EFFECTS OF FREE RESPONSE AND PROMPTED GRATITUDE JOURNALING ON

MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS' SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING

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ABSTRACT

EFFECTS OF FREE RESPONSE AND PROMPTED GRATITUDE JOURNALING ON

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Positive psychology researchers study gratitude journaling frequently as an

intervention that aims to increase feelings of gratitude and overall subjective well-being

(SWB). One question arising from previous research is what possible variables increase

the effectiveness of gratitude journaling amongst middle school students. The present

study explored the effect of prompted daily gratitude journaling compared to daily free

write gratitude journaling on seventh grade students' levels of gratitude and SWB.

The study involved 22 participants, half of whom wrote in a blank gratitude

journal daily and the other half of whom responded to a gratitude prompt of, "I am

grateful to _____ because _____." The researcher measured outcomes using pre- and

post-test data from questionnaires designed to measure one's positive and negative affect,

overall life satisfaction, and inclination to express gratitude.

Based on pre-, post-, and follow up test data, students in the prompt condition did

not experience higher levels of gratitude, positive affect, or subjective well-being, nor

lower levels of negative affect, when compared to students in the free response condition. Implications for future practice include pairing a teaching component with the journaling to increase effectiveness and including a more specific prompt to elicit gratitude towards others.

Dedicated to my parents for their never-ending support.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Mentally healthy youth have few symptoms of mental illness and high levels of subjective well-being (SWB; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). However, rather than focusing on how to increase well-being, traditional, school-based mental health approaches are deficit-oriented; only those experiencing significant psychopathy receive support (Suldo, Riley, & Shaffer, 2006). Currently, well-developed treatments for symptoms of mental illness far outnumber interventions aimed to increase SWB, but SWB interventions have yielded a promising line of research for school-based mental health interventions (Roth, Suldo, & Ferron, 2017).

In order to facilitate SWB for youth both inside and outside of schools, one proposed intervention is the use of daily gratitude journals. This practice includes asking participants to write about things they are grateful for each day. Ideally, it teaches students to shift their attention away from negative aspects of their lives and instead to learn to appreciate what they have and what others have done for them (Shankland & Rosset, 2017). This mindset shift counterbalances the "negativity bias," or one's tendency to pay more attention to negative stimuli in the environment (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, Vohs, 2001). For the purpose of this study, gratitude is defined as, "a sense of thankfulness and joy in response to receiving a gift, whether the gift be a tangible

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benefit from a specific other or a moment of peaceful bliss evoked by natural beauty"
(Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p.554).

According to Lyubomirsky et al. (2005), intentional activities that require effort
and planning account for 40% of the population's variation of SWB. Examples include
setting and achieving goals; pursuing hobbies and relationships; and performing acts of
kindness. Generally, positive psychology interventions (PPI) are intentional activities
meant to cultivate happiness. These activities target SWB by mimicking the behaviors of
those who experience high SWB (Roth et al., 2017).

From an academic standpoint, benefits of SWB include greater satisfaction in
school, positive academic self-perceptions, and higher academic achievement. Greater
school satisfaction is also linked to increased overall well-being; overall well-being then
contributes to the quality of one's social relationships and physical health (Stiglbauer,
Gnambs, Gamsjager, & Batinic, 2013). Interventions to increase SWB in an academic
setting have the potential for far reaching benefits for students who spend a large portion
of their day in school.

One emerging area within PPIs is the teaching and practice of gratitude in order to
promote SWB. Research suggests that specific thoughts foster gratitude (Algoe, 2012;
Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Froh et al., 2014). Following the model of cognitive
behavioral therapy (CBT), changing one's thoughts can increase how often and how
intensely people experience emotions of gratitude (Beck, 2011). This experience of
gratitude can strengthen social relationships, increase helpful behaviors, and contribute to
overall SWB as individuals learn to appraise situations more positively (Algoe, 2012).
Examples of activities commonly included in gratitude interventions include counting

blessings, writing and delivering letters of gratitude, and training oneself to become more aware of times in which to feel grateful (Froh & Bono, 2011).

Emmons and McCollough (2003) led the first set of studies establishing the effectiveness of gratitude journals. Participants assigned to a gratitude journal condition experienced enhanced well-being when compared to those who wrote about hassles in their lives and those who wrote about neutral life events (2003). Since then, various studies have evaluated the effectiveness of gratitude journaling; these studies have also found that the practice increases life satisfaction and decreases negative affect (Bolier, Haverman, Westerhof, Riper, Smit & Bohlmeijer, 2013).

Despite this support, there is controversy about the effectiveness of gratitude journaling due to methodological issues cited within studies, including poor randomization procedures and biased reporting. Furthermore, many studies report on the effectiveness of gratitude journaling coupled with other interventions without isolating effectiveness of this specific piece (Bolier et al., 2013). In addition, it is necessary to determine variables that maximize effectiveness of gratitude journaling. Examples of variables to consider include how frequently journaling takes place (e.g. daily or weekly), the number of items included in each journal entry, amount of time spent on each journal entry, and the amount of detail included (e.g. "I am grateful for my family" vs. "I am grateful to my family because they support my goals"). For these reasons, further research into the effectiveness of gratitude journaling is necessary.

The purpose of the present study was to determine the effectiveness of a prompted daily gratitude journaling compared to free response gratitude journaling. The researcher determined the effectiveness by measuring the levels of gratitude and SWB in a suburban

seventh grade population using a quantitative, quasi-experimental research design. One group of students was asked to write in a free response style for five minutes, while the other group was given the prompt "I am grateful to _____ because _____" and asked to write statements in that style for five minutes. The purpose of the prompt was to facilitate depth of response and to help students think about what others have done for them, rather than just generate a list of things they are grateful for.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Evidence suggests that there is a need for positive psychology interventions in schools in order to increase feelings of SWB and to reduce negative mental health symptoms. The following literature review will explore the importance of these interventions, specifically targeting gratitude.

Mental Health Disorders in Youth

According to the National Comorbidity Survey-Adolescent Supplement (NCS-A), 22.2% of youth ages 13-18 have experienced some kind of mental health disorder in their lifetime (Merikangas et al., 2010). Of those, the most common are anxiety disorders (31.9%), such as generalized anxiety disorder or social anxiety disorder. The next largest group is behavior disorders (19.1%), which include attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), oppositional defiant disorder, and conduct disorder. Mood disorders, such as major depressive disorder and bipolar disorder, account for 14.3%, and substance use disorders make up 11.4% of youth who experience mental health disorders. Of participants surveyed using the NCS-A, forty percent met the criteria for more than one disorder (Merikangas et al., 2010). Furthermore, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC; 2014), suicide is the second leading cause of death for youth ages 10-14 and 15-24.

Relevance of positive experiences in middle school students. Students in middle school face unique challenges as they embark on the transition from child to adulthood. Children are malleable during this period of development, when experiences can significantly affect their future (Cicchetti & Toth, 1996). Factors such as poor school performance, negative peer relationships, and difficulty at home can lead to significant mood disruptions during adolescence. Such mood disruptions can negatively affect peer relationships and academic performance. Because youth during this period of development can be so impressionable, students in middle school are also uniquely situated to experience positive psychological growth. Positive experiences can lessen mood disruptions and improve overall life experiences. These experiences include parental support and positive peer relations. For these reasons, focusing specifically on fostering positive attributes, such as gratitude and hope, can serve as a buffer against the development of poor mental health in adolescence (Froh et al., 2014).

Dual-factor model of mental health. According to the dual-factor model (DFM) of mental health, mental health is made up of two dimensions: the mental health continuum and the mental illness continuum (Greenspoon & Saklofske, 2001; Suldo & Shaffer, 2008). When these dimensions intersect, four quadrants emerge (Figure 1).
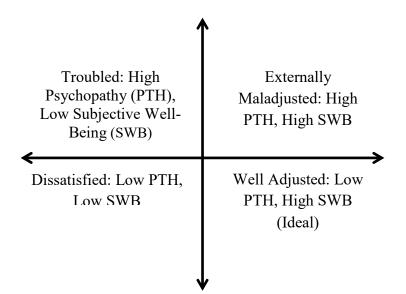
Troubled: High Psychopathy (PTH), Low Subjective Well-Being (SWB)	Externally Maladjusted: High PTH, High SWB
Dissatisfied: Low PTH, Low SWB	Well Adjusted: Low PTH, High SWB (Ideal)

Figure 1. Dual-factor model of mental health based on research from Greenspoon & Saklofske (2001).

The distressed, or troubled, quadrant refers to those who experience high psychopathy (PTH) and SWB The externally maladjusted, or symptomatic but content, quadrant contains those who have high PTH but also high SWB. Individuals who experience low PTH and high SWB are in the well-adjusted, or complete mental health, quadrant. This is the ideal quadrant. Those in the dissatisfied, or vulnerable, quadrant have low PTH as well as low SWB. While students in this quadrant do not have complete mental health, they are typically not identified on mental health screenings as being in need of services. Because of this, school professionals should consider a student's SWB in addