

Running head: GRATITUDE IN SCHOOL

Gratitude in School: Benefits to Students and Schools

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My life wouldn't be the same without the people that have shaped and molded my character...I think it is important to be humble, let go of all ideas of self-importance, and acknowledge the people that helped you get where you are. I am thankful to God, my family, friends, and even my teacher for helping me improve my life.

—Diary entry of a high school student research participant

Establishing social relationships and achieving a sense of identity are two main challenges in adolescents that occur in the backdrop of many changes (e.g., physical, sexual, cognitive, and emotional). Such turbulence may make a grateful outlook difficult to hold, but doing so may be beneficial and transformative. It can focus people on the good turns in their life and the enablers that likely played a role, if they only took a moment to look. The above quote, written by a student in a study on gratitude and youth (Froh, 2008), illustrates this nicely.

One reliable way to feel good *and* strengthen relationships is to experience and express gratitude. Acknowledging the caring acts of others can strengthen relationships and help secure new ones. Learning to do this early in life may contribute to the bedrock for many positive outcomes in development. Gratitude is a common response to the kind act of another. Opportunities to help others and to cooperate abound in schools. Nevertheless, in spite of the benefits attributed to gratitude (see Emmons and McCullough [2004] for reviews) and its many

potential applications (Bono, Emmons, & McCullough, 2004; Bono & McCullough, 2006), research on this construct in youth is scant (Froh & Bono, in press; Froh, Miller, & Snyder, 2007).

This chapter covers research on gratitude, emphasizing its potential to enhance youths' well-being, social development, and achievement. We begin by focusing on the concept of gratitude and its potential determinants and differences among youth. We then turn to the consequences of having low gratitude, followed by a review of interventions designed to promote gratitude in youth samples. Finally, we close with a focus on fruitful avenues for research, potential applications, and benefits that gratitude may have for students and schools.

WHAT IS GRATITUDE?

When one receives a personal gift or benefit that was not earned, deserved, or expected, but instead due to the good intentions of another person, a typical emotional response is gratitude (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). People are grateful if they are aware of and thankful of the good things that happen to them and if they express thanks to those responsible (Emmons, 2004). McCullough, Emmons, and Tsang (2002) found that grateful people (in comparison to their less grateful counterparts) are more likely to feel appreciative (a) for a wider *span* of benefits at any given time (e.g., family, friends, teachers, being included in a special event, or having been defended by someone); (b) with greater *density* for any given benefit (i.e., grateful to more people); (c) more *frequently*; and (d) more

intensely for any benefit received.

In the first major survey of the literature, McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons, and Larson (2001) examined whether research supported a functional conceptualization of gratitude. This review found that gratitude served three functions, all based within a moral paradigm. First, gratitude serves as a *moral barometer*. Evidence suggested that people tend to be grateful in response to: benefits that they value; benefits that are provided intentionally and at some cost to the benefactor (Okamoto & Robinson, 1997; Tesser, Gatewood, & Driver, 1968); and benefits that are offered gratuitously rather than obligatorily (Bar-Tal, Bar-Zohar, Greenberg, & Hermon, 1977). McCullough et al. (2001) thus reasoned that gratitude signals when interpersonal exchanges are beneficial. Follow-up studies supported this notion, finding that people are more grateful for benefits that they value (Tsang, 2007) and that are done out of kindness rather than self-interest (Tsang, 2006a). Recognizing and feeling the positive impact others have on our welfare provides a distinct indication of the value of certain relationships.

Second, McCullough et al. (2001) found evidence supporting their notion that gratitude can also serve as a *moral reinforcer*. Showing gratitude can increase the chance that a benefactor will act kindly again in the future—just as showing ingratitude can potentially decrease kind acts in the future. Examples of evidence for this are many, including findings that expressions of thanks can reinforce the amount of aid given, such as volunteering with HIV/AIDS patients (Bennett,

Ross, & Sunderland, 1996) and kidney donation (Bernstein & Simmons, 1974). Further, field experiments reveal that “thank-you notes” can increase restaurant servers’ tips (Rind & Bordia, 1995) and yield more visits from case managers in a residential treatment program (Clark, Northrop, & Barkshire, 1988). Finally, laboratory experiments show that benefactors are willing to give, sacrifice, and expend effort on behalf of others more if they are thanked than if they are not (Clark, 1975; McGovern, Ditzian, & Taylor, 1975; Moss & Page, 1972).

A third hypothesis McCullough et al. (2001) examined was whether gratitude functions as a *moral motive*—by motivating a beneficiary to respond altruistically to a benefactor or others. Although they only found weak support for this notion (Graham, 1988; Peterson & Stewart, 1996), recent experiments have shown that gratitude can cause people to exert effort to help a benefactor in return (Tsang, 2006b, 2007), or even a third party (Bartlett & DeSteno, 2006). Gratitude also appears to increase general trust in others (Dunn & Schweitzer, 2005). Thus, evidence also supports gratitude’s role in motivating moral behavior.

Overall, research suggests that gratitude is particularly suited to helping people maintain and build strong, supportive social ties. The development of gratitude, however, has only been examined using theories of children’s social and cognitive development (McAdams & Bauer, 2004). The early sources of gratitude and factors that promote or inhibit its development remain uncharted (Froh & Bono, in press).

ASSESSMENT OF GRATITUDE AMONG ADOLESCENTS

A main challenge is assessing gratitude, especially in younger children with whom it may be difficult to discern from social politeness. To date, three gratitude rating scales have been used with adolescent samples. The *Gratitude Adjective Checklist* (GAC; McCullough et al., 2002), which is the sum of three adjectives—gratefulness, thankfulness, and appreciativeness—was used to measure gratitude in youth as a disposition (Froh & Yurkewicz, 2007) and as a mood (Froh et al., in press; Froh & Yurkewicz, 2008). Students were asked to rate the degree to which they experienced each emotion “in general” in the former study (trait) and “since yesterday” in the latter studies (mood). As a dispositional measure, the GAC demonstrated good internal reliability (i.e., alphas $\geq .82$) and discriminant validity (i.e., GAC did not correlate with favorite color and shoe size) with early and late adolescents. As a measure of grateful mood over a 5-week period, the GAC showed comparable internal reliability estimates across 11 time points and moderate temporal stability (i.e., pretest gratitude correlated with gratitude at week 2, $r = .49$ and at week 5, $r = .67$). Both dispositional and mood measures correlated as expected with various measures of well-being. These data suggest that the GAC is a valid and reliable self-report measure of adolescents’ trait gratitude and grateful moods.

Research is underway to examine if two separate self-report measures of trait gratitude among adults can be successfully used with children and

adolescents (Froh, 2008). One, the *Gratitude Questionnaire-6* (GQ-6; McCullough et al., 2002), has six items that measure the four facets of the grateful disposition (i.e., intensity, frequency, span, and density). Sample items include, “I have so much to be thankful for,” “If I had to list everything that I felt grateful for, it would be a very long list,” and “I am grateful to a wide variety of people.” The second—the *Gratitude, Resentment, Appreciation Test*, 16-item short version (GRAT; Thomas & Watkins, 2003)—measures one’s sense of abundance in life and appreciation of others. Sample items include: “I couldn’t have gotten where I am today without the help of many people” and “I think it’s important to appreciate each day that you are alive.” Preliminary evidence suggests that these measures may be suitable for children and adolescents (Froh, 2008), but further research is needed.

LIKELY DEVELOPMENTAL DETERMINANTS OF GRATITUDE

Although empirically very little is known about the development of gratitude, many social and cognitive factors likely play a role in its development. Here we focus on such factors that are believed to be the most influential. After describing these factors, we then turn to what is empirically known about other developmental factors (such as gender differences).

Emmons and Shelton (2005) stated that “gratitude does not emerge spontaneously in newborns” (p. 468) but emerges from environmental factors. Thus, it is likely that parents, peers, teachers, and other adults aid children’s

emotional understanding by providing conversations and structured activities that embed psychological insight about social experiences, which would include providing prompts to child who receive help or a gift from another person. To illustrate, Greif and Gleason (1980) audiotaped exchanges between parents and their 2- to 5-year-old children to examine their politeness routines (saying “hi,” “thanks,” or “bye”). They found that parental prompting lead 86% of the children to express thanks. Without parent prompting, however, expressions of thanks were reduced to only 7%.

