First, for the quantitative study, this researcher sought to determine if maintaining a gratitude journal would lead to an increase in emotional wellbeing (Covitality) and gratitude. Given the above findings, the gratitude intervention unveiled 25 statistically significant results ($p < .05$). Next for the qualitative phenomenological study, the purpose was to explore the meaning middle school students ascribe to experience when maintaining a gratitude journal and to determine if the intervention is a viable way to incorporate SEL into the classroom. Furthermore, the qualitative findings discovered maintaining gratitude led students to report an effect in 11 of the 12 blocks related to positive psychology (SEHS): Self-awareness, self-efficacy, persistence, family coherence, peer support, school support, gratitude, optimism, emotional regulation, self-control, and empathy.

A Final Reflection on Gratitude

Greatness lies in each individual, yet it appears many miss out on their destiny. Like a thick fog, negativity, fear, and resentment often cover one’s path making it impossible to navigate. Next, life circumstances, sickness, and loss send many to focus on what they do not have, rather than what they do. Being stuck in a downward spiral for long feeds the addiction

and seems to take the very soul of its victims (Fredrickson, 2013). Eyes no longer light up, apathy takes over, and dreams disappear. Similarly, a computer can be taken over by a small virus, only to be rendered useless.

While there are many solutions to rebooting, one's life, gratitude offers a small adjustment, resulting in a plethora of results (Ackerman, 2017; Allen, 2018; Emmons, 2012). It is free, takes little time, and has been around since the beginning. Gratitude is pausing to look for the good (Emmons & Stern, 2013). After the creation of light, land, water, plants, trees, stars, the moon, the Sun, creatures of the sea, every living thing, livestock and human beings; the divine paused, and "saw that it was good" (Genesis 1:3, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, NLT). Scripture empathizes the importance of gratitude nearly 150 times (Wilson, 2015).

Underlining each religion, it can be found (Emmons & Crumpler, 2000). It is the universal key to unlocking life's joys (Emmons, 2012). It will buffer one's life, and even undo negative effects (Fredrickson, 2013). It is found in the roots of every successful recovery program (Alan, 2018; Emmons & Stern, 2013; Young & Hutchinson, 2012). One individual who spent two decades homeless on the streets of Skid Row refers to it as a sort of, "Utopia," he goes on to explain, "It is too good to describe, and must be experienced" (J. Barrett, personal communication, November 11, 2018). From recognizing another's kindness, to appreciating nature, or realizing the gifts in life, "Gratitude enhances nearly all spheres of human experience" (Emmons & Stern, 2013, p. 846).

Therapists utilize it as a mental health intervention (Emmons & Stern, 2013). Early on most parents teach it to their small children. In the United States, there is even a holiday for it. Spoken in every language, it has bridged gaps of misunderstanding and hurt. If utilized, it will transform an individual's path leading to an upward spiral (Fredrickson, 2013). Like atoms,

forming the matter of everything, the human eye cannot see it, unless one decides to open up their eyes and magnify the good, it can be easily missed.

Similar to the tongue, it may be one of the smallest members, however, the presence or absence of it has both the power of life and death (James 3:3, NIV; Proverbs 18:21, NIV). While it is found in every language, culture, and religion (Emmons & Crumpler, 2000). It is maybe more than a word or two. It may be bigger than an intervention, practice, lifestyle, or even mindset. To the researcher, gratitude is the language of heaven; one she is only beginning to learn and thinks will take an eternity to unravel.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: First Week of Goals and Gratitude Journal



Goals and Gratitude Journal



Goals and Gratitude: Make Gratitude Your Goal!

Written by Mariah Mayer

WEEK 1 • GRATITUDE

The Skills of Independence

- **Self- starter:** If you know something needs to be done, do it before anyone asks.
- **Time-manager:** Make wise use of your time.
- **Trusted:** Do the right thing, even when no one is watching.
- **Focused:** Do not distract others and choose to not be distracted.
- **Thankful:** Choose to be thankful, even when you don't feel like it.

Passport Power Word	Skill	Example(s)	Quote of the week
Gratitude	Be thankful. Choose to be thankful even when you don't feel like it.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thankful - Grateful - Self-management - Self-awareness - Social-awareness - Relationship skills - Responsible decision making 	<p>"It is not happiness that brings gratitude, but rather gratitude that brings happiness."</p> <p><i>Optional:</i> Find another quote about gratitude (write in the space below).</p>

W E D N E S D A Y

Objective: Watch video, and start your gratitude journal.

Video link: [The Gratitude Experiment](#)

Directions for starting a gratitude journal: Over the next weeks months, we will be working on cultivating a sense of gratitude. This means that you make an effort to think about the good things in your life, both large and small, that you have to be grateful about. These might include friendships, family members, sacrifices or contributions that others have made for you. You can also include facts about your life such as your advantages and opportunities, or even gratitude for life itself, and the world that we live in. In all of these cases you are identifying previously unappreciated aspects of your life, for which you can be thankful. Each week, you will be given five minutes in class to write. You may do so in the space below, or in a paper journal. So you are able to discover how many many blessings you have been given, please number your entries, include the date, and write at least one sentence about each person, place or thing. Note: If you write in your paper journal, please indicate what number you are on in the space below.

Sample journal (with sentence starters), and sample responses.

Date: _____

1. Today I am grateful for _____

_____.

2. I am thankful for _____

_____ ,

because _____

_____.

3. Something, I have not been grateful for is... (ex: running water, many people in the world still do not have it)

_____.

Appendix B: Counting One's Blessings

You may either write the directions or give them to the individuals verbally (Emmons & McCullough, 2003).

Directions: Let me get more specific. You have been randomly assigned to try to cultivate a sense of gratitude now, and during the next few weeks. “Cultivate a sense of gratitude” means that you make an effort to think about the many things in your life, both large and small, that you have to be grateful about. These might include particular supportive relationships, sacrifices or contributions that others have made for you, facts about your life such as your advantages and opportunities, or even gratitude for life itself, and the world that we live in. In all of these cases you are identifying previously unappreciated aspects of your life, for which you can be thankful. You may not have thought about yourself in this way before, but research suggests that doing so can have a strong positive effect on your mood and life satisfaction. So, we’d like to ask you to continue thinking in this way over the next few weeks, following up on the initial writing that you’re about to do.

Appendix C: Three Good Things

Directions: Each day for at least one week, write down three things that went well for you that day and provide an explanation for why they went well. It is important to create a physical record of your items by writing them down; it is not enough simply to do this exercise in your head. The items can be relatively small in importance (e.g., “my co-worker made the coffee today”) or relatively large (e.g., “I earned a big promotion”). To make this exercise part of your daily routine, some find that writing before bed is helpful.

As you write, follow these instructions:

1. Give the event a title (e.g., “co-worker complimented my work on a project”)
2. Write down exactly what happened in as much detail as possible, including what you did or said and, if others were involved, what they did or said.
3. Include how this event made you feel at the time and how this event made you feel later (including now, as you remember it).
4. Explain what you think caused this event—why it came to pass.
5. Use whatever writing style you please, and do not worry about perfect grammar and spelling. Use as much detail as you'd like.
6. If you find yourself focusing on negative feelings, refocus your mind on the good event and the positive feelings that came with it. This can take effort but gets easier with practice and can make a real difference in how you feel. (The Greater Good, n.d.)

Appendix D: The First Week of Teacher's Guide

**WEEK 1: MONDAY**

- ☐ Introduce Gratitude
- ☐ Share quote
- ☐ Share story
- ☐ Teach students how to format Goals and Gratitude Journal
- ☐ Give students time to write Passport Power Word Week 1 Goal

STEP 1:

PROJECT WEEK 1 POWERPOINT SLIDE (2)

Share Passport Power Word Skill: Gratitude

“Be thankful. Choose to be thankful even when you don't feel like it.”

STEP 2:

PROJECT WEEK 1 POWERPOINT SLIDE (2)

Share Quote:

"It is not happiness that brings gratitude, but rather gratitude that brings happiness."

Teacher Reads Short Story: The Bag of Treasure (written by *Mariah Mayer*)

There was once a little girl who traveled to the shores of Mexico. She loved going to this deserted beach because it had what seemed like thousands of sand dollars. Her first trip there, she

tried to take some home, but she did not have a bag, so all of the sand dollars she took, unfortunately broke.

The following year, upon her return, she brought with her a small bag, and even tissue to wrap each sand dollar. She carefully wrapped each one, and took them home as her prized possession, proudly displaying them in her home. Each time she would look at the delicate sand dollars, she remembered her special time in Mexico, and was filled with a similar joy akin to being there.

Now this little girl has grown up, and she continues to collect the beauty around her. She does so by keeping a gratitude journal. In her journal she writes down what she is thankful for, her favorite part of the day, things she wants to remember, and people she appreciates. To her, this book has become her treasure, for it holds all of the places, thoughts, and ideas from around the world. Each day, she wakes up, and puts in more treasures. You would think her bag by this time would have broken, but it continues to expand, filling her with new delight each time she opens it, or puts more treasures inside.

Similar to a pirate's bag of priceless treasure, this book holds what is most dear to her. She believes the more treasures she puts in her bag, the more colors she sees in the world, as a result her life keeps getting brighter taking her to an endless upward spiral of joy, love, and gratitude.

Mayer Message (utilize to discuss story and quote)

Note: I typically start off the 1st day of school with gratitude, so you may want to adjust whatever you say.

Welcome to 6th grade. I am sure you read the sign on the door stating, "Wait time 5 minutes, until the BEST class begins!" I want to assure you, this is going to be your best year yet! You have graduated from elementary school and now you are officially in middle school. I know there are many mixed feelings in the room. Some of you have been anticipating this day for as long as you can remember. To you, middle school students have always been scary and now that you are here, you are really not sure about this. What you need to realize is, while some of you feel too young to be here, the students in 5th grade next already see you as the big kids. This morning I know some of you are struggling with being at school at all, you have had a great summer and you are not ready for school to start. I am going to ask you to choose to be thankful, even when you don't feel like it. This past summer, I went to Swaziland Africa. I stood in amazement when I entered their classrooms. There were desks for maybe 25. The class sizes were 65-75. Be thankful you are sitting in a chair. In Africa, most of the desks were broken. If a student moved the wrong way, the top of the desk, would fall on them. Be thankful you have your own desk. Your desk will not hurt you. The classroom walls had no color, the paint was chipping off the walls. Look around at all the color in our class. You may think it is too hot to be at school, but have you noticed how nice and cool the air conditioning is?! Be thankful for air conditioning. It is much hotter in Africa and they do not have air-conditioned classrooms. There is no projector in their classroom just simply a chalkboard. Students were provided with 2 pencils for the entire year. Many had lost their pencils or simply used them up. In order for students to write their name on their paper, they had to pass the pencil around the room. Be thankful for your pens, pencils, paper and all your school supplies.

