"I wouldn't be who I am today without these incredible teachers":
A social media analysis of the #ThankYourTeacher campaign

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"I wouldn't be who I am today without these incredible teachers": A social media analysis of the #ThankYourTeacher campaign

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Teachers play a significant role in society, yet many feel unappreciated. Other concerns within the teaching profession include teachers' stress, burnout and high job attrition and turnover. The study explored responses to the social media-base campaign, #ThankYourTeacher created for the general public to show appreciation towards teachers. Data were collected and analyzed from posts using the hashtag #ThankYourTeacher on Instagram and Twitter in addition to responses posted on a related website and a feedback tool at public events. Thematic content analysis determined what people felt grateful for toward their teachers. The themes were conceptualized, using the Head, Heart and Hands Model for Transformational Learning (Orr, 1992), a model that emphasizes an integrated approach to teaching and learning, with the majority of expressions of gratitude in the present study related to Heart and Hands practices as opposed to the Head domain of the model. That is, more people were grateful for their teachers' ability to inspire, encourage, and provide kindness (Heart) as well as their dedication and leadership (Hand) than a teacher's general subject area knowledge (Head). The findings of the study demonstrate the importance of the student-teacher relationship and that relational qualities may be more valued than teacher knowledge. The study has potential to stimulate future research, theory and practice in the teaching profession and above all highlight that teachers are indeed valued and appreciated in manifold ways. It also contributes to our understanding of using social media research analysis.

Keywords: teachers; gratitude; schools; kindness; appreciation; education, COVID-19, social media research

According to the Teaching and Learning International Survey (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, [OECD], 2020), on average, one in four (26%) teachers do not feel their profession is valued by society. Yet, when societal perceptions are examined, teaching is considered a critical profession on par or exceeding the importance of doctors, professors and lawyers (Dolton, Marcenaro, de Vries, & She, 2018; Teach Strong, 2016). It is plausible that there may be a relative gap between society appreciating teachers, and teachers being aware that society does indeed appreciate them. In 2019, in response to World Teacher's Day, the media team within the Faculty of Education, Monash University ran a public social media #ThankYourTeacher campaign to celebrate and acknowledge the work of teachers. The campaign offered a public and visible platform by which the general population could show their appreciation towards teachers. The purpose of this study was to examine responses to the hashtag #ThankYourTeacher to identify, when it comes to teachers, what people are grateful for.

THE BROADER CONTEXT

The Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) data estimates that approximately 15% of teachers contemplate leaving the profession within the first five years (OECD, 2020). This figure varies dramatically across the published literature. Data from Australia found that up to half of the 453 Australian teachers sampled leave the profession in the first five years after graduation citing either not having enough or having too much work as the biggest challenge (Bennett, Newman, Kay-Lambkin, & Hazel, 2016). In the UK, over a quarter of those who graduate leave the profession in the first 5 years (National Education Union, 2019). In the United States, around eight percent of teachers leave the profession each year (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). These concerns appear to be common in many developed countries around the world (International Task Force on Teacher for Education 2020, 2015).

Heffernan and colleagues (2019) examined the responses of over 2000 teachers in Australia, finding that 71% of teachers reported feeling unappreciated, 76% found their workload unmanageable, and 58% indicated that they wanted to leave the profession. Teachers cited a lack of respect for the profession, excessive workloads, and a heavy focus on data and testing as the biggest challenges facing the profession. Teachers feeling undervalued, underpaid, time poor and stressed are persistently reported worldwide (Roffey, 2012; OECD, 2020).

While teachers may feel under-valued, societal perceptions of teachers do not mirror the concerns raised by teachers themselves. Teaching is consistently reported across the world as being one of the most trusted professions (Morgan, 2017). In the United States, up to 90% of adults report that teachers are important for society and the country's success (Teach Strong, 2016). The vast majority of people surveyed also estimated that teachers are, however, often undervalued in society. The extent to which teachers are valued and appreciated, and the relative status of the teaching profession varies across countries, with high teacher status reported for countries including China, Taiwan, and Singapore. Research suggests a positive and significant relationship between academic outcomes and teacher status, with countries with high teacher status reporting higher global academic results than countries with lower teacher status such as Brazil and Israel (OECD, 2014; Dolton et al., 2018).