Some linguistic prompts may aid language development in children more than others. For instance, if a student offers their snack to another student, it would be quite common for an adult to say to the student receiving the snack, “That was nice of him to share—say thank you.” Such a prompt merely focuses on the obligation to express thanks for a benefit received. Little focus is placed on *why* thanks should be given. For instance, it would be uncommon for an adult to say the following to the student receiving the snack: “Wow, he *noticed* you had no snack. That was nice of him to share. He didn’t have to. Say thank you.” Because gratitude is an acquired virtue that focuses on the conditions of a benefit-giving situation (Emmons & Shelton, 2005), children could benefit from prompts that not only encourage politeness but also elaborate on the intentions of another person’s kind act insofar as is comprehensible to the beneficiary.

Age also likely a prime factor in the development of gratitude. It is only

after children develop a theory of mind, around age 4 (Wellman, 1990) that they begin to perceive behavior as intentional—a key cognition needed to experience gratitude (McCullough et al., 2001). As children become less egocentric and enter early adolescence, they develop the improved social competence that comes with empathy (Saarni, 1999). Indeed, the ability to empathize may be the strongest developmental catalyst of gratitude, as it enables the social cognitive appraisals needed to appreciate and reciprocate the conditions of benefit-giving situations (McCullough et al., 2001).

Engaging youths in mutually beneficial interactions with adults (e.g., coordinated activities at school, service learning in the community, or joint play at home), and encouraging them to do the same with peers (e.g., through creative learning projects or during extracurricular activities in which youths can collaborate on personally meaningful tasks) may also facilitate gratitude through the adult helping to provide structure and guidance for grateful appraisals. No doubt, gratitude would also be fostered in youths if adults regularly modeled appreciative responses in interactions with other adults and with youths themselves and if adults were to explicitly emphasize the social cognitive elicitors of gratitude mentioned earlier (i.e., the value of a benefit, a benefactor's effort, intention, and gratuitousness of the behavior) in discourse with youths.

Among factors that have been empirically studied in gratitude, gender has been the primary focus. For example, Froh and Yurkewicz (2008) found that girls

tended to report experiencing gratitude more than boys ($p = .065$, $d = .30$). This is in line with research using other youth samples (Becker & Smenner, 1986; Gordon et al., 2004) and adult samples as well (Kashdan, Mishra, Breen, & Froh, 2008; Ventimiglia, 1982). However, boys may derive more benefit from gratitude than girls—findings that were inconsistent with adult samples (Kashdan et al., 2008). One reason for these differences, although rarely studied, may be that social expectations mediate the expression of gratitude. That is, because men are more inclined to emotions linked with status and power (Brody, 1999), they may associate gratitude with indebtedness and dependency and see it as less useful. Should this hypothesis be supported by additional studies, interventions to encourage gratitude should be sensitive to sex differences in the expression of gratitude (Gordon et al., 2004). Further, emotional re-education appealing to boys' desire to be seen as brave (Emmons, 2004) would help encourage boys that giving thanks for gifts from others does not undermine their own accomplishments or autonomy.

REVIEW OF RESEARCH ON OUTCOMES LINKED TO GRATITUDE

For centuries, gratitude has been considered a powerful ingredient of health and well-being for individuals and society. It is encouraged by religions and cultures throughout the world (Emmons & Crumpler, 2000) and is widely deemed as central to happiness; over 90% of American teens and adults indicated that expressing gratitude made them “extremely happy” or “somewhat happy”

(Gallup, 1998). Considered an important virtue for thriving, gratitude figures as a character strength of transcendence because of its potential to provide one with a sense of meaning and connection to entities that are greater than the self—other people, communities, God or another spiritual force (Emmons, 2004). Research in the last decade has shown a variety of ways that gratitude is beneficial for optimal development. We now briefly review that research.

Psychological or Subjective Well-Being

Happy people tend to also be grateful (McCullough et al., 2002; Watkins, 2004). Gratitude is associated with a variety of positive psychological outcomes. Research with adults has shown that, compared with less grateful people, grateful people report experiencing greater happiness, hope, pride (Overwalle, Mervielde, & DeSchuyter, 1995), positive mood, optimism, satisfaction with life, vitality, religiousness and spirituality; and they also tend to report less depression and envy (McCullough et al., 2002). McCullough et al. also found that many of these associations held after controlling for the Big Five personality traits or social desirability bias and that many even held using peer-report methods, demonstrating the robustness of these relationships.

Expressing thanks for or reflecting on benefits received can enhance the positive mood. In one recent experiment, Watkins, Woodward, Stone, and Kolts (study 4; 2003) assigned undergraduates to a control group (write about their living room) or a gratitude condition (write a letter to someone they were grateful

to; writing an essay on gratitude). Dependent measures were completed before and after group activities. Those in the gratitude conditions reported increases in positive affect, compared with those in the control group.

Until recently, however, research on gratitude and its links to subjective well-being have been restricted to adult populations. As one exception, Froh and Yurkewicz (2008) examined how gratitude correlated with a variety of well-being constructs in 11- to 13-year-olds. Gratitude was positively related with optimism, overall positive affect, and satisfaction with school and family but was not related to negative affect. These findings were consistent with studies using adult samples (Watkins et al., 2003; although not others, see McCullough et al., 2002). Froh and Yurkewicz also explored gratitude's place among the myriad emotional states found under the positive affect framework. Results of a factor analysis showed that gratitude loaded onto a component that included pride, hope, excitement, forgiveness, and inspiration.

The regular experience of positive emotions can make people healthier and more resilient, fueling an upward spiral of optimal functioning, well-being, and development (Fredrickson, 2001; Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002). Positive emotions broaden problem-solving strategies (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005) and can undo the aftereffects of negative emotions (Fredrickson, Mancuso, & Branigan, 2000). Indeed, one reason resilient people bounce back from negative life events better is that they experience positive emotions regularly and use them

more often in response to stressful situations (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). Given its relationship to positive affect, gratitude may be used to engage this upward spiral (Fredrickson, 2004). For example, after compassion, gratitude was the second most common emotion experienced after the September 11 attacks in 2001. Thus, gratitude appeared to be a powerful factor that helped people to cope with the disaster (Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, & Larkin, 2003). Such effects may occur with youth too. For example, in an archival study of newspaper accounts of things children were thankful for, themes of gratitude for basic human needs (e.g., family, friends, and teachers) were found to increase after 9/11 (Gordon, Musher-Eizenman, Holub, & Dalrymple, 2004). There is no way to tell, however, if positive emotions helped the children cope with the disaster.

Relational Well-Being

Grateful people are more prosocially oriented. That is, they tend to be more helpful, supportive, forgiving, and empathic toward others, and they have more agreeable personalities (McCullough et al., 2002). They also tend to be less narcissistic (Farwell & Wohlwend-Lloyd, 1998). As mentioned before, feeling grateful makes people respond prosocially to benefactors (Bartlett & DeSteno, 2006; Tsang, 2006, 2007) and unrelated others (Bartlett & DeSteno, 2006).

Grateful people may act prosocially as an expression of their appreciation, but over time these actions build and strengthen social bonds (Emmons & Shelton, 2005; Komter, 2004). The most current view is that gratitude serves a

social evolutionary purpose; its unique social characteristics seem to have adaptive value for facilitating humans' tendency to cooperate with non-family members (McCullough, Kimeldorf, & Cohen, in press) and for sustaining reciprocal altruism (Nowak & Roch, 2006; Trivers, 1971).

POTENTIAL LONG-TERM BENEFITS OF GRATITUDE

Promoting grateful moods in students may help nurture beneficial processes, such as creativity and motivation to improve one's self, which in turn can build lasting resources for feeling good and functioning well in the future (Fredrickson, 2004). Gratitude does not prompt one to reciprocate benefits in a tit-for-tat fashion, but instead can stretch one to repay kindness creatively (Komter, 2004). As Fredrickson noted (2004), "new methods of repaying kindness can become lasting skills in a person's repertoire for expressing love and kindness" (p. 152). When practicing as a school psychologist, the second author recalls an art teacher giving a gifted student with Asperger syndrome art supplies to use during counseling (drawing reduced his stress). Instead of saying "thank you" or writing a "thank you" letter, the student drew a cartoon character offering a colorful bouquet of flowers. Insofar as the student felt grateful, this story illustrates the creative prosocial behavior that gratitude can trigger. There is a good chance that gratitude for help received early in life (e.g., mentoring) may even help fuel later generative behavior, like giving time or money to a charitable cause (Peterson & Stewart, 1996).