This year, we will be learning about (you explain your content area), but we also will work on gratitude. We will work on being thankful, even when we don't feel like it. Every day you

come into my class; I want you to think of at least one thing you are thankful for. I have asked you to get a notebook or journal. You will use this to write down all the things you are thankful for each and every day. I know many things happen, that you are not thankful for, but even these things I hope you will include in your journal. On my plane ride to Africa, I was having a very hard time being grateful. I found it difficult to sleep in my chair, so I wrote, I am thankful I do not have to normally sleep in a chair. I have a bed; I get to lay down when I sleep. A baby cried for most of the flight, my flight was almost 12 hours, I wrote I am thankful I am able to sleep in a quiet house.

In Africa, we work with nearly 200 AIDS orphans at a care point. It is at this care point, the students come to get their 2 meals per day, but some of the students are still in school, so we will bring them food. There was one girl her name was Temvelo she lived with her grandmother, both her mom and dad had died. Every day she woke up and started walking to school at 6:30am. When I went to visit her home at 5pm that evening she was still not home. School was very far. It took her at least an hour to walk there. She did not have a bus to take or a car available. I became friends with one of her cousins, she told me how hard Temvelo had been working, but that even though she had worked really hard this year, she would not be going on to the next grade level. She would need to repeat. Not because of her grades, but because she was not able to afford the school fees. School fees?! I asked?! Isn't school free?!

No, school in Africa is not free. If you cannot pay the fees you do not pass. Be thankful, today you have graduated to the next grade level, be thankful you passed 5th grade. Be thankful, you did not have to pay school fees. If someone drove you to school, be thankful. If you walked

or rode your bike be grateful you have legs. If you had an incredible summer, be thankful for all the good memories. I hope you will look back on your summer and write about all the things you were able to do, all the people you were able to spend time with and I hope you will even write about today. Be grateful you are able to go to school. Be thankful you are able to see your friends, make new friends and learn new things.

Remember: "It is not happiness that brings gratitude, but rather gratitude that bring happiness." So, choose to be thankful, even when you don't feel like it!

STEP 3:

Give students time to write in journal (see Student journal below):

1. Write a goal for the week, based on the Passport Power Word.
2. Write what the quote of the week means and how they can apply it to their life.
3. Write about their weekend. What are they grateful for that they were able to do this weekend?

Student Journal

Week 1: *Gratitude*

The Skills of Independence

- **Self- starter:** If you know something needs to be done, do it before anyone asks.

- **Time-manager:** Make wise use of your time.
- **Trusted:** Do the right thing, even when no one is watching.
- **Focused:** Do not distract others and choose to not be distracted.
- **Thankful:** Choose to be thankful, even when you don't feel like it.

Passport Power Word	Skill	Example(s)	Quote of the week
Gratitude	Be thankful. Choose to be thankful even when you don't feel like it.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thankful • Grateful • Self-management • Self-awareness • Social awareness • Relationship skills • Responsible decision making 	<p>"It is not happiness that brings gratitude, but rather gratitude that brings happiness."</p> <p><i>Optional:</i> Find another quote about gratitude (write in the space below).</p>

Monday

Objective: Read story, discuss quote of the week, and write a goal for the week.

Short Story: The Bag of Treasure (written by *Mariah Mayer*)

There was once a little girl who traveled to the shores of Mexico. She loved going to this deserted beach because it had what seemed like thousands of sand dollars. Her first trip there, she

tried to take some home, but she did not have a bag, so all of the sand dollars she took, unfortunately broke.

The following year, upon her return, she brought with her a small bag, and even tissue to wrap each sand dollar. She carefully wrapped each one, and took them home as her prized possession, proudly displaying them in her home. Each time she would look at the delicate sand dollars, she remembered her special time in Mexico, and was filled with a similar joy akin to being there.

Now this little girl has grown up, and she continues to collect the beauty around her. She does so by keeping a gratitude journal. In her journal she writes down what she is thankful for, her favorite part of the day, things she wants to remember, and people she appreciates. To her, this book has become her treasure, for it holds all of the places, thoughts, and ideas from around the world. Each day, she wakes up, and puts in more treasures. You would think her bag by this time would have broken, but it continues to expand, filling her with new delight each time she opens it, or puts more treasures inside.

Similar to a pirate's bag of priceless treasure, this book holds what is most dear to her. She believes the more treasures she puts in her bag, the more colors she sees in the world, as a result her life keeps getting brighter taking her to an endless upward spiral of joy, love, and gratitude.

Optional: Write a short story narrative about the passport power word. If your story is chosen, it could appear in **published** curriculum. (Length=a paragraph less 250 words.)

*Submit your story to mnmayer@capousd.org

- Based on the word of the week (gratitude), what is your goal for this week?

- What does the quote mean, and how can you apply it to yourself? (*Optional*: If you find another quote about gratitude you can include it in the space below the quote of the week.)
- What did you do this weekend that you are grateful for? Explain (Include sensory details: see, smell, taste, feel, sound)

WEEK 1: WEDNESDAY

- ☐ Show Video
- ☐ Request Student Feedback
- ☐ Give students 5 minutes to journal

STEP 1:

Show video: Video link: [The Gratitude Experiment](#)

STEP 2:

Discussion: Ask students if anyone would like to share their thoughts about the video with the class.

STEP 3:

PROJECT WEEK 1 POWERPOINT SLIDE (3)

Give students 5 minutes to journal (Writing prompts provided on slide)

SAY: You have been randomly assigned to try to cultivate a sense of gratitude now, and during the next few weeks. “Cultivating a sense of gratitude” means that you make an effort to think about the many things in your life, both large and small, that you have to be grateful about. These might include particular supportive relationships, sacrifices or contributions that others have made for you, facts about your life such as your advantages and opportunities, or even gratitude for life itself, and the world that we live in. In all of these cases you are identifying previously unappreciated aspects of your life, for which you can be thankful. You may not have thought about yourself in this way before, but research suggests that doing so can have a strong positive effect on your mood and life satisfaction. So, we’d like to ask you to continue thinking in this way over the next few weeks, following up on the initial writing that you’re about to do.

Student Journal

Wednesday

Objective: *Watch video and start your gratitude journal.*

Directions for starting a gratitude journal: *Over the next weeks months, we will be working on cultivating a sense of gratitude. This means that you make an effort to think about the good things in your life, both large and small, that you have to be grateful about. These might include friendships, family members, sacrifices or contributions that others have made for you. You can also include facts about your life such as your advantages and opportunities, or even gratitude for life itself, and the world that we live in. In all of these cases you are identifying previously*

unappreciated aspects of your life, for which you can be thankful. Each week, you will be given five minutes in class to write. You may do so in the space below, or in a paper journal. So, you are able to discover how many blessings you have been given, please number your entries, include the date, and write at least one sentence about each person, place or thing. Note: If you write in your paper journal, please indicate what number you are on in the space below.

Sample journal (with sentence starters), and *sample* responses.

Date:

1. **Today I am grateful for**
2. **I am thankful for _____, because**
3. **Something, I have not been grateful for is *running water, many people in the world still do not have it.***

WEEK 1: FRIDAY

- ☐ Give students 5 minutes to reflect and journal (see Student journal below)

STEP 1:

PROJECT WEEK 1 POWERPOINT SLIDE (4)

Give students 5 minutes to reflect and journal on their Passport Power Word Goal for the week. Encourage students to think about how successful or unsuccessful they were in achieving their goal. Encourage students to think about how they can set and achieve future goals better – if applicable. (Writing prompts provided in student journal and on slide)

Friday


1. How did you do with your goal this week?

2. What did you learn about the word of the week (gratitude)?


Appendix E: Sample of Teacher's Google Slide Presentation

Gratitude


"It is not happiness that brings gratitude, but rather gratitude that brings happiness."



What is your goal for being grateful?



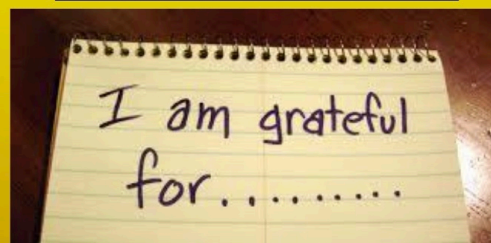
GRATITUDE EXPERIMENT




Be Grateful

Choose to be *grateful*, even when you don't feel like it.

Gratitude: Being Thankful; Showing Appreciation





What are you grateful for?
Who can you show gratitude towards this week?
How can you show gratitude this week?



Appendix F: Social Emotional Health Survey

Belief-in-self Self-efficacy

Prompt select the answer that best describes how true you feel that this statement is about you personally...

Response 1 = not at all true 2 = a little true 3 = pretty much true 4 = very much true

1. I can work out my problems.
2. I can do most things if I try.
3. There are many things that I do well.

Self-awareness

Prompt select the answer that best describes how true you feel that this statement is about you personally...

Response 1 = not at all true 2 = a little true 3 = pretty much true 4 = very much true

4. There is a purpose to my life.
5. I understand my moods and feelings.
6. I understand why I do what I do.

Persistence

Prompt select the answer that best describes how much you feel that this statement is like you personally

Response 1 = not at all true 2 = a little true 3 = pretty much true 4 = very much true

7. When I do not understand something, I ask the teacher again and again until I understand.
8. I try to answer all the questions asked in class.
9. When I try to solve a math problem, I will not stop until I find a final solution.

Belief-in-others/School support

Prompt At my school, there is a teacher or some other adult...

Response 1 = not at all true, 2 = a little true, 3 = pretty much true, 4 = very much true

10. ...who always wants me to do my best.

11. ...who listens to me when I have something to say.

12. ...who believes that I will be a success.

Family coherence

Prompt how much do you agree or disagree with this statement...

Response 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, 4 = strongly agree

13. My family members really help and support one another.

14. There is a feeling of togetherness in my family.

15. My family really gets along well with each other.

Peer support

Prompt select the answer that best describes how true you feel that this statement is about you personally...

Response 1 = not at all true, 2 = a little true, 3 = pretty much true, 4 = very much true

16. I have a friend my age who really cares about me.

17. I have a friend my age who talks with me about my problems.

18. I have a friend my age who helps me when I'm having a hard time.

Emotional competence/Emotional regulation

Prompt select the answer that best describes how true you feel that this statement is about you personally...

Response 1 = not at all like me, 2 = not very much like me, 3 = like me, 4 = very much like me.

19. I accept responsibility for my actions.

20. When I make a mistake, I admit it.

21. I can deal with being told no.

Empathy

Prompt select the answer that best describes how true you feel that this statement is about you personally...

Response 1 = not at all like me, 2 = not very much like me, 3 = like me, 4 = very much like me

22. I feel bad when someone gets their feelings hurt.

23. I try to understand what other people go through.

24. I try to understand how other people feel and think.

Behavioral self-control

Prompt select the answer that best describes how true you feel that this statement is about you personally...

Response 1 = really untrue 2 = sort of untrue, 3 = true, 4 = really true

25. I can wait for what I want.

26. I don't bother others when they are busy.

27. I think before I act.

Engaged living:

Optimism

Prompt select the answer that best describes how true you feel that this statement is about you personally.

