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## BRINGING AN APPLE TO SCHOOL:

Evidence of the effects of gratitude on the wellbeing of students, teachers and school leaders.




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## ROADMAP FOR TODAY'S PRESENTATION

- Importance of gratitude
- Psychological evidence
- Gratitude in schools:
  - Students
  - Teachers
  - Principals
- Spreading gratitude across schools
- Barriers to gratitude



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## WHAT IS GRATITUDE?

**“A worldview towards noticing and appreciating the positives in life”**

(Wood, Joseph & Maltby, 2009, p. 443)

**“An acknowledgment that we have received something of value from others”**

(Emmons & Mishra, 2011 p. 248).



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## THE IMPORTANCE OF GRATITUDE

### Philosophy

*“Gratitude is not only the greatest of the virtues, but the parent of all others.”*

*Marcus Tullius Cicero*

*“There is as much greatness of mind in acknowledging a good turn, as in doing it.”*

*Lucius Annaeus Seneca*

### Religion

*“Let them give thanks to the LORD for His loving kindness, And for His wonders to the sons of men!”*

*Psalms 107:29-32*

*“A noble person is mindful and thankful of the favours he receives from others.”*

*The Buddha*

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## THE IMPORTANCE OF GRATITUDE

### Sociology

*“Gratitude is an integral component of good citizenship”*

*White, 1996*

### Literature

*“Gratitude is the fairest blossom which springs from our soul”*

*Henry Ward Beecher*

### Anthropology

*“Gratitude is an evolutionary adaptation that regulates people’s responses to altruistic acts”*

*Triver, 1971*

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## THE IMPORTANCE OF GRATITUDE

### Education

*“Gratitude is a vital ingredient in schools”*

*Kerry Howell, 2012*

### Psychology

*“Gratitude has a special place in the grammar of a moral life”*

*Emmons, 2003*

## PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH

- Used bibliometric analysis to quantitatively assess the growth of positive psychology research.
- 700 hundred *PsycINFO* journals covering the fields of psychology, psychiatry, neuroscience, management, business, public health & sport.
- PP literature has growing rapidly in significance = 415% growth (20 years).
- Prominent new topics:
- Mindfulness, flourishing, kindness, posttraumatic growth & **gratitude**

Rusk, R., & Waters, L. (2013). Tracing the size, reach, impact and breadth of positive psychology. *Journal of Positive Psychology*, 8(3).

## PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH

- Park, Peterson and Seligman (2004) found that gratitude was in the top three predictors of life satisfaction together with hope and zest.
- Around 18.5 per cent of individual differences in people's happiness is predicted by the amount of gratitude they feel (Wood, Joseph & Linley, 2007).
- The practice of gratitude can increase happiness levels by around 25% (Emmons, 2008).

## OTHER PSYCHOLOGICAL FINDINGS

- Gratitude boosts resiliency
- Gratitude fosters optimism
- Gratitude reduces resentment & bitterness
- Gratitude counters depressive thoughts
- Gratitude helps us sleep better
- Gratitude supports our immune system
- Gratitude helps us cope with pain
- Gratitude reduces somatic symptoms
- Gratitude engenders helping behaviour
- Gratitude fosters positive relationships
- Gratitude predicts marital success

## WHAT HAPPENS WHEN GRATITUDE IS MISSING?

- Kant viewed ingratitude as "the essence of vileness and wickedness".
- "Of all the crimes that human creatures are capable of, the most horrid is ingratitude" (David Hume, 1968).
- "Ingratitude is the most abominable of sins...For it is a forgetting of the graces, blessings, and benefits received. As such, it is the cause, beginning and origin of all sins and misfortunes." (St Ignatius of Loyola)

## STUDENT GRATITUDE AND WELL BEING

### STUDENT GRATITUDE AND WELL BEING Waters (2011)

#### Evidence of the wellbeing benefits of gratitude:

1. for students
2. for teachers
3. for school leaders

#### Students who feel gratitude:

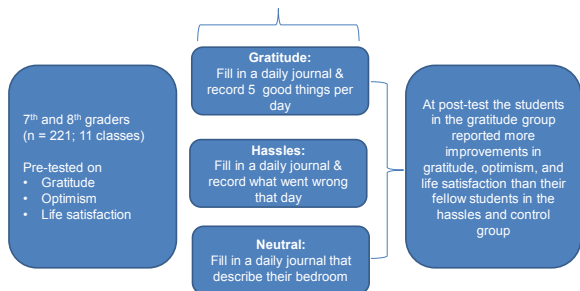
- Find school more interesting
- Feel good at school
- Think they are learning a lot
- Are eager to go to school
- Are more satisfied in their relationships
- Report higher optimism



Waters, L. (2011). A review of school-based positive psychology interventions. *The Australian Educational and Developmental Psychologist*, 28(2), 75-90

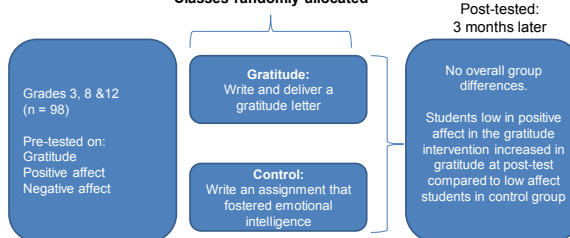
**BOOSTING GRATITUDE IN STUDENTS**  
Froh, Sefick and Emmons (2008)

Classes randomly allocated



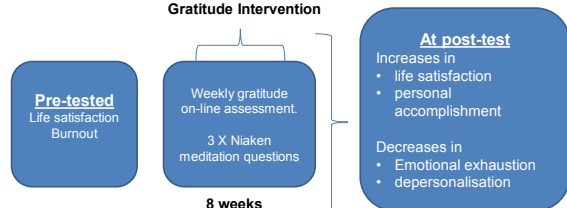
**BOOSTING GRATITUDE IN STUDENTS**  
Froh, Kashdan, Ozimkowski, & Miller (2009)

Classes randomly allocated

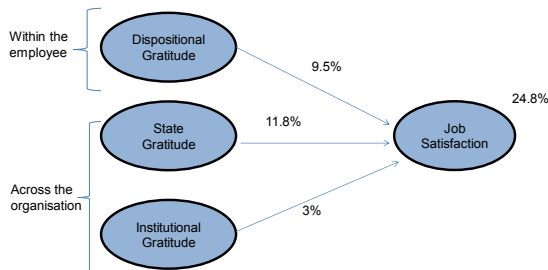


**BOOSTING GRATITUDE IN TEACHERS**  
Chan (2011)

Gratitude Intervention



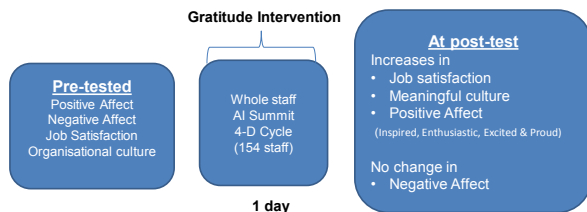
**GRATITUDE & JOB SATISFACTION**  
Waters (2012)



Waters, L. (2012). Predicting job satisfaction: Contributions of individual and institutional gratitude. *Psychology*, 12,1174-1176.

**APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY WITH TEACHERS**  
Waters, White & Murray (2012)

Gratitude Intervention

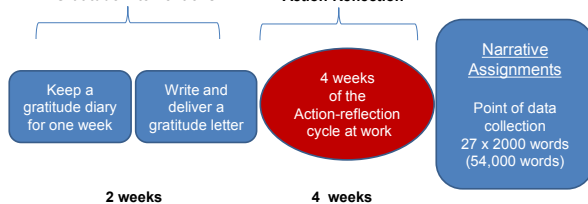


Waters, L., White, M & Murray, S. (2012). Toward the creation of a positive institution: St Peter's College, Adelaide, Australia. *The International Journal of Appreciative Inquiry*, 14(2), 60-66

**BOOSTING GRATITUDE IN PRINCIPALS**  
Waters & Stokes (under review)

Gratitude Interventions

Action-Reflection



Waters, L. & Stokes, H. (under review). Using gratitude interventions with school leaders: A qualitative analysis of the effects of gratitude on the cultivation of wellbeing and positive relationships. *Educational Administration Quarterly*

## QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

### Miles and Huberman (1994) framework

- data reduction
- data display
- identifying themes
- verifying conclusions



Having written the gratitude letter, I then wrote a letter to my team.

I framed the letter in terms of concrete actions identifying strengths that I saw in each and acknowledging my gratitude for what they did and what they bring.

The responses were great from hugs to return letters but the greatest outcome from my personal perspective has been the increase in confidence that they now display as a team

(Principal, Secondary)

## QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Presenting my letter certainly had a positive effect on my emotions and that evening had me thinking of other ways I could show gratitude.

I sent a text message to all my staff that Sunday evening thanking them for the effort they had put into their work so far this term and how I appreciated working with them.

Out of my twenty seven staff, all but two replied expressing their thanks.

(Principal, Primary)

## QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

In the last week I have singled out people for their contribution to the faculty and made sure that I thanked them.

A recent example includes the writing of a thank you card to a staff member for helping me with NAPLAN preparations

(Principal, Secondary)

## CHANGES IN LEADERSHIP PRACTISE

### Overall findings: The experience of the gratitude interventions was generalised by Principals who went on to incorporate gratitude into their broader leadership practise

- Gratitude as a daily personal ritual
- Expressing gratitude at work more often and with more people
- Solving disputes from an appreciative perspective
- Gratitude post cards to students
- Gratitude board in staff room

## BARRIERS TO GRATITUDE AT SCHOOL

Howell (2012) Waters & Basky (under review)

• Vulnerability

• Indebtedness

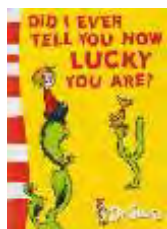
• Embarrassment



Waters, L. & Basky, A. (under review). Appreciative leadership: The wellbeing benefits of gratitude at work and the affective-moral-social processes that spread it across an organization. [Leadership Quarterly](#)

Gratitude is a choice

.....it's your choice



.....& you get it to choose it

.....everyday