In a study examining the effects of gratitude interventions on well-being, Emmons and McCullough (2003) found that student and adult participants randomly assigned to a gratitude condition reported fewer physical symptoms, more positive and optimistic life appraisals, and more time exercising, than their counterparts in a control or other conditions. Their results showed that gratitude boosts immediate positive affect and improves optimal functioning and well-being over a longer period of time among adults. We describe a similar study with adolescents (Froh, Sefick, & Emmons, in press) in the intervention section below.

Gratitude also may promote intrinsic goal striving and reduce materialistic goals. For example, people who pursue intrinsic goals report greater well-being than those who pursue extrinsic or materialistic goals (Kasser & Ryan, 1996). This is partly explained by the eroding effects of materialism on friendships (Kasser, 2002), but gratitude may safeguard against this erosion. Gratitude seems to influence intrinsic goal pursuit, other-oriented motivations, and the fulfillment of higher-order needs (e.g., self-expression and purpose), whereas materialism seems to fuel extrinsic goal pursuit, individualistic motivations, and the fulfillment of lower-order needs (e.g., possessions of comfort and safety) (Kasser, 2002; Polak & McCullough, 2006). For example, in a daily diary study examining undergraduate students' gratitude and materialism over a two-week period, Bono and Polak (2007) found that on days when people were less materialistic than usual (as measured by the *Aspirations Index*; Kasser & Ryan, 1996), they also

tended to be more grateful on that same day (as measured by the GQ-6; McCullough et al., 2002; effect size $r = -.19$). This link held after controlling for trait materialism, implying that gratitude is related to less materialistic strivings, no matter how generally materialistic the person. Further, materialism was related to increased social loneliness and conflicted exchanges (ES $r = .20$), but gratitude was related to even stronger decreases in these outcomes (ES $r_s = -.35$ to $-.38$).

Helping to explain the above patterns, Kashdan and Breen (2007) found that materialism was negatively related with well-being by way of increased experiential avoidance (i.e., unwillingness to face negatively evaluated thoughts, feelings and sensations, as well as the circumstances begetting such experiences). Together, these findings illustrate ways gratitude and materialism pull people toward different ways of being in the world—gratitude promotes valuing connections to people, mindful growth, and social capital; whereas materialism promotes valuing possessions, instant comfort, and social status.

It is unknown, however, whether and how these effects occur in children. Research examining if gratitude serves as a buffer against materialism in youth is currently underway, and preliminary results suggest that lower gratitude can account for materialism's negative links to purposefulness and life satisfaction as well as materialism's positive links to envy and negative affect (Froh, Bono, & Wilson, 2008). If gratitude and materialism have divergent associations with purpose and fulfillment among youths, then gratitude would prove useful for

advancing many of the social development goals increasingly addressed by schools. For example, there is evidence that strong extrinsic values are linked to increased health risk behavior (in terms of tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana use, as well as sexual activity) and that both are negatively predicted by perceptions of parents' autonomy support (Williams, Cox, Hedberg, & Deci, 2000). Thus, gratitude may aid flourishing in youth because it motivates them to fulfill basic needs of personal growth, relationships, and community—all of which reduce vulnerability to the main health risks they face.