Response 1 = not true of me, 2 = sort of not true of me, 3 = sort of true of me, 4 = true of me

28. Each day I look forward to having a lot of fun.

29. I usually expect to have a good day.

30. Overall, I expect more good things to happen to me than bad things.

Gratitude

Prompt Select the answer that best describes how much you have experienced this feeling “since yesterday”

Response 1 = not at all, 2 = a little, 3 = moderately, 4 = quite a bit, 5 = extremely

31. Grateful

32. Thankful

33. Appreciative

Zest

Prompt these words describe feelings people have. Please read each one carefully. How much do you have this feeling right now?

Response 1 = not at all, 2 = a little, 3 = moderately, 4 = quite a bit, 5 = extremely

34. Energetic

35. Active

36. Lively

Appendix G: The Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6) and Gratitude Questions on the SEHS

The GQ-6:

Instructions: Using the scale below as a guide, write a number beside each statement to indicate how much you agree with it. (One = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = slightly disagree 4 = neutral, 5 = slightly agree 6 = agree, 7 = strongly agree).

- ____ 1. I have so much in life to be thankful for.
- ____ 2. If I had to list everything that I felt grateful for, it would be a very long list.
- ____ 3. When I look at the world, I don't see much to be grateful for.
- ____ 4. I am grateful to a wide variety of people.
- ____ 5. As I get older, I find myself more able to appreciate the people, events, and situations that have been part of my life history.
- ____ 6. Long amounts of time can go by before I feel grateful to something or someone.

Scoring: Compute a mean across the item ratings; items 3 and 6 are reverse-scored.

The SEHS questions related to gratitude or “engaged living.”

Engaged living: Gratitude

Prompt Select the answer that best describes how much you have experienced this feeling “since yesterday” (Response 1 = not at all, 2 = a little, 3 = moderately, 4 = quite a bit, 5 = extremely).

31. Grateful

32. Thankful

33. Appreciative

GQ-6 (using 4 of the 6 questions)

37. “I have so much in life to be thankful for.

38. If I had to list everything that I felt grateful for, it would be a very long list.

39. "I am grateful to a wide variety of people."

40. "I get older I find myself more able to appreciate the people, events, and situations that have been part of my life history."

Appendix H: Open-ended Questions Added to the Post-test Survey

Confounding Variable: Academics

44. “During the past 12 months, how would you describe the grades you mostly received in school?”

8 = mostly A’s

7 = A’s and B’s

6 = mostly B’s

5 = B’s and C’s

4 = mostly C’s

3 = C’s and D’s

2 = mostly D’s

1 = mostly F’s

Confounding Variable: Frequency of Implementation

45. How often do you write in your gratitude journal?

Never

1 to 2 times a week

3 to 4 times a week

Nearly every day

Everyday

Confounding Variable: Student Engagement

46. How often do you miss school?

Never

1 to 2 times a week

3 to 4 times a week

Nearly every day

Everyday

Confounding Variable: Student Behavior

47. Check all that apply to this past school year.

I received a warning from a teacher

I have received a warning from more than one teacher

I have been put on step one by at least one of my teachers.

I have been put on step one by more than one teacher.

I have been put on step two by one of my teachers.

I have been put on step two by more than one teacher.

Trash pick up

Detention

Office referral

Suspension

Expelled from my last school

Open ended questions (Qualitative)

48. Describe your experience with keeping a gratitude journal?

49. How would you describe gratitude?

50. What situations have supported you experiencing gratitude?

51. What situations have hindered experiencing gratitude?

52. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix I: Permission from Researcher to Use the Social Emotional Survey

October 25, 2018

Hi Mariah,

Thank you for contacting me and for your kind words.

With respect to the SEHS, I presume you are using this with secondary students, correct. I also presume that you have seen our website, www.project-covitality.info where we post updated information; Please let me know how your project goes.

Best, Mike

Michael Furlong, PHD

Website: www.michaelfurlong.info

Project Covitality: www.project-covitality.info

Research Gate: www.researchgate.net/profile/Michael_Furlong2

U.S. News & World Report rank: UC Santa Barbara No. 5 among the USA's top public universities

“Doubt is not a pleasant condition, but certainty is an absurd one”

↩ **Mike Furlong**

10/25/18



Re: Social Emotional Health Survey (GQ-6) - Google F... [Details](#)

To: I Really Love Macie, Erin, Karen

Hi Mariah,

Thank you for contacting me and for your kind words.
With respect to the SEHS, I presume you are using this with secondary students, correct? I also presume that you have seen our website, www.project-covitality.info where we post updated information, Please let me know how your project goes.

Best, Mike

Michael Furlong, PHD

Website: www.michaelfurlong.info

Project Covitality: www.project-covitality.info

Research Gate: [www.researchgate.net/profile/](http://www.researchgate.net/profile/Michael_Furlong2)

[Michael_Furlong2](#)

U.S. News & World Report rank: UC Santa Barbara No. 5
among the USA's top public universities

“Doubt is not a pleasant condition, but certainty is an absurd one”

Appendix J: Permission from the Researcher to Use GQ-6

Email from Michael Earl McCullough

October 26, 2018, at 3:34 am

Dear Mariah:

Thanks for this. You are very welcome to use the GQ-6 in any non-commercial context you'd like.

Good luck in your work.

All best wishes,

Mike

Michael Earl McCullough

To: Mariah Mayer

[Details](#)



RE: Permission to use the GQ-6

October 26, 2018 at 3:34 AM

Dear Mariah:

Thanks for this. You are very welcome to use the GQ-6 in any non-commercial context you'd like.

Good luck in your work.

All best wishes,

Mike

From: Mariah Mayer [<mailto:mariahnmayer@gmail.com>]

Sent: Thursday, October 25, 2018 10:16 PM

To: McCullough, Michael Earl <mikem@miami.edu>

Subject: Permission to use the GQ-6

Dr. McCullough,

Thank you for your brilliant contributions to gratitude research!

I am requesting permission to use the GQ-6 in a pilot study conducted by Dr. Eugene Kim, a professor at Concordia University.

Appendix K: Site Authorization

Page 1 of 2

APPENDIX E: SITE AUTHORIZATION for pilot study

Title of Study: Social Emotional Health and Gratitude

Researcher/s: Mariah Mayer

Researcher/s' Affiliation with Site: Bernice Ayer Middle School Teacher

Researcher/s' Phone Numbers: (949) 291-0929

Researcher/s' CUI Email (unless not from CUI): mnmayer@capousd.org

Researcher/s' University Supervisor: Eugene Kim

Univ. Supervisor's Phone & Email

(949) 333-9188

eugene.kim@cui.edu

Location/s where Study will Occur:

Bernice Ayer Middle School

1271 Calle Sarmentoso

San Clemente, Ca 92673

(949) 366-9607

Fred Newhart Middle School

25001 Veterans Way
Mission Viejo, CA 92692
(949) 855-0162

Niguel Middle School
29070 Paseo Escuela,
Laguna Niguel, CA 92677
949 234-5360

Las Flores Middle School
25862 Antonio Pkwy
Rancho Santa Margarita, CA 92688
949 589-6543

Purpose of Study (1-2 paragraphs):

The purpose of this study is to determine the effects of gratitude interventions on social and emotional health for middle school students. Through this study, students will ascribe meaning as they learn about gratitude, its benefits, and how to practice it. One of the ways students will practice gratitude is by maintaining a gratitude journal. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the meaning middle school students ascribe to experience,

when maintaining a gratitude journal, and to investigate how gratitude impacts one's social-emotional health.

Procedures to be Followed:

First, the researcher created a curriculum to assist teachers in teaching gratitude. The researcher put together a year's worth of quotes, stories, and videos. Next, the stakeholder applied to research in the district. Once both the district and IRB approved the study, the researcher sought teachers who wanted to volunteer. Next, each teacher was trained by the researcher. Out of all of the participating classes ($N = 40$), half of the classes (20) implemented the curriculum.

Classrooms followed the same curricular standards and goals, but some classrooms the *intervention classrooms* implemented the gratitude curriculum. Having non-intervention classes helped to show “the ‘counterfactual’ of what would have happened without the presence of the presumed cause” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 129). Participants in the study received full disclosure and informed consent form. They were able to opt out of the study at any time during the study's duration. The procedures set out in this study utilized the following structure.

Before the Intervention

Before the pre-test could be administered, permission will be obtained from Concordia International Research Board (IRB). Next, the researcher will obtained permission from the district Capistrano Unified School District, CUSD. Then, the researcher received site authorization from the principals of each of the middle schools (Appendix). All classes filled out an Informed Student Consent Form (Appendix). Students were told they could stop participating at any time. To ensure students understood, each of the participating teachers read the consent forms aloud. If students had questions, they were answered either whole class or individually.

Students were not required nor penalized for not participating. After students signed the consent forms, each teacher collected them and stored them in a secure location. Next, Parent Informed Consent Forms were sent home (Appendix). Parent consent forms were stored in a secure location. Once all forms were collected, the researcher collected all forms and stored them in a secure location. Once permission was granted, each class took the survey on Google Forms utilizing google classroom. The researcher set up a google classroom to manage all of the data. Each of the intervention classes wrote their journal on a google doc that was connected to the researcher's google classroom. Before students began the survey, each teacher read the directions aloud to their class. While the survey was being administered, each of the classroom teachers walked around and helped out any students who needed extra support (to read or understand the questions). The survey took approximately 15 minutes.

The Intervention

Students in the *intervention classrooms* maintained a digital goal and gratitude journal. Each week students were exposed to a word of the week, or passport power word. At the beginning of each week, the word of the week was introduced along with the story, quote, and message to accompany it. These journals were collected and used as data. Once a week, students spent five minutes writing in their gratitude journals. Before students wrote in their journals, they watched a video relating to the word of the week. After watching the video, students were provided writing prompts related to both the word of the week and gratitude. At the end of each week, the word of the week was reviewed and reflected.

After the Intervention

All students took the post-test survey. The post-test survey was the same as the pre-test survey, and also included open-ended questions. After the survey, some students volunteered to

be interviewed. The interviews were filmed and transcribed. Parents also were asked to give voluntary feedback. If a student returned the parent feedback form, they were given a prize (cookie, muffin, donut). In addition, students, teachers, and parents who volunteered to be interviewed given a prize and entered into a contest to win a gift card.

Links to surveys

Pretest

<https://forms.gle/dk3t59vBdzQGWh9H7>

Posttest

<https://forms.gle/nEX5Gd4HDrjxqHJ8>

The results will be analyzed using Statplus and or SPSS, with a variety of statistics including t-Tests, ANOVA's correlations, and descriptive analysis.

Time and Duration of Study

This study will start in September 2019 (pre-test) and end in December 2019(post-test).