THE IMPORTANCE OF GRATITUDE

Gratitude is the expression towards something positive occurring and the positive outcome has emerged from an external source (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Waters & Stokes, 2015). Therefore, gratitude is most often directed towards another person or non-person entity such as a place, object, or animal such as a pet (Armenta, Fritz, Lyubomirsky, 2016). Waters (2017) suggests that gratitude involves several steps (1) attention (i.e., noticing), (2) savoring and appreciating the experience, and (3) actively appreciating the good thing by expressing the appreciation. While many people value and appreciate teachers, it may be possible that the vast majority of people do not engage in actively expressing their feelings of gratitude. Although there are likely to be a number of factors that contribute towards teacher perceptions of being undervalued (e.g., financial remuneration), with potentially complex associations between these factors, one area worthy of further investigation is the various ways that people appreciate and express gratitude for their teachers.

BENEFITS OF SHOWING GRATITUDE

The benefits of gratitude are widely reported and include a sense of connectedness (Boehm, Lyubomirsky, & Sheldon, 2011), stronger social bonds (Fredrickson, 2004), the management of conflict (Bartlett, Condon, Cruz, Baumann, & DeSteno, 2012; Lambert & Fincham, 2011) and even improved sleep (i.e., people who practice gratitude before sleep fall asleep faster) (Wood, Froh, & Geraghty, 2010). It has been found to be a protective factor for stress and depression (Wood, Maltby, Gillett, Linley, & Joseph, 2008), improved mental health (Bale, Grove & Costello, 2020) and even enhance physical health after the experience of myocardial infarction (Huffman et al., 2016).

Armenta, Fritz, and Lyubomirsky (2016) examined gratitude in 14 to 15 years olds. The student participants were asked to write gratitude letters to parents, teachers and coaches. In the randomized control trial, the students assigned to the gratitude letters group reported more motivation and healthy eating than those students assigned to the control group. Further, students who wrote gratitude letters were buffered against a decline in satisfaction with school during the course of the school year. While there appears to be some reported benefits associated with students expressing gratitude to their teachers, there remains no research that has specifically examined the benefits of expressing gratitude to teachers or what people are indeed grateful for.

HEAD, HEART AND HANDS MODEL FOR TRANSFORMATIONAL LEARNING

There have been numerous ways that teaching and learning objectives have been conceptualized, with recent models emphasizing the constructivist learning approach, student-centered learning, competency-based models and integrated learning approaches (e.g., Hattie & Donoghue, 2016). One model that has been applied across a diverse range of learning contexts over recent years, including the inclusive education field (Florian & Rouse, 2009; Sharma, 2018; Sharma, Armstrong, Merumeru, Simi, & Yared, 2019; Ahsan, Sharma, & Deppeler, 2012) and sustainability education (Orr, 1992; Sipos, Battisti, & Grimm, 2008), is the Head, Heart and Hands Model for Transformational Learning developed by (Orr, 1992) and later adapted by Sipos, Battisti and Grimm (2008). The model was developed based on the work of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, an 18th century educational reformer who defined teaching and learning as being the integration of head, heart and hands (Tröhler, 2013). The model emphasizes an integrated approach to teaching and learning and aligns with views of students, parents and teachers that education should equip students with more than just knowledge, but rather should contribute towards personal growth, prepare young people for life more broadly and equip students with the capacity to become active and contributing members of society (Widdowson, Dixon, Peterson, Rubie-Davies, & Irving, 2015).

Within the model, the "Head" component refers to the cognitive processes of learning, including the acquisition of new knowledge; the "Heart" component refers to the affective elements of the teaching and learning process, including social and emotional support, sense of belonging, and a passion for learning; and the "Hands" component refers to the concrete practices, behaviors and experiential elements of the teaching and learning process.

AIM

Teachers have a significant impact on the lives of young people and their communities, most people acknowledge they are important, yet teacher perceptions that they are underappreciated persist. One way of addressing this discrepancy is through displays of gratitude such as through the #ThankYourTeacher campaign. The #ThankYourTeacher campaign presented a unique opportunity to examine what people are grateful for in respect to their teachers (past and present). The study sought to examine responses to the #ThankYourTeacher campaign, guided by the framework of the Head, Heart and Hands Model for Transformational Learning as a way of identifying what people are most grateful for about their teacher/s.

Method

Method

RESEARCH DESIGN

A social media analysis of responses to Monash University's 2019 #ThankYourTeacher campaign was conducted. Once all responses were extracted from social media and collated they were qualitatively analyzed using thematic analysis.

#THANKYOURTEACHER CAMPAIGN

Monash University, Faculty of Education ran a #ThankYourTeacher campaign between 24 October 2019 and 10 November 2019 to celebrate and acknowledge the work of teachers. The campaign involved the collection of posts by the general public in relation to their teachers using a range of social media platforms, including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn. In addition, posts were written on the #ThankYourTeacher information website and written feedback was collected at two events held in Melbourne, Australia from the general public in attendance. The campaign encouraged community members to reflect and publically share positive aspects of a teacher from their education.

DATA EXTRACTION

The research team drew from raw data manually searched and collected from Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn that was posted in response to the hashtag #ThankYourTeacher between 24th of October 2019 to 30 May 2020. The posts were collected over four consecutive days by three researchers. The data was drawn from public posts that did not require personal connections with the poster to download. These posts were intended to be publically accessible as: (1) the platform is a public dissemination tool and/or (2) the poster did not use settings that limited the accessibility of the information shared, such as making the post private. In addition, written feedback collected from people who attended the two #ThankYourTeacher events held in Melbourne CBD and posts written on Monash University's #ThankYourTeacher website were downloaded for analysis.

Inclusion criteria were posts that:

- used the #ThankYourTeacher hashtag;

- were original or re-posts with original content, expressed thanks, gratitude or appreciation towards a teacher or towards the profession more generally;

- were also publicly accessible to be downloaded;

- were written in English.

Posts were excluded if they did not relate to the sentiments of the campaign. Advertisements were removed. Table 1 provides a summary of the number of posts extracted from each platform and those that met eligibility criteria.

Table 1. Total Number of Posts per Platform and Number of Posts that met Inclusion Criteria

	Total Number of Posts Extracted	Number of Posts with Original Content	Number of Reposts with Original Content	Number of Posts that met Inclusion Criteria (% total posts)
LinkedIn	45	40	5	16 (35.56%)
Facebook	7	6	1	2 (28.57%)
Instagram	226	198	28	75 (33.19%)
Twitter	308	239	69	81 (26.30%)
Monash Website	45	N/A	N/A	43 (95.56%)
Federation Square Event	227	N/A	N/A	113 (49.78%)
Monash University Event	89	N/A	N/A	31 (34.83%)
TOTAL	**947**			**361 (38.12%)**

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Consistent with best practice approaches to the ethical conduct of social media research (e.g., Ayers, Caputi, Nebeker & Dredze, 2018; Gruzd, Paulin, Haythornthwaite, 2016) the research team used several safeguards to protect social media user confidentiality, privacy and anonymity. No usernames, social media handles, biographic information, geographic location or any other identifying information was extracted from social media sites. Posts were collated in an electronic database where they were stored under password protection, which was only accessible to the research team.

INTER-RATER RELIABILITY

An independent coder with postgraduate qualifications was used to review a blind sample of 10 posts per social media platform (LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter) (i.e., a total of 40 posts out of 586; 6.83%) to ensure reliability in the extraction of posts from social media sites which met the inclusion criteria. Posts collected through the Monash University website and at the two #ThankYourTeacher events were not included in the inter-rater reliability process as all posts collected via these platforms met the eligibility criteria as participation was directly related to the #ThankYourTeacher campaign.

The inter-rater review process revealed discrepancies in the total number of identified posts and posts that met the inclusion criteria for two social media platforms, LinkedIn and Facebook. On further investigation into the search algorithms used by these two platforms (see:https://www.linkedin.com/help/linkedin/answer/4447/linkedin-search-relevance-people-search?lang=en; https://www.facebook.com/help/113625708804960?helpref=faq_content), it was identified that search results were influenced by the user's networks, activity and previous searches on each platform, with researchers consistently identifying different posts across multiple searches. Given the impacts of these algorithms on the reliability of data extracted from these platforms, posts made on Facebook and LinkedIn were excluded from the analysis.