PROMOTING GRATITUDE IN YOUTH THROUGH INTERVENTIONS

Froh, Sefick, and Emmons (in press) conducted a novel investigation of counting blessings in early adolescents. Eleven classrooms were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: gratitude, hassles, or a no treatment control. Measures were completed daily for two weeks and then again at a three-week follow-up. For two weeks, students in the gratitude condition were asked to count up to five things for which they were grateful and students in the hassles condition were asked to focus on irritants. Gratitude journal entries included benefits such as: "I am grateful that my mom didn't go crazy when I accidentally broke a patio table," "My coach helped me out at baseball practice," and "My grandma is in good health, my family is still together, my family still loves each other, my brothers are healthy, and we have fun everyday." The results found that counting blessings was related to more optimism, more life satisfaction, less negative affect

and marginally fewer physical complaints. Students who reported feeling grateful in response to aid reported more positive affect. In fact, feeling grateful for aid demonstrated a linear relationship with positive affect throughout the intervention—becoming stronger by the three-week follow-up. Gratitude for aid also mediated the relationship between the intervention and general gratitude. Feeling thankful for having received aid (an instance of gratitude in a specific domain) seemed to prompt a broadened view of other instances of kindness in students' daily lives. Thus, acknowledging blessings like aid may boost subsequent gratitude by increasing awareness of other gifts in life.

The most significant finding, in our view, was the relationship between counting blessings and satisfaction with school. Satisfaction with school is related to academic and social success (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002). Many middle and high school students, however, report dissatisfaction with their experience of school (Huebner, Drane, & Valois, 2000; Huebner, Valois, Paxton, & Drane, 2005). Students who are satisfied with their school experience tend to find school interesting, feel good at school, believe they are learning a lot, and look forward to going to school. In the Froh et al. (in press) study, students who counted blessings (in comparison with students in the hassles and control groups) reported greater satisfaction with school right after the two-week intervention. Therefore, regular doses of gratitude in students may help counter negative appraisals of the academic experience and may improve school bonding and social adjustment.

The practicality of some gratitude interventions (e.g., counting blessings) can make their use appealing. For instance, Froh (2007) had an opportunity to test whether a gratitude intervention had appeal and potential as a learning activity for approximately 1,000 middle school students in their homerooms. Students were asked to count up to five blessings they were grateful for on a daily basis for two weeks. Afterward, teachers followed a lesson plan using the focused conversation method of teaching (Nelson, 2001). Students were asked the following types of questions: *Objective* (e.g., What specific blessings did you count?), *Reflective* (e.g., What did you like most about counting your blessings?), *Interpretive* (e.g., What are the benefits of giving thanks?), and *Decisional* (e.g., How can we practice gratitude in our lives and at school?). The results were visible. Several students recognized that “life could be so much worse.” One student—from a wealthy family—stated, “I realized how good I really have it. Some kids have nothing. I just never thought about it before.” Though no outcome measures were collected, this intervention showed anecdotally that reflecting on fortunate events in life can engage students and may help make them more mindful as well. It also illustrates one way the entire school can be taught to be grateful.

Because gratitude may strengthen supportive relationships and increase prosocial behavior in adolescents (Froh & Yurkewicz, 2008) these resources may be especially useful for students with special needs, physical disabilities, or social adjustment difficulties. Teaching students to respond gratefully to friends who

help protect them from a bully, encourage them to persist on a task, or offer help on homework might strengthen friendships—increasing students' satisfaction with school and their chances of succeeding. Future research should explore the sources of youth gratitude and examine more rigorously if promoting gratitude in youth improves goal striving, academic achievement, and social development.

OTHER POTENTIAL GRATITUDE APPLICATIONS IN SCHOOLS

Simmel (1950) argued that gratitude is the moral glue that bonds people together into a functioning society. His logic of gratitude as the “moral memory of mankind” (p. 388) can be applied to school communities. School psychologists and other educators can help students identify resources provided by the Board of Education (e.g., funding for extracurricular activities), school-level administration (e.g., support for school plays), teachers (e.g., giving up lunch to help students), support staff (e.g., cleaning the facilities), and community volunteers (e.g., hours committed to organizing or chaperoning enrichment events). Most importantly, recognizing the contributions and investments others make toward their welfare would focus students on concrete ways that they and their progress are valued at the school, and knowing that others believe in and care to bring out the best in them would likely engage their motivation to better themselves. Gratitude felt and expressed by students and the improved behaviors that could ensue would likely spread to teachers and staff, encouraging them to work harder on students' behalf and helping to prevent burnout. Therefore, teaching students to count

blessings and develop an attitude of gratitude may foster stronger bonds to schools *and* communities, helping both students and schools to thrive.