Benefits of Study

This study entails a gratitude intervention, which is expected to offer significant benefit to subjects. Numerous studies have discovered gratitude's benefits to increase the following: spirituality, wellbeing, likability, giving, social support, friendship, self-esteem, positive emotions, family relationships, managing, decision making meaning at work, mental health, exercise, and sleep. In addition, gratitude has been proven to lessen or decrease symptoms of materialism, suicidal behavior, impatience, stress, depression and blood pressure. Also, gratitude has been reported to help an individual recover from substance abuse and enhance recovery from coronary health events. Overall, gratitude has the ability to improve one's emotional, social, personality, career and overall health (The Benefits of Gratitude, 2017).

Other studies have looked at the benefits in adolescents and children and have discovered “that more grateful adolescents are more interested and satisfied with their school lives, are more kind and helpful, and are more socially integrated” (Allen, 2017, p. 4). In addition, a few studies have reported “that gratitude journaling in the classroom can improve students’ mood and that a curriculum designed to help students appreciate the benefits they have gained from others can successfully teach children to think more gratefully and to exhibit more grateful behavior” (Allen, 2018, p. 5).

Persons who will have access to the records, data, tapes, or other documentation (see Application Process Step C. 3 of Handbook)

Date when the records, data, tapes, or other documentation will be destroyed: June 2022

Researcher's signature _____ Date: _____

Authorization

I understand that participation in this study is confidential. Only the researcher, collaborators, and supervising professor will have access to participants' identities and to information that can be associated with their identities. Please check the appropriate box below and sign the form:

I give permission for my organization to participate in this project. I understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form. I have read this form and understand it.

I do not give permission for my organization to participate in this project.

Authorized Signature _____ Date _____

Printed Name & Title _____

Appendix L: Child Consent form Intervention Class

Child Consent form intervention class

We are doing a study to learn about how keeping a gratitude journal affects students. We are going to ask you to create a gratitude journal and ask you a few questions. If you agree to be in our study, we are going to ask you some questions about yourself. We want to know a little bit more about you before we begin. You will be given statements to agree or disagree with. For example, "I have so much in life to be thankful for."

You can ask questions about this study at any time. If you decide at any time you do not want to finish, you can ask us to stop.

The questions we will ask are only about what you think. There are no right or wrong answers because this is not a test.

If you sign this paper, it means that you have read this and that you want to be in the study. If you don't want to be in the study, don't sign this paper. Being in the study is up to you, and no one will be upset if you do not sign this paper or if you change your mind later.

☐ I wish to participate in this study.

☐ I do not wish not to participate at this time.

Signature of person obtaining assent: _____ Date: _____

Printed Name of person obtaining assent: _____

Your Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix M: Parent INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Parent INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Intervention class

Mariah Mayer, a fellow CUSD teacher and Concordia doctorate student will be conducting a study in our classroom to determine the effects of how gratitude impacts student's well-being, engagement, and academics. The study will last approximately 4 months (from September 2019 to December 2019). I am writing on Mrs. Mayer's behalf for your permission to use the student data (primarily survey data) she collects from our classroom. CUSD and our Principal have approved this study for implementation at _____ Middle School to determine how gratitude affects middle school students.

During this academic year, students in my class will be maintaining a gratitude journal. In order to measure the effectiveness of this curriculum, I will administer a pre-survey, before students begin gratitude interventions. After maintaining a journal for approximately four months, students will take a post-survey. This survey should only take about 10-15 minutes.

According to the research, the benefits of participating in this study include increases in happiness, productivity, resilience, achievement, optimism, and sleep; along with decreases in anxiety and depression. There are no apparent risks if you participate in this study. If successful, the gratitude program may be extended to other classrooms at across the district.

Your information will remain confidential, and only Mrs. Mayer and myself will have access to the data. The data and documentation will be destroyed by June 30, 2021. Your participation is voluntary, and you may discontinue participation at any time without any penalty or consequence. In addition, you may contact Mariah Mayer (949-291-0929; mnmayor@capousd.org) or myself at any time regarding your participation.

Sincerely,

Mrs. _____

Please check the appropriate box below and sign the form:

☐ I agree to participate in this study. I understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form. I have read this form and understand it.

☐ I do not wish to participate in this study.

Printed Name of Student: _____

Printed Name of Parent/Guardian _____

Signature of Parent/Guardian: _____ Date _____

Spanish version

Appendix N: Parent INFORMED CONSENT FORM Spanish Version

Formulario de consentimiento de información de los padres

Clase de intervención

Realizaré un estudio en nuestro salón de clases para determinar los efectos de cómo la gratitud afecta el bienestar, el compromiso y los académicos de los estudiantes. El estudio durará aproximadamente 4 meses (de septiembre de 2019 a diciembre de 2019). Estoy escribiendo en nombre de la señora Mayer para su permiso para usar los datos de los estudiantes (principalmente los datos de la encuesta) que recopila de nuestro salón de clases. CUSD y nuestro director han aprobado este estudio para su implementación en Bernice Ayer Middle School para determinar cómo la gratitud afecta a los estudiantes de secundaria.

Durante este año académico, los estudiantes de mi clase mantendrán un diario de gratitud. Con el fin de medir la eficacia de este plan de estudios, administraré una pre-encuesta, antes de que los estudiantes comiencen las intervenciones de gratitud. Después de mantener un diario durante aproximadamente 4 meses, los estudiantes realizarán una encuesta posterior. Esta encuesta sólo debe tomar unos 10-15 minutos.

Según la investigación, los beneficios de participar en este estudio incluyen aumentos en la felicidad, productividad, resiliencia, logro, optimismo, y el sueño, junto con disminuciones en la ansiedad y la depresión. No hay riesgos aparentes si participa en este estudio. Si tiene éxito, el programa de gratitud puede extenderse a otras aulas en todo el distrito.

Su información seguirá siendo confidencial, y sólo la señora Mayer y yo tendremos acceso a los datos. Los datos y la documentación serán destruidos antes del 30 de junio de 2021. Su participación es voluntaria, y usted puede interrumpir la participación en cualquier momento sin ninguna penalización o consecuencia.

Además, puede ponerse en contacto con Mariah Mayer (949-291-0929; mnmayor@capousd.org) o conmigo mismo en cualquier momento con respecto a su participación.

Sinceramente

Sra. Mayer

Marque la casilla correspondiente a continuación y firme el formulario

_____ He leído este formulario y lo entiendo. Deseo participar en este estudio.

_____ No deseo participar en este estudio.

No deseo participar en este estudio. _____

Firma del estudiante _____ Fecha _____

Firma del Padre _____

Appendix O: Child Consent Form Nonintervention Class

Child Consent form nonintervention class

We are doing a study to learn about how keeping a gratitude journal affects students. We are not going to ask you to create a gratitude journal, but we would like to ask you a few questions. If you agree to be in our study, we are going to ask you some questions about yourself. We want to know a little bit more about you before we begin. You will be given statements to agree or disagree with. For example, "I have so much in life to be thankful for."

You can ask questions about this study at any time. If you decide at any time you do not want to finish, you can ask us to stop.

The questions we will ask are only about what you think. There are no right or wrong answers because this is not a test.

If you sign this paper, it means that you have read this and that you want to be in the study. If you do not want to be in the study, do not sign this paper. Being in the study is up to you, and no one will be upset if you do not sign this paper or if you change your mind later.

☐ I wish to participate in this study.

☐ I do not wish not to participate at this time.

Signature of person obtaining assent: _____ Date: _____

Printed Name of person obtaining assent: _____

Your Signature: _____ Date: _____

Your Printed Name: _____

Appendix P: Parent INFORMED CONSENT FORM Nonintervention Class

Parent INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Nonintervention class

Mariah Mayer, a fellow CUSD teacher and Concordia doctorate student will be conducting a study in our classroom to determine the effects of how gratitude impacts student's well-being, engagement, and academics. The study will last approximately 4 months (from September 2019 to December 2019). I am writing on Mrs. Mayer's behalf for your permission to use the student data (primarily survey data) she collects from our classroom. CUSD and our Principal have approved this study for implementation at _____ Middle School to determine how gratitude affects middle school students.

During this academic year, students in our class will not be asked to do anything differently. In order to compare the effectiveness of this curriculum, I will administer a both a pre and post survey. This survey should only take about 10-15 minutes.

According to the research, the benefits of participating in this study include increases in happiness, productivity, resilience, achievement, optimism, and sleep; along with decreases in anxiety and depression. There are no apparent risks if you participate in this study. If successful, the gratitude program may be extended to other classrooms at across the district.

Your information will remain confidential, and only Mrs. Mayer and myself will have access to the data. The data and documentation will be destroyed by June 30, 2021. Your participation is voluntary, and you may discontinue participation at any time without any penalty or consequence. In addition, you may contact Mariah Mayer (949-291-0929; mmmayer@capousd.org) or myself at any time regarding your participation.

Sincerely,

Mrs. _____

Please check the appropriate box below and sign the form:

☐ I have read this form and understand it. I wish to participate in this study.

☐ I do not wish to participate in this study.

Printed Name of Student: _____

Signature of Student: _____ Date _____

Appendix Q: Passport Power Words

1. Self-starter
2. Time
3. Trust
4. Focus
5. Gratitude
6. Mindfulness
7. Kindness
8. Write
9. Thankful
10. Exercise
11. Responsibility
12. Respect
13. Global Citizenship*
14. Hope
15. Community
16. Friendship
17. Smile
18. Loyalty
19. Perseverance
20. Attitude
21. Grit
22. Empathy: Caring*

23. Ethics: Help someone else*
24. Love
25. Encouraging words
26. Trustworthiness
27. Be trustworthy
28. Entrepreneurism: Trustworthy actions*
29. Confidentiality
30. Fairness/self-regulation*
31. Being a role model
32. The golden rule
33. Motivation
34. Honesty
35. Words silver boxes
36. Truth/honesty/Tenacity*
37. Integrity/resilience*
38. Courage

Appendix R: Student's Responses After Gratitude (Exit Ticket 2015)

What have the skills taught you?

The skills have helped me to....

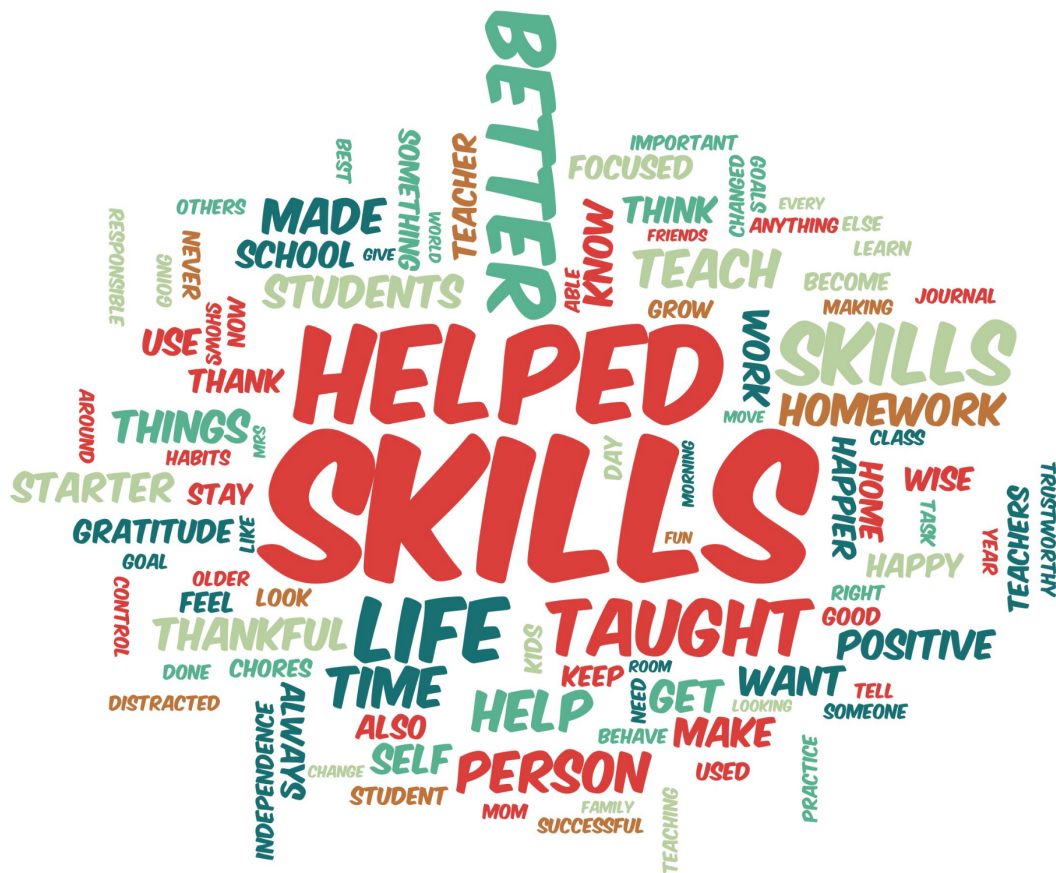
- believe I can do anything
- Be Happier
- Excel
- Get homework and chores done
- Stay focused
- Stay out of trouble
- Make wise use of my time
- To be thankful
- Do better in school
- Get better grades
- To be thankful for what I do have and not what I don't have
- Made me a self-starter
- They have helped me to think about the little things in life
- They have helped me to be a better person
- A time manager
- They have helped me to be organized.
- They have helped me to work harder.
- They have helped me to be a nicer person.
- The skills have made me smarter
- They have helped me to set a goal every day!

- I have gained good habits.
- The skills have personally helped me to do what I need to without someone else having to tell me.
- They have taught me how to be happy!
- The skills have made me a better person on the inside.
- They have taught me to be grateful, thankful for all I have in my life and have shown me how to keep a gratitude journal.
- They have taught me how to save time.
- They have helped me to learn respect for others.
- I became more focused, which helped me to be happier and do better academically.
- The skills have taught me that really anything is possible if you try.
- They have motivated me to study for tests.
- I am now more responsible.
- I am not only a better person but a better student.
- The skills have kept me focused all year and have made this year better for me.
- The skills have kept me motivated.
- The skills have made me more positive.
- I am not afraid to fail. If I do fail, I will just try again.
- The skills have helped me to realize that being thankful is important.
- The skills have taught me to do my homework right away.
- The skills have taught me to make a positive difference.
- To never give up
- To work hard to complete each task.

- The skills have personally helped me, by introducing me, to what I need to do, in order to be successful.
- The skills have made me less stressed and happier.
- The skills have helped me to be a trustworthy person and to be thankful even when I am feeling down.
- They have helped me to finish my homework and get good grades on tests.
- The skills have helped me to stay on track.
- The skills have taught me to not just be thankful on Thanksgiving but all the time.
- The skills have made me a humbler person. They made me realize what is important.
- I will never forget my dreams and always be positive.
- They have taught me to be more mature.
- They have taught me how to make the best of my life.
- Self-starter: I am a self-starter now. I do not wait for the teacher anymore.
- Time manager-I manage time better.
- Focused- I am not distracted easily.
- Trustworthy-I stay on task.
- Thankful-I give thanks no matter what.
- The skills have helped me to believe in myself.
- They have showed me how to work quickly and effectively.
- The skills have helped me to be more positive about my life. I used to be negative a lot.
- I feel like my eyes have been open to the world.
- I am more upbeat.
- I know how to achieve my goals.

- In the future, I want to be a surfer who inspires people to do the right things. I also want to be best friends with my brother.
- The skills have changed my personality into a happier person. They have helped my entire family.
- Your inspirational speeches have helped me to think about my life more clearly.
- I am a better listener.
- I hope to always have a gratitude journal and to keep practicing the skills.
- I have become nicer.
- Thank you, Mrs. Mayer, for being so nice and fun to be around. I am so happy that I got you for 2 of my classes. I am on 2,588 on my gratitude list!
- They have made me more responsible, diligent and efficient!
- The skills have helped me to work hard in all that I do!
- They have taught me to strive for greater things.
- They have taught me to look at the bright side of life.
- They have helped me to be honest.
- The skills have trained me to have a better mind.
- Thank you for being a great role model. You really inspired me to help others and to practice gratitude. I will continue to do so as long as I live. This summer I am going to be volunteering at an elderly home. I would like your advice on where else to volunteer. I want to make a difference in people's lives. Please keep in touch!!
- Thank you for teaching me good habits, you are the most perfect role model ever!!
- I have a better outlook on life.
- I am more thankful and patient.

- Thank you for being a person I can look up to!
- It has been an honor to be in your class!
- This year has been fun and happiness!
- The skills have taught me how to act respectfully.
- They have helped me to see if I set a daily goal, I do better in life.
- I want to help others, go to Africa one day or South America, and build houses!
- Thank you for teaching me the skills, you actually made me want to go to school!
- I used to watch TV not knowing what to do, now I know I should be a self-starter and do my homework or study!
- The skills have improved me.



Appendix S: Proposed Timelines

Administrative Checklist A: Dissertation Proposal Timeline (Phase Three)

July 2019 a. Write & Submit to Chair - Dissertation Chapter 1: Introduction (10 pages) 1 month

August 2019 b. Write & Submit to Chair - Dissertation Chapter 2: Lit Review (40 - 50 pages) 1 month

August/Sept c. Write & Submit to Chair - Dissertation Chapter 3: Methodology (10-15 pages) 1 months

2018 • Validation: Pilot Survey/Interview questions (5-10 subjects)

- Discuss results with chair/methodologist
- Revise questions as needed

August Train individuals to do gratitude journals

Sept. 1-7, 2019 d. Upon receipt of Form C: Dissertation Committee Assignment from the
Doctoral Program Office 1 week

- Inform committee member of membership on the dissertation committee
- Secure respective signatures on the form to verify each member's willingness to serve
- Upload Form C with signatures to the designated assignment slot on Blackboard: DTMS
- Email the preliminary dissertation proposal in Word to committee members for feedback.

[Allow two weeks for members to read and comment.]

Sept. 8-31, 2019 e. Continue to write and revise chapters one, two, and three. 3 weeks

- Consider feedback from committee members and revise the dissertation proposal as warranted.
 - Submit drafts to Grammarly and make corrections as warranted.
 - f. Submit draft to chair for feedback. Gain approval from the chair on final draft of proposal.

g. No later than two weeks before the proposal defense, upon approval of the chair 1 day

- Upload the dissertation to Blackboard DTMS for the Doctoral Program Office to check for plagiarism, using SafeAssign
- Email the dissertation proposal in a Word document to each dissertation committee member
- Notify committee members of the date and time of the Dissertation Proposal Conference Call

November 1-31, 2019 h. Revise dissertation proposal based on committee member feedback 1 month

Dec. 1-15, 2019 i. Application to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) 2 weeks

- Gain approval from your chair
- Submit required documents to the IRB and other entities as warranted to gain their approval.
- Revise documents as required by IRB and resubmit until approval is secured.

Dec15-30, 2019 j. Defend the comprehensive dissertation proposal at the Dissertation Proposal Conference Call 2 weeks

- Make final edits to the Dissertation Proposal
 - Gain approval of the dissertation proposal by the committee with modifications as warranted k. Upload to Blackboard DTMS Form E: Defense of the Dissertation Proposal 2 weeks
- Request pdf file of Dissertation Rubric from your chair for you to upload to Blackboard DTMS under Dissertation Rubric (Chapters 1-3)

[Chair communication: 1/month]

Administrative Checklist B: Dissertation Research (Phase Four)

Jan. 1-Mar. 30, 2020 l. Data Collection – surveys/interviews 3 months

- Complete qualitative and quantitative phases of the research
- For quantitative, calculate your ideal sample size based on a CI of 95% and MoE of 5%

Apr. 1-15, 2020 m. Data Transcription – type all data into excel or word 2 weeks

Apr. 16-31, 2020 n. Data Coding – code any qualitative data 2 weeks

May. 1-31, 2020 o. Data Analysis – statistical and QDA analysis on the data 1 month

June. 1-30, 2020 p. Write Chapter 4 – Results (40), including graphs and tables 1 month

- Submit to committee and get feedback
- Rewrite and revise as needed

July. 1-31, 2020 q. Write Chapter 5 – Conclusions (20), including summary, answers, limitations and prescriptions 1 month

- Submit to committee and get feedback

Appendix T: Observation Procedures

The eight observation procedures as set forth by Creswell and Poth (2018) are:

- Select a site to be observed and gain access.
- Identify who or what to observe with help from gatekeeper.
- Distinguish the type of observation based on observer role.
- Design and use an observational protocol to guide notes.
- Record aspects including descriptions and interpretations of the observations.
- Be introduced to build initial rapport.
- After observing, slowly withdraw using good observational procedures.
- Prepare timely notes that are thick and rich in narrative description. (p. 169)

Appendix U: Interview Questions

All individuals will be asked the same questions in the same order. The questions students in the interview will be asked are:

- Describe your experience with keeping a gratitude journal?
- How would you describe gratitude?
- How has experiencing gratitude affect your perspective on life?
- Why should gratitude be taught in schools?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix V: Student's Hypothesis

On Wednesday, November 7, 2018, the researcher asked her class to make a hypothesis on how kids experience gratitude compared to adults. Here are some of their responses.

My hypothesis for kids experiencing gratitude compared to adults is:

- Kids will experience gratitude more because they can be more open than adults can.
Vanessa Petrocelli, period 1
- Kids will experience it more because kids are still changing. Anna Fischer, period 1
- Kids will be impacted MORE than adults because kids' brains are still developing. Jett G, period 1
- Students can be happier for the future from it, but adults do not have a really good future because they are old and won't be able to do much. Asher Ross, period 3
- Kids will be impacted more. I believe that because students have not lived long, so they will try gratitude since it is, then always use it and get greatly impacted. Whereas adults will not use it since they have lived a longer life, and will probably think that, they have lived this long without gratitude and they have been just fine. Madilyn Riggs, period 3

Appendix W: SEHS Proctor Protocol

Before class, Chrome books were put on all of the student's desks. After the teacher took attendance, the classroom teacher was given the opportunity to leave. Each of the proctors introduced themselves, and said, "My name is _____. Today I am here to give you a survey. This survey will be used to help Mrs. Mayer to complete her dissertation for her doctorate program. A dissertation is a research paper, that all doctors must write and publish, before they are allowed to become a doctor. Thank you in advance for helping her, she truly appreciates it. If you have returned the consent form, you will now be taking the survey. I will read the directions in a moment. For those of you who will not be taking the survey, because possibly you forgot to get your parent signature, if you would still like to take it, to help out Mrs. Mayer, you may do so tomorrow during Swell time.