To measure inter-rater reliability, a Cohen's Kappa calculation was conducted drawing on a sample of posts made on the remaining two platforms, Instagram and Twitter (20 posts out of 534, 3.75%). The comparison of the two ratings for the sample of posts resulted in a Cohen's Kappa Coefficient of =.86, indicating a strong to very strong inter-rater reliability.

DATA FILTERING

Following the removal of the LinkedIn (n=16) and Facebook posts (n=2), a total of 343 posts met the inclusion criteria. These posts were then screened to check for duplicates with a total of 15 duplicate posts identified. The original post was retained in each platform (as determined by date and time of each post) and duplicates were subsequently removed from the sample. Table 2 provides a summary of the final number of posts per platform included in the analysis.

Table 2. Total Number of Posts per Platform Included in the Analysis

Platform	Number of Posts Included in Analysis
Instagram	74
Twitter	73
Monash Website	43
Federation Square Event	107
Monash University Event	31
TOTAL	**328**

DATA ANALYSIS

Consistent with models of sentiment analysis (e.g., Bogen, Bleiweiss, Leach, & Orchowski, 2019), the research team incorporated both inductive and deductive thematic analysis in order to capture the complexities of social media data. The three categories of the Head, Heart and Hands Model for Transformational Learning provided a priori categories, with systematic in-depth thematic analysis using Braun and Clarke's six stages (2006) enabling the identification of a number of overarching themes and subthemes within these categories. The authors of the project (KA, CG, NG, FM) then reviewed and further refined themes and subthemes.

Results

Results

OVERVIEW OF THEMES

Thematic analysis of the 328 social media posts yielded a number of themes and subthemes, which were further sorted into the three overarching categories as defined by the Head, Heart and Hands Model for Transformational Learning. This model was used as a framework to help identify and understand the teaching and learning processes that were most appreciated by participants. An overview of these themes and subthemes per category is presented in Table 3.

In addition to posts which aligned with these categories, a further 46 social media posts (14.02%) were defined as general expressions of gratitude and included posts that primarily thanked a specific teacher, but provided no further contextual information. An example post includes:

"Thank you for everything Teacher A"

Table 3. Overview of Themes and Subthemes per Head, Heart and Hands Learning Category

	Themes/subthemes	Number of posts	Example post/s
Head (n=31)	General and Subject Area Knowledge	31	"Because they help me to extend my knowledge" "Teacher B, you nurtured my love of poetry"
Heart (n=137)	Passion/ Inspiration	51	"Teacher C - you continue to be an inspiration to me! You are doing wonderful things and impacting so many people along the way #ThankYourTeacher"
	Belief/ Encouragement	36	"Thank you to Teacher D who has always believed in me and my potential when I didn't myself. You've done more for me than you could ever imagine"
	Kindness/Empathy/Support	40	"Teacher E because she always made me feel cared for"
	Connection/ Belonging	10	"In grade 5, Teacher F helped Participant A feel like he belonged. He says that experience is a big part of why he went on to become a teacher"
Hands (n=120)	Teaching practices (n=43)		
	Engagement	5	"I had so many great teachers in my time, but special thx to Teacher G for showing that passion goes a long way. Your engaging lessons really helped to build my confidence and interest in English. Never a dull moment in your classroom #ThankYourTeacher"
	High expectations	5	"Thank you to my English teacher who taught me to speak English as a second language. I still remember her making me practice my P's and T's in front of a candle, so that the flame would flicker. She encouraged me to keep improving my English, and not to stop at being 'average'"
	Critical/independent thinking	5	"My high school English teacher, Teacher H! She taught me to think for myself and be proud of my ideas"
	Humor/fun	11	"Teacher I because he brings fun to the classroom"
	Individualized learning	6	"Teacher J because he tailored my courses to suit my interests in electronics"
	Making connections beyond the classroom	11	"Teacher K -- taught me so much about political engagement and who took our class from outer suburban Melbourne to Canberra. We watched Bob Hawke commit Australian troops to the first Gulf War. Teacher K made politics real. #ThankYourTeacher"
	Mentoring/ Leadership	38	"My teacher is a great role model and can always help me even when I'm too embarrassed to ask. They dedicate their time to help me have a great future"
	Dedication/ Commitment/ Hard Work	39	"To all the teachers and educators out there that are tirelessly helping students during these uncertain times, THANK YOU! The fact that you are simultaneously learning to navigate a virtual classroom environment has not gone unnoticed"

HEAD

Social media posts that were identified as aligning with the Head category focused on expressions of gratitude in relation to the teaching content, general knowledge or subject specific learning that participants experienced with their teachers. Of the total 328 social media posts, 31 posts (9.45%) were identified as relating to this overarching category within the theme, General and Subject Area Knowledge.

General and Subject Area Knowledge

This theme included social media posts that expressed gratitude for teachers sharing information, knowledge and subject specific content. Some posts within this theme focused on gratitude for the general knowledge that teachers shared with participants:

"[Thank you to my teachers] because they helped me to extend my knowledge."

While other posts within this theme focused on specific subject areas, including Math, English, Science, Art, Music and Languages:

"My professor, Teacher L taught me to write much better and do philosophy. Every sentence counts - absolutely no 'fluff'!"

Many of the posts within this theme described the subsequent impact that the teaching and learning of a specific subject area has had on participants' lives and careers:

"Today I thank Teacher M who took a class of girls who refused to read to all becoming English Lit majors, writers, editors, publishers, teachers. She taught us the power of language and created life-long learners #thankyourteacher."

HEART

Social media posts that aligned with Heart category included expressions of gratitude for the social and emotional support, compassion, encouragement and sense of connection provided by teachers. One hundred and thirty-seven posts (41.77%) were identified as aligning with this category, with four themes identified: Passion/Inspiration (15.55%, n=51); Belief/Encouragement (10.98%, n=36); Kindness/Empathy/Support (12.20%, n=40); and Connection/Belonging (3.05%, n=10).

Passion/Inspiration

Social media posts describing the ways that teachers inspired participants consisted of the largest theme within this category. Participants shared the impact that their teachers' passion had on them as learners:

"My favourite teacher was inspiring to me. She loved literacy and shared her gifts in an encouraging way."

Many posts within this theme described the impact of teachers' passion on subsequent career decisions, with some participants describing how their teachers had inspired them to pursue a career in education themselves:

"My Year 12 English teacher was the reason that I chose to become a teacher. Thank you Teacher N!"

Belief/Encouragement

Another theme which emerged within the Heart category related to participants' gratitude for the ways in which their teachers had believed in them and encouraged their interests and talents:

"Teacher O taught me literature in Year 11+12. I was the only guy in class for two years and loved every minute. My interest in literature and the arts was validated; a worthwhile pursuit for a boy from the suburbs where football and drinking were the main goals #thankyourteacher"

Some participants described the ways their teachers had stretched and challenged them in their learning, leading to an increased sense of confidence and new opportunities and other participants described the transformational effects of having a teacher who believed in them during difficult periods in their lives:

"Thank you to Teacher P who has always believed in me and my potential when I didn't myself. You've done more for me than you could ever imagine."

Kindness/Empathy/Support

Social media posts which related to the theme of kindness, empathy and support consisted of a large proportion of responses within the Heart category. Participants described the powerful impacts of the support and care provided by their teachers:

"Dear Teacher Q, thank you for making such a difference in my life. I was in hospital for a full term…so missed a lot of school. Once I was well enough to return to school, Teacher Q spent every lunch-time with me, helping me to catch up. I will never forget her kindness…"

Many posts described the ways that teachers supported their students beyond the classroom and the important role they have played in the lives of young people:

"I have seen colleagues do the most incredible work to support vulnerable young people: taking them to doctors' appointments, advocating, helping them find jobs, guiding them through traumatic family events. That's all before they even step into the classroom. #ThankYourTeacher"

Connection/Belonging

A further theme identified within the Heart category related to participants' sense of belonging or connection to others.

In grade 5, Teacher F helped Participant A feel like he belonged. He says that experience is a big part of why he went on to become a teacher.

This theme emphasized the important role teachers play in establishing supportive relationships with their students and the powerful effects these relationships have on students' learning and wellbeing.