Social exchange is necessary for most organizations in society to function properly. The positive emotions of leaders (e.g., principals, teachers) predict the performance for their entire group (George, 1995). Grateful principals may beget grateful teachers, who beget grateful students; grateful teachers and grateful students may outperform their less grateful counterparts. Gratitude and the valuing of benefits may be contagious. Indeed, evidence suggests that gratitude promotes social cohesion, relational and job satisfaction, and even organizational functioning (Emmons, 2003). Appreciation interventions using physiological awareness techniques have shown that a wide range of people in organizational, educational, and health care settings can also benefit from experiences of gratitude (Childre & Cryer, 2000). Thus, gratitude may benefit teachers and staff, especially as schools become the nexus for various youth programs that foster learning readiness and teachers try to align individual students with such resources. Combine this with increasing student diversity, and the challenges teachers and staff confront in today's school environment become clearer. More supportive relationship networks among teachers and staff would only help meet these rising challenges. Examining such issues would help identify novel ways of improving schools.

CONCLUSION

Belonging to strong social ties is a fundamental need, and securing strong and supportive relationships early on can provide the bedrock for many positive outcomes in human development. Experiencing and expressing gratitude is one way for youths (and adults) to boost their mood, strengthen their social ties, and cultivate a sense of purposeful engagement with the world. Though having such experiences are critical for healthy youth development, research on gratitude in youth or the development of gratitude is only now emerging.

In terms of the potential benefits of gratitude to students and schools, research should apply gratitude's moral functions to adolescents' relations with peers and adults at school (e.g., mentors, role models, teachers, counselors). If students feel respected and are able to focus on the people and things that they appreciate at school, this should build trust with the very people who are trying to help them. This should, in turn, foster a stronger satisfaction with and sense of engagement with school. Also, given the centrality of identity formation among adolescents (Marcia, 1980), would gratitude help indicate to youths strengths that are worth building? Further, would school staff and practitioners be more likely to view students as good investments if they were thanked for their efforts? This could also boost staff morale. Finally, if appreciation is more often experienced and expressed school-wide, then the moral motive function suggests that students would become more cooperative and helpful with each other, thus improving their peer relationships. It is unknown if gratitude could benefit schools in these ways,

but it seems reasonable to postulate that instilling grateful habits in young people when this virtue is emerging holds much promise for students and schools.

We have sought in this chapter to review the literature on gratitude to bring into focus its relevance to students and schools. We have also underscored important directions for future research in this area. Gratitude has been shown to lead to many positive outcomes that are of central importance to children and adolescents—psychological well-being, satisfaction with school and with other domains, prosocial relationships, and it likely improves focus on priorities and fulfillment of meaningful goals. Thus, developing gratitude applications for students and schools may help catalyze achievement and improve school bonding.

For instance, could gratitude be designed into existing programs (e.g., character and civic education or service learning projects) and services (e.g., mentoring and counseling) to enhance their effectiveness? Involving youth in volunteer in community/service activities, where they could witness firsthand the appreciation of their beneficiaries, may also help instill gratitude. Coaches could encourage appreciative responding to the help and support of team mates, a practice that may better focus students on improving their skills and boost a team's cohesiveness. English and writing classes might also benefit from the inclusion of appreciation exercises because of the personal relevance and nuances of benefit-exchanges. Such activity may also motivate students to focus on their unique life stories and priorities.

Teachers can encourage appreciative responding in students by pointing out and reinforcing kind acts in the classroom, and teachers and staff could model reciprocity and thankfulness in coordinated activities or play with students—all things parents can do at home too. Use of a gratitude board to display pictures and things for which students are grateful, for instance, could help induce gratitude and boost self-esteem, pride and cohesiveness in classrooms. The more youths are exposed to such behaviors and engaged in environments where balanced and supportive exchanges take place, the more apt they may generalize such behaviors to peers and develop the capacity for gratitude. The prospect that these simple activities could have positive impacts that spread to the rest of the school underscores the value of gratitude for students and schools. At best, gratitude could help make schools places where youth and their potential are valued above all else while simultaneously encouraging all the people and communities involved to thrive.

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