Don't worry, you will still get a cookie, or the treat of your choice. Is there anyone who forgot to return the form? If so, here is an invite to Mrs. Mayer's room. She will be administering the survey with a proctor all week during SWELL. (The proctor passes out the invites.) For those of you not taking the survey, please work on a quiet activity. For those of you taking the survey, please open up your Chrome books and log on to our google classroom. (The proctor then displayed the code.) Once all students had successfully logged on, the proctor said "Please respond to the following statements with: 5 Completely true (very much like me), 4 somewhat true (mostly like me), 3 agree (somewhat like me), 2 somewhat not true (not like me at all), 1 completely not true (not like me at all). When you write your ID, number remember it is also your lunch numbers and should not contain an A (students often write an a after their number because their password is their ID number followed by an a.) If you are in PAL, you will be

taking your survey in that class, please work on a quiet activity while others are completing the survey.

Remember, give yourself the most accurate number to represent you. Once again,

- 5 Completely true (very much like me),
- 4 somewhat true (mostly like me),
- 3 agree (somewhat like me),
- 2 somewhat not true (not like me at all),
- 1 completely not true (not like me at all).

Now to help us get familiar with the upcoming survey, we will take the first one together. Please listen to each question being read, once you I read the question, I will explain what each question means, if you would like me to repeat a question or you did not understand something, please raise your hand at the end, and I will gladly repeat the question.

1. I never complain. If you put a one it means “I complain all the time.” If I put a 5 it means “I never complain.”
2. I always feel grateful. A one means no I am never grateful, a five means yes, I am grateful for everything.
3. I am more grateful than many people I know. A one means No I am never grateful, A five means out of all the people I know, I am the most grateful person.
4. I feel grateful towards a few people. If you put a one it means I am grateful for everyone in the world. If you put a five it means you are only grateful for a few people. A few means two or three people.
5. Life is unfair. If I put a one, I am saying life is never unfair, everyone is treated fairly. If I put a five it means life is unfair all the time.

I know we are asking for your name and ID; however, this is to ensure you put the correct number. Once you take the posttest and your ID number is confirmed, your ID number and your name will be deleted from the data. Does anyone need help figuring out their ID number? Since you just used it to log on, I assume you have memorized it by now.

To the nonintervention classes the proctor said, “When you are finished with your survey, please close your Chrome book and work on a quiet activity.”

To the intervention classes the proctor said, “You will notice there is also a Goals and Gratitude Journal already in your Google classroom. Once everyone is finished with their survey, we will all open it up together, so if you finish early, please work on a quiet activity.

Before we start, does anyone have any questions?

While the surveys were being administered, each of the proctors walked around and helped out students who needed extra support. The surveys took students approximately 10-15.

Appendix X: 6th Grade and Former Student Results

For the SEHS, a one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect for self-awareness for 6th grade, $F(4, 237) = 2.7, p = .03$ (see Figure 1). The intervention teachers were A ($n = 59, \Delta M = 0.05$), B ($n = 112, M = -0.05$) and C ($n = 21, M = 0.27$) and D ($n = 48, M = -1.3$) was nonintervention. Compared to the nonintervention group, Grade 6 students who maintained a gratitude journal were much more likely to respond positively to statements about self-awareness.

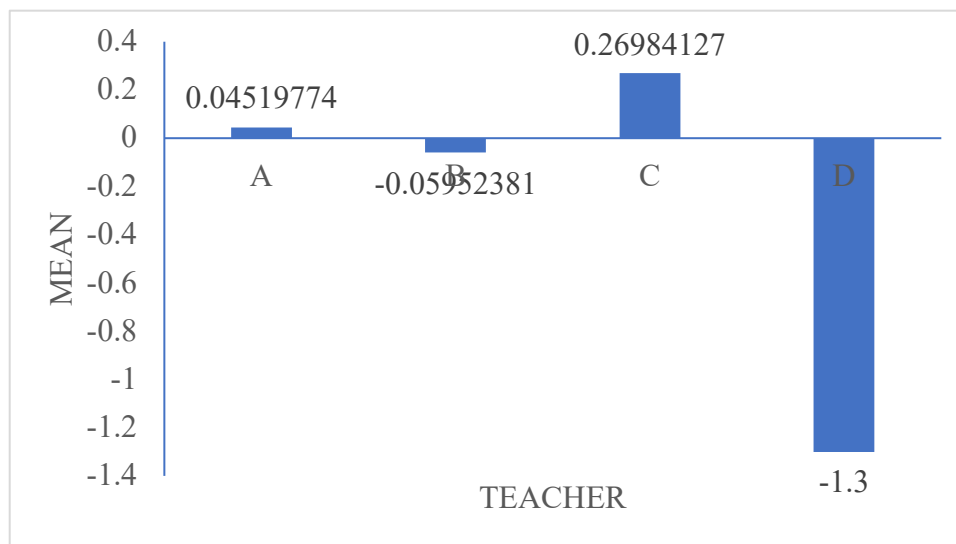


Figure 12a. Self-awareness

For the SEHS, a one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect for persistence in 6th grade, $F(4, 237) = 2.51, p < .04$ (see Figure 14). The intervention teachers were A ($n = 59, M = -0.17$), B ($n = 112, M = -.3$) and C ($n = 21, M = -0.38$) and D ($n = 48, M = 0.11$) was nonintervention.

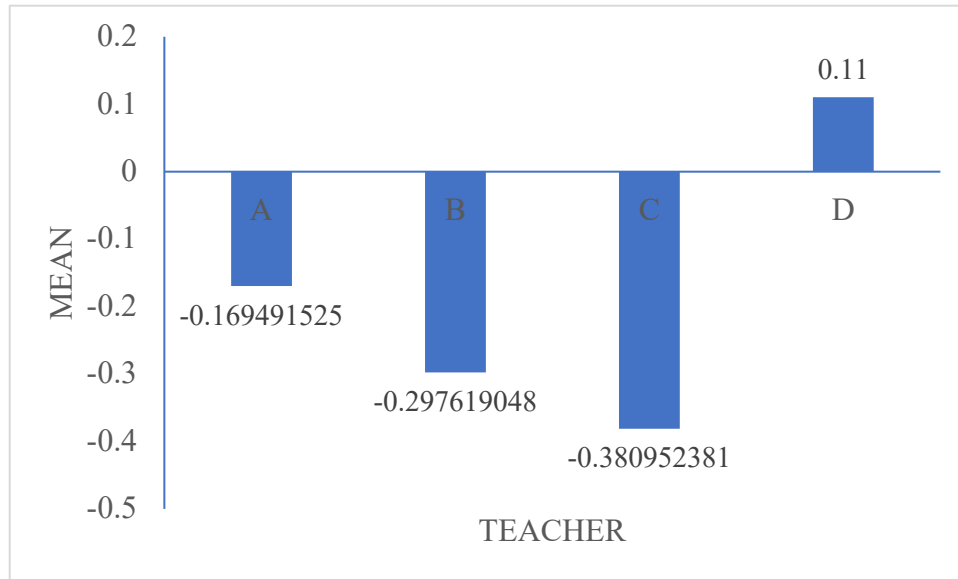


Figure 14a. Persistence

For the SEHS, a one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect for school support in 6th grade, $F(4, 237) = 4.65, p < .001$ (see Figure 16). The intervention teachers were A ($n = 59, M = -0.09$), B ($n = 112, M = -0.22$) and C ($n = 21, M = -0.015$) and D ($n = 48, M = 0.22$) was nonintervention.

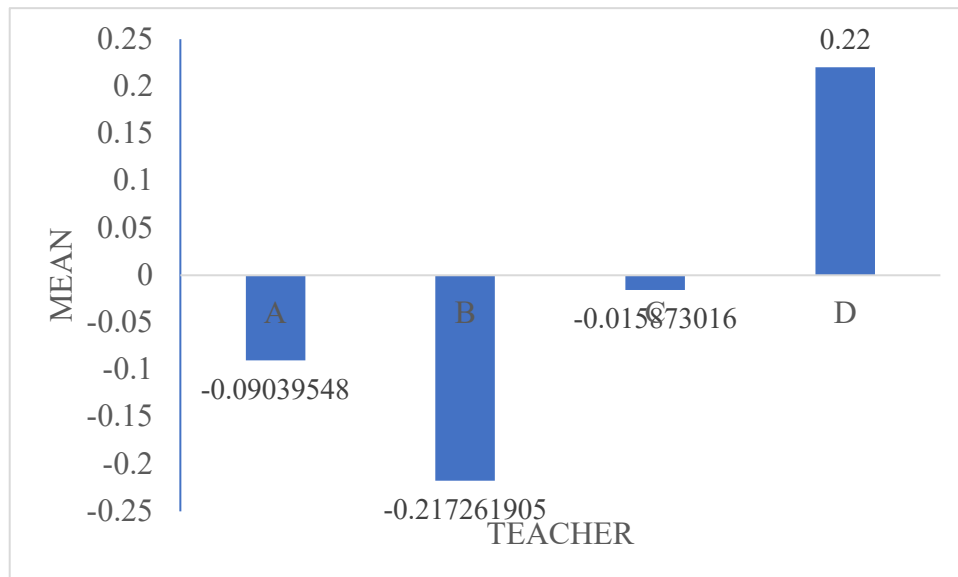


Figure 16a. School Support

For the SEHS, a one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect for family coherence 6th grade, $F(4, 237) = 2.77, p = .03$ (see Figure 17). The intervention teachers were A ($n = 59, M = -0.05$), B ($n = 112, M = -.13$) and C ($n = 21, M = 0.41$) and D ($n = 48, M = -0.04$) was nonintervention.

