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Honoring the complexities when introducing gratitude into a school context

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## What is 'gratitude'?

"Being thankful. Appreciation of and inclination to return kindness"  
*Concise Oxford Dictionary*

## Contexts where gratitude has been applied

1. School leaders, teachers and year 12 students at two inner-city Sydney high schools.
2. Teachers, parents and school leaders at a Sydney primary School
3. Teachers and principal at a Hobart primary school
4. First-year pre-service teachers
5. University students and academics

## Findings from studies reported in *The Psychology of Gratitude*

*Increased gratitude leads to:*

- *Greater joy and satisfaction*
- *Greater sense of well-being*
- *Increased optimism*
- *Tendency to exercise more often*
- *Decrease in depression*
- *Greater sense of connectedness*
- *Greater ability to deal with adversity*

*(2004, Emmons & McCullough eds.)*

## Different perspectives

School principal  
Deputy principal  
Teacher who is about to retire  
Teacher in their first year of teaching  
Teacher with young primary-school children  
Teacher of Maori descent  
Teacher who is a devout Hindu  
Teacher from South Korea  
Teacher who is a devout Christian  
Science teacher  
Teacher who is the trade union representative  
Teacher who has recently lost his wife to breast cancer  
Teacher who is still grieving about the loss of her son in a car accident

How do we find a definition of gratitude that:

- Respects difference
- Is suitable to the modern day contemporary classroom
- Is secular
- Is sensitive to the multitude of connotations?

## What is gratitude

“Gratitude goes beyond a thought or feeling (a sense of appreciation and thankfulness) to be an **inner attitude** that can be understood as the **opposite of resentment or complaint**. It can be actualised in one’s daily life through the heart-felt **active practice of giving thanks**. Gratitude is usually expressed **towards someone or something**.”

(Howells, 2007)

## Gratitude research

Interviews and focus groups

- What did you do to practise gratitude?
- What were the effects of this practice?
- What were the challenges?

## Outcomes

- Improved wellbeing
- Improved relationships with colleagues
- Positive impact on student learning
- Positive impact on the wider community

## Where to from here?

- Participants need to start with their own definition
- We need to give teachers the opportunities to share their concerns and connotations and not expect a common starting point
- We need to respect that, no matter what the research says about the positive connotations of gratitude, there will be some in the school community who do not want to participate.
- More conceptual work on the terms we are using in positive psychology