HANDS

Posts that aligned with the Hands category were those with an emphasis on the teaching practices, leadership and actions of teachers. One hundred and twenty posts (36.59%) were identified as aligning with Hands learning, with three themes emerging within this category: Teaching Practices (13.11%, n=43); Mentoring/Leadership (11.59%, n=38); and Dedication/Commitment/Hard Work (11.89%, n=39). Within the Teacher Practices theme, a further six subthemes were identified: Engagement (1.52%, n=5); High Expectations (1.52%, n=5); Critical/ Independent Thinking (1.52%, n=5); Humor/Fun (3.35%; n=11); Individualized Learning (1.83%, n=6); and Making Connections beyond the Classroom (3.35%, n=11).

Teaching Practices

This theme included expressions of gratitude towards teachers for a number of specific teaching practices as indicated in the following subthemes.

Engagement. Participants described the impact that their teachers' engagement practices had on their learning:

"I had so many great teachers in my time, but special thx to Teacher R for showing that passion goes a long way. Your engaging lessons really helped to build my confidence and interest in English. Never a dull moment in your classroom #ThankYourTeacher"

High Expectations. Another subtheme which was identified within the overarching Teaching Practices theme, related to participants' expressions of gratitude towards their teachers for having high expectations for their learning and achievement.

Critical/Independent Thinking. Several posts related to teachers' capacity to encourage critical and independent thinking in their students, with participants expressing gratitude for the impact of this practice on their learning:

"My high school English teacher, Teacher H! She taught me to think for myself and be proud of my ideas."

Humor/Fun. Participants described the impact of teachers' use of humor and fun in the classroom on their enjoyment of school and learning:

"I would like to thank Teacher S who was a wonderful educator and helped one of my three daughters in particular through navigating her high school years with humour and good advice."

Individualized Learning. A further subtheme included social media posts in which participants expressed gratitude for teachers who provided individualized learning opportunities:

"[I would like to thank] Teacher T because he tailored my courses to suit my interests in electronics."

Making Connections beyond the Classroom. Participants also expressed appreciation for their teachers who had supported them to make connections beyond their classrooms and into the wider world:

"Teacher U taught me to look to the past to understand the present and to search for those voices missing in history. He taught me to be curious about the world. These are lessons I still carry close to my heart, nearly 30 years later. I am so grateful."

Mentoring/Leadership

Another strong theme in the Hands category included gratitude for the leadership and mentoring support provided by teachers, with many participants describing the influence their teachers' guidance and leadership have had on their lives beyond the classroom:

"Ppl come into our lives 4a reason, season or lifetime My final yr English & Homeroom tchr Teacher V - true leader & role model-guided us beyond content, related to all & inspired me to stand for values, softly spoken yet wth gravitas #ThankYourTeacher."

Dedication/Commitment/Hard Work

This theme included social media posts which involved expressions of gratitude towards teachers for their commitment to their students, schools and communities and for their perseverance and hard work, particularly during times of adversity:

"Teachers [are] an integral part of our life. [We are] what we are because of them. I feel proud to have wonderful teachers who contributed their efforts and time for us."

The extraction of social media data overlapped with the introduction of COVID-19 restrictions across the world, including a transition to home learning for many countries. In Australia, in March 2020, some schools began closing in-class learning although there was variation from when this started to occur between states and school sectors. A proportion of posts expressed gratitude towards teachers for their commitment and hard work in supporting students and parents during home learning:

"Dear teachers, you are helping change the world everyday. Even in these difficult times, you've updated to distance learning, stayed strong and have continued to inspire students. Happy Teacher Appreciation Week, you all."

DISCUSSION

The current study aimed to provide an exploration of expressions of gratitude towards teachers through Monash University's #ThankYourTeacher campaign, and to better understand the approaches to teaching and learning that people were most grateful to their teachers for, within the framework of the Head, Heart and Hands Model for Transformational Learning. The study makes a novel contribution to the literature, highlighting a number of findings with important implications for theory and practice.

Results of thematic analysis revealed a substantially greater number of social media posts which aligned with the categories of Heart and Hands learning, as opposed to posts aligning with the Head learning category. Schools have a long history of prioritizing head learning (Allen, Kern, Vella-Brodrick, & Waters, 2017, 2018; Thompson, 2013), but these findings demonstrate that what people are grateful for - what people remember - is Heart and Hands learning. The findings suggest that teachers can have control over implementing the practices that people find the most meaningful, with many of these practices having transformational and lifelong impacts as described by participants in the current study.

Research in the area of inclusive education has identified that effective schools and teachers are those that promote the development of all students regardless of their background or abilities and those that support the inclusive and holistic Head, Heart and Hands learning of all students (Ahsan, Sharma & Deppeler, 2012; Tirri, 2011). The results of the current study support this area of research, providing validation of the importance of Head, Heart and Hands learning from the perspective of students and the practices used by their teachers that they appreciated most.

Participants identified practices that supported their social and emotional wellbeing, increased their engagement in learning and ignited their passion, as those that they were most grateful for. These results are also consistent with the literature which emphasizes the importance of the connection between physical, emotional, social and mental wellbeing in supporting learning (e.g., Allen, Vella-Brodrick, & Waters, 2017; Grove & Laletas, 2020; Jarvis & Parker, 2005). The finding that many participants expressed gratitude in relation to Hands and Heart learning also aligns with the views of parents, teachers and students regarding the role of education in the 21st century and the emphasis on education beyond just the acquisition of knowledge, to supporting the holistic development of young people (Brühlmeier, 2010; Widdowson et al., 2015).

The findings of the current study also suggest that people value their teachers in a range of ways, with many describing the significant impacts that teachers have had on their learning and wellbeing in both the short and longer term. This is consistent with previous research from across the world, which has identified that teaching is a trusted and valued profession, with shared beliefs that teachers play a critical role in the success of society (Morgan, 2017; Teach Strong, 2016). Given the disconnect between these views and teachers' perceptions of being undervalued and unappreciated (e.g., Heffernan et al., 2019; Roffey, 2012; OECD, 2020) the current research highlights the importance of opportunities for people to express gratitude towards their teachers, such as that provided by the #ThankYourTeacher campaign.

The study also adds to the knowledge base regarding the application of gratitude to the school context and highlights possible opportunities to strengthen the relationship between students, teachers and their schools. Based on a study by Chan (2011) in which a gratitude intervention with students reduced teacher burnout and increased the sense of personal accomplishment in Chinese teachers, Bono, Foh and Forrett (2014) suggested that gratitude experienced and communicated by students may have further benefits for teacher wellbeing, job satisfaction and retention. They further suggested that expressions of gratitude by students towards their teachers may contribute towards stronger connections to schools, which may have further positive benefits for students, teachers and schools more broadly. Given its potential implications, this remains an important area for further investigation.

The findings also have implications for initial teacher training programs and highlight the importance of teachers' social and emotional competencies. Research has demonstrated teachers' social and emotional skills are critical in creating positive student-teacher relationships (Allen et al., in press for 2020; Grove & Laletas, 2020; Kavenagh, Freeman, & Ainley, 2012). The results of the current study suggest that people best remember and are most grateful for the social-emotional support provided by their teachers and the impact this support has had on their learning, careers and lives more broadly.

Results of the current study also need to be considered within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the move to remote learning experienced by students across the world. Although the vast majority of posts occurred prior to COVID-19, a portion of posts occurred in March to May when many schools in Australia had moved to home-based learning. Many posts expressed gratitude for the hard work and commitment of teachers broadly, but also specifically within the context of COVID-19 and the adaptations to teaching and learning that teachers were required to make within a short timeframe in response to the move to remote learning. Hargreaves (2020) suggests that remote learning has provided an opportunity for parents and students to better understand the complexity and importance of the work undertaken by teachers, with an increased sense of gratitude experienced towards teachers across the world. The results of the current study support these suggestions, as evidenced by expressions of gratitude towards teachers for their support and commitment towards students during COVID-19.

Limitations

As data was collected from public sources and the anonymity of participants was maintained to protect confidentiality, demographic characteristics such as country of origin could not be explored. A major limitation of the research is the potential cultural differences in understanding gratitude which may have affected who participated and what they understood was the nature or purpose of the campaign. In some counties, especially in South-East Asia, expressing gratitude can lead people to feel indebted, guilty, or uncomfortable (Layous et al., 2017; Watkins, Scheer, Ovnicek, & Kolts, 2006). Although gratitude as a construct appears universally valued, it does not always result in positive outcomes. In much research, Asian participants benefit significantly less from expressing gratitude than U.S. counterparts (Boehm, Lyubomirsky, & Sheldon., 2011; Layous, Lee, Choi, & Lyubomirsky, 2013; Armenta et al., 2017).

A second limitation also relates to the inability to identify personal data and specifically whether respondents experienced mental health problems. The presence of mental health problems may have contributed towards a willingness to participate but also resulted in diminished wellbeing which may have been reflected in the responses provided. Research on expressing gratitude with people with depression, for instance, have shown it can be difficult for people with depression to identify what they are grateful for and when they do it does not necessarily result in a positive feeling (Armenta et al., 2017; Sin, Della Porta, & Lyubomirsky, 2011; Watkins, 2014). Therefore, the presence or absence of mental health problems in participants could be a factor that may have influenced participation or response type.

Also, although negative experiences were not censored, given the focus of this study and the nature of the #ThankYourTeacher campaign more broadly, the findings share a positive view and expression of teacher gratitude. Participation in the #ThankYourTeacher campaign was voluntary, however it is possible that people with more experiences might have chosen to respond to the campaign. The findings therefore need to be considered with the caveat that they may not represent the range of views and experiences held by a range of different people.

Future research

In light of the mismatch between teachers' perceptions of feeling valued and societal perspectives that teachers are important, opportunities to study teacher gratitude and the associated benefits appear critical (Heffernan et al., 2019; Dolton et al., 2018). Given that for many populations, gratitude remains an important component of wellbeing (Wood et al., 2010; Emmons & Mishra, 2011), it is possible that expressing gratitude towards teachers may assist with their perceptions of their role in society and assist in alleviating burnout and stress.

Research shows that even witnessing good deeds promotes positive emotion (Haidt, 2003). Given that social media is a public platform, expressions of gratitude communicated in these broad and widely accessible forums may further contribute towards feelings of appreciation, recognition and wellbeing in teachers, as well as having other potential benefits for students and the general public.

However, future research should be mindful of an important caveat. The present study examined social media responses to the hashtag #ThankYourTeacher. As respondents were primed to say favorable things towards teachers as was the nature of the campaign, it is possible that people were compelled to show gratitude due to an obligation or perceived social pressure which may have resulted in insincere gratitude (Armenta et al., 2017; Layous & Lyubomirsky, 2014). Research on insincere gratitude suggests that it can increase negative emotions such as resentment (Armenta et al., 2017; Layous & Lyubomirsky, 2014). Examining the benefits and drawbacks of expressing gratitude on social media both to the giver, receiver and observer is much needed research in the field.

Future research could also examine whether practicing gratitude addresses some of the concerns of the teaching profession and contributes towards improvements in teachers' perceptions of being valued, as well as contributing towards potential improvements in teacher wellbeing and increased retention of teachers in the profession. There are also opportunities to further investigate the impacts of student expressions of gratitude towards teachers on students and schools more broadly, to better understand the role and impacts of gratitude within this context. These findings may have important practice implications by contributing towards the development of interventions aimed at supporting the wellbeing of students, teachers and school communities.

Conclusions

The present study sought to examine what people are grateful for when it comes to the teachers who had taught them. This social media analysis study found that the relational qualities that teachers offer was central to what people appreciated. Moreover, people were more likely to show gratitude towards Hand and Heart characteristics as opposed to head characteristics, meaning that people may be more appreciative towards a teacher's kindness, empathy, and passion rather than their knowledge of the subject content area. The findings have implications for policy and practice in schools where there has been debate over the efficacy of teachers placed in subject areas they may not have specific training and expertise. Findings from this study may also stress the importance of teacher training in the area of social and emotional competencies which have been well established as important for students, but often assumed to be already established in teachers, which may not always be the case. Given that social and emotional competencies in teachers are an important factor driving positive student-teacher relationships (Allen et al., in press for 2020; Grove & Laletas, 2020; Kavenagh, Freeman, & Ainley, 2012) and reflect what people are grateful for, they should be given full consideration by school leadership in staff recruitment and professional development. Taken together, the findings of the study emphasize that teachers are indeed a profession that people are grateful for, and effective teaching, at least from the perspective of what people appreciate, steps well outside rudimentary pedagogical principles.

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Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, upon reasonable request.

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No potential competing interest was reported by the authors

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