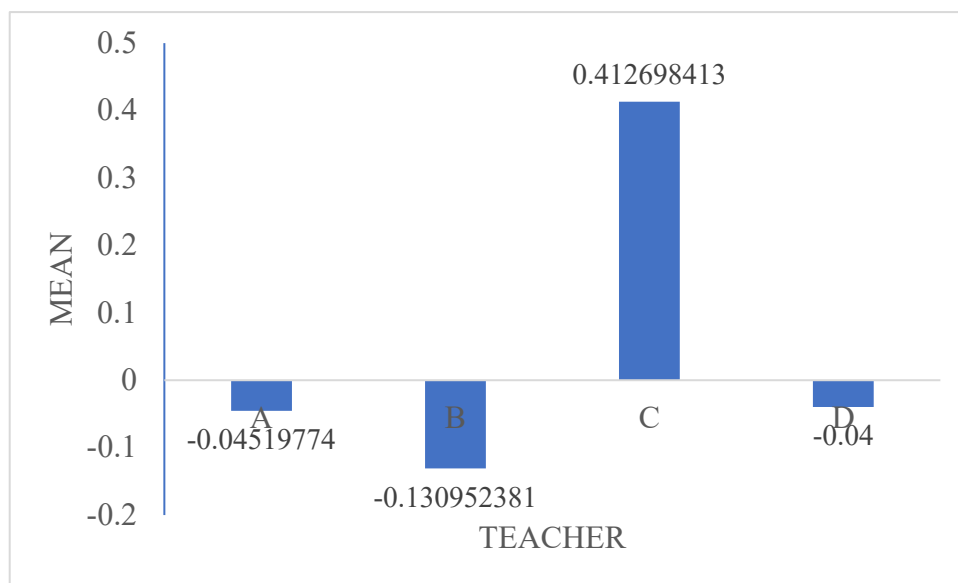


Figure 17a. Family Coherence

For the GQ-6, a one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect for teacher in 6th-grade, $F(4, 237) = 35.85, p < .001$ (see Figure 24). The intervention teachers were A ($n = 59, M = -0.05$), B ($n = 112, M = -.07$) and C ($n = 21, M = 0.15$) and D ($n = 48, M = -1.2$) was nonintervention.

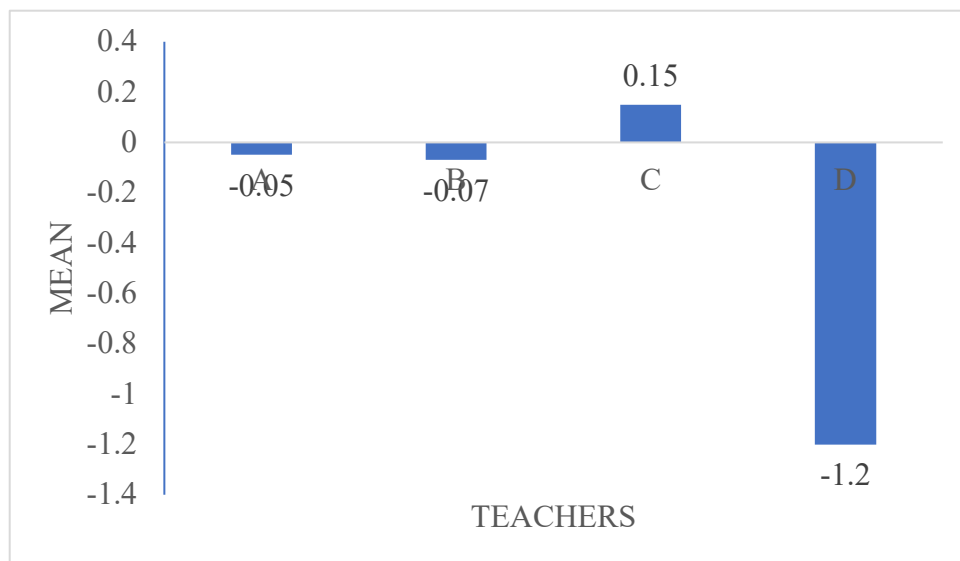


Figure 24a. GQ-6 for 6th-grade Teachers

For the Grade Point Average (GPA), a one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect for teacher in 6th grade, $F(4, 237) = 35.85, p < .001$ (see Figure 34). The intervention teachers were A ($n = 59, M = 0.85$), B ($n = 112, M = 0.65$) and C ($n = 2, M = 0.38$) and D ($n = 48, M = 0.68$) was nonintervention.

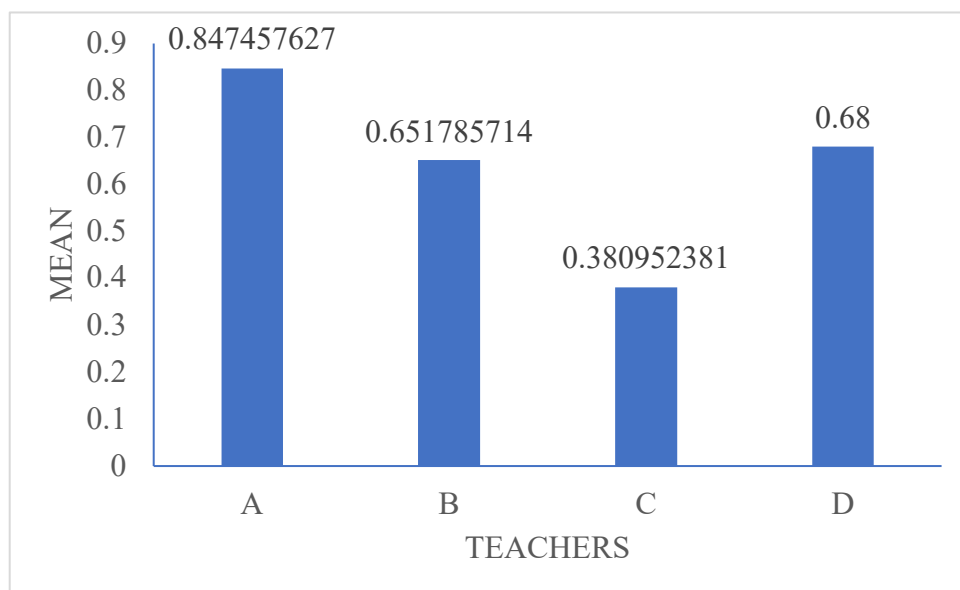


Figure 34a. Grade Point Average

For school support, one possible reason for this result could be teacher D was a Co-

teacher for a Special Education class, meaning there were two teachers for this one class (See Figure 16). Having two teachers may lead to a greater sense of teacher support because while an instructor is teaching, the other can support struggling students.

For family coherence, Teacher C's class significantly increased ($p = .03$, see Figure 17). This class was a support class for English Learners (EL), and part of a new program to meet their needs. To support these students the class size was smaller ($n = 21$) and focused on developing verbal skills as well as supporting student's social-emotional needs through the intervention.

Additional findings included: grade level (6th-grade level only) and Grade Point Average.

Next, additional findings specific to 6th grade: Self-awareness ($p = .03$), persistence ($p = .04$), school support ($p = .001$), family coherence ($p = .03$), GQ-6 ($p < .001$), teacher ($p < .001$), and GPA ($p < .001$).

Results for Mayer

For the GQ-6, a one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect for Mayer, $F(1,631) = 14.22$, $p < .001$ (see Figure 26). The difference in the mean score was greater for the Mayer's group ($N = 279$, $M = -0.3$) compared to the non-Mayer group ($N = 343$, $M = -0.06$). These students had Mayer presently or in the past, meaning they all had all had the intervention.

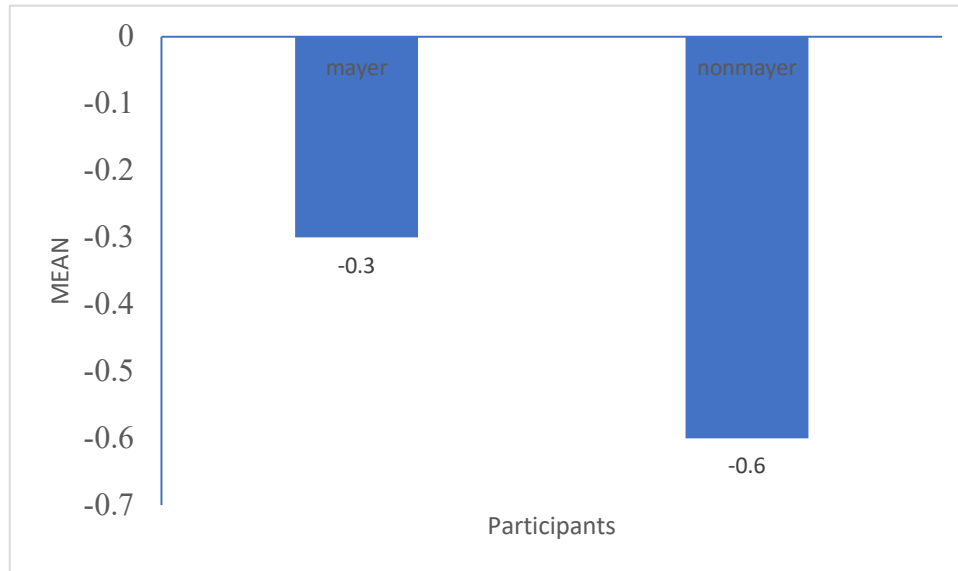


Figure 26a. GQ-6 for Mayer

For “I have so much in life to be grateful for,” a one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect for Mayer, $F(1,631) = 5.17, p = 0.02$ (see Figure 31). Since this is a reverse score (negatively worded) the score was reversed scored, to ensure clarity the mean was adjusted before it was graphed. The difference in the mean score was greater for the Mayer’s group ($N = 279, M = -0.02$) compared to the non-Mayer group ($N = 343, M = -0.2$). These students are both past and present; meaning they all had the intervention.

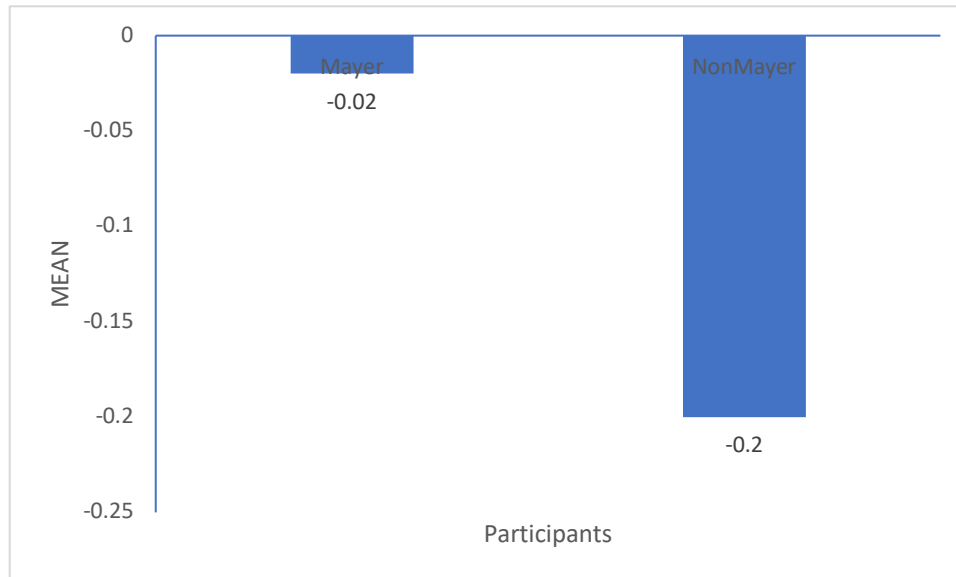


Figure 31a. “I Have so Much in Life to be Grateful For”

For “if I had a long list that I felt grateful for, it would be a very long list,” a one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect for Mayer, $F(1,631) = 4.67, p = 0.03$ (see Figure 32). The difference in the mean score was greater for the Mayer’s group ($N = 279, M = 0.05$) compared to the non-Mayer group ($N = 343, M = -0.14$). These students had Mayer presently or in the past, meaning they all had all had the intervention.

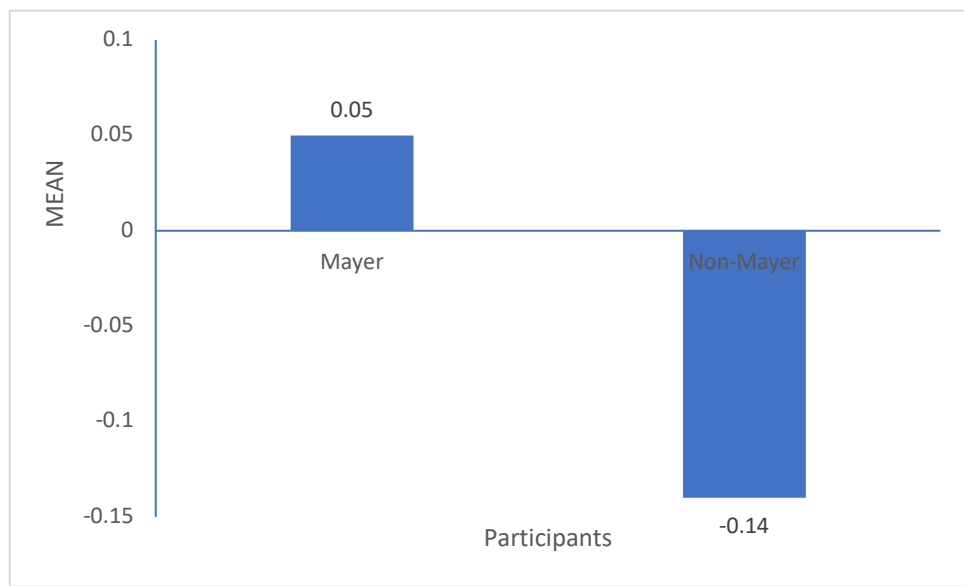


Figure 32a. “If I Had a Long List That I Felt Grateful For, It Would be a Very Long List”

For the “I find myself more able to appreciate the people, events, and situations more and more each day,” a one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect for Mayer, $F(1,631) = 21.7$, $p < .01$ (see Figure 37). The difference in the mean score was greater for the Mayer’s group ($N = 279$, $M = -1.16$) compared to the non-Mayer group ($N = 343$, $M = -1.97$). These students had Mayer presently or in the past, meaning they all had the intervention.

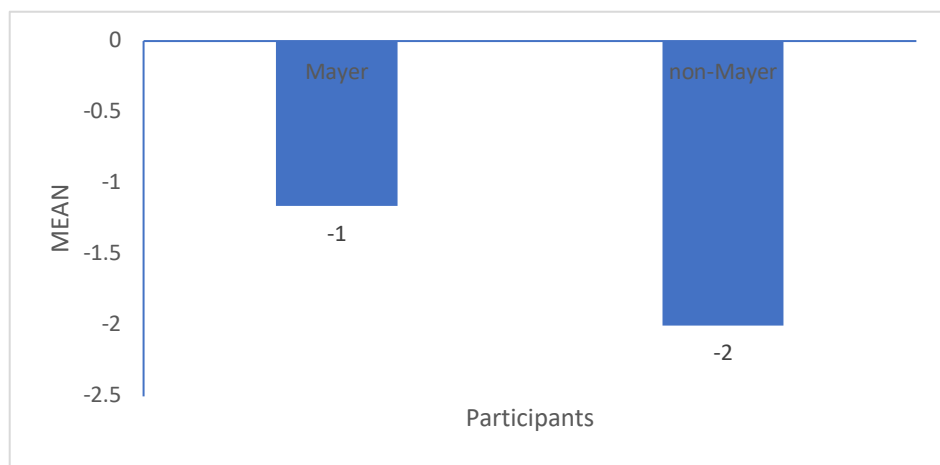


Figure 37a. “I find myself more able to appreciate the people, events, and situations more and more each day”

For “when I look at the world, I don’t see much to be grateful for,” a one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect for Mayer, $F(1,631) = 5.7, p = .02$ (see Figure 40). Since this is a reverse score (negatively worded) the score was reversed scored, to ensure clarity the mean was adjusted before it was graphed. The difference in the mean score was greater for the Mayer’s group ($N = 279, M = -0.56$) compared to the non-Mayer group ($N = 343, M = -0.87$). These students had Mayer presently or in the past, meaning they all had the intervention.

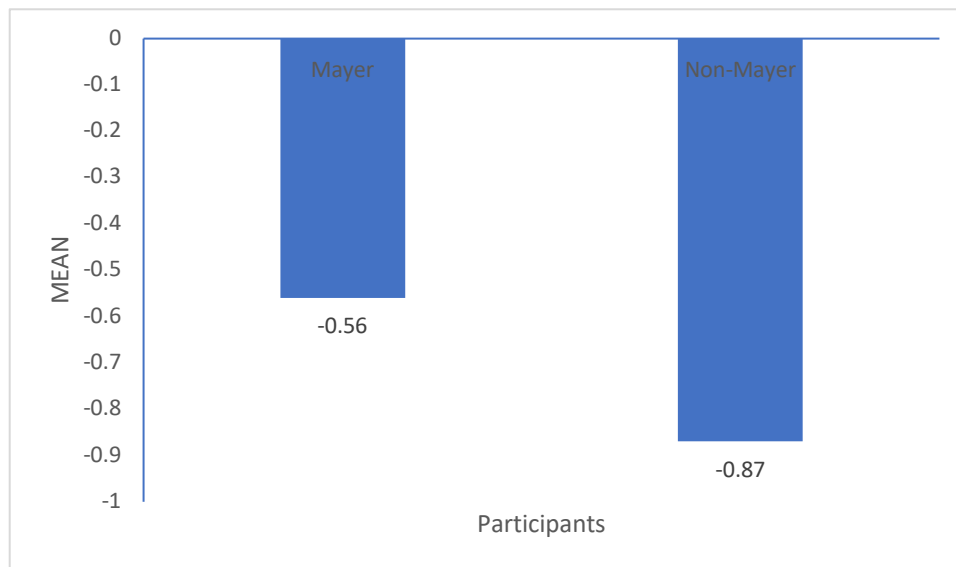


Figure 40a. “When I Look at the World, I Don’t See Much to be Grateful For”

Discipline

For the receiving a “warning,” a one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect for Mayer, $F(1,631) = 6.06, p = .01$ (see Figure 41). The difference in the mean score was less for Mayer’s group ($N = 279, M = 0.41$) compared to the non-Mayer group ($N = 343, M = 0.51$), meaning Mayer’s group received less warnings. These students had Mayer presently or in the past, meaning they all had the intervention.

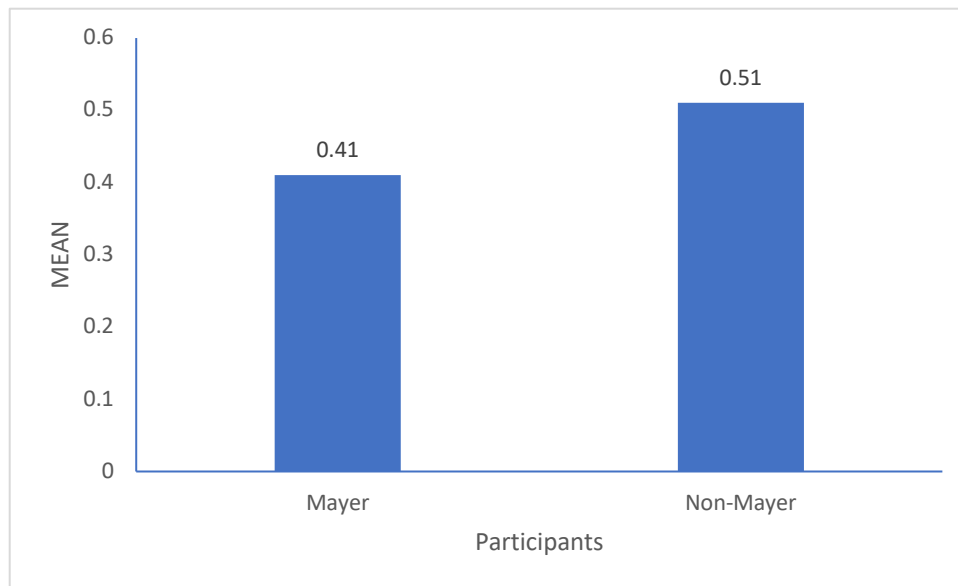


Figure 41a. Warning

For suspension, a one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect for Mayer, $F(1,631) = 14.22, p = .01$ (see Figure 42). The difference in the mean score was less for Mayer's group ($N = 279, M = 0.003$) compared to the non-Mayer group ($N = 343, M = 0.03$), meaning Mayer's group received less suspensions. These students had Mayer presently or in the past, meaning they all had the intervention.

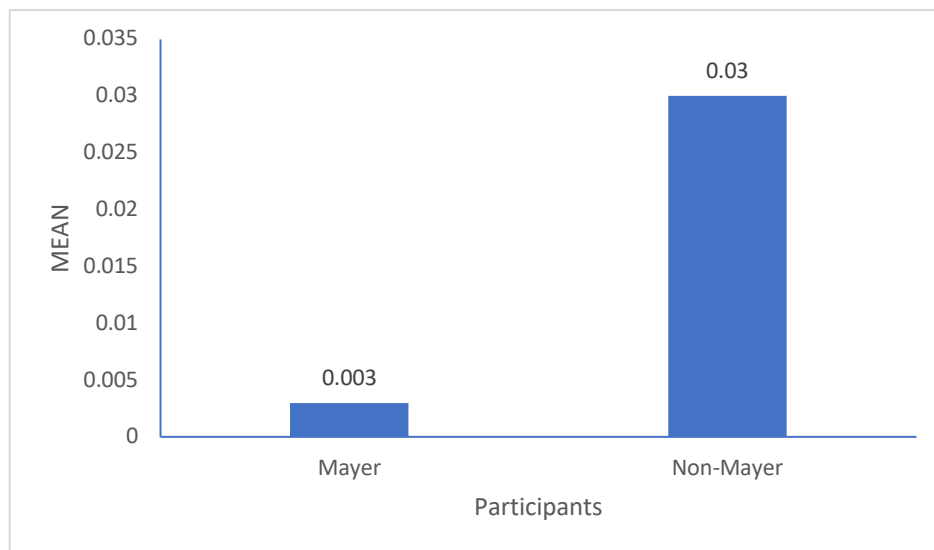


Figure 42a. Suspension

Finally, additional findings related to Mayer's group: warnings ($p = .01$), suspension ($p = .01$), GQ-6 ($p = .002$), and specific GQ-6 questions ($p < .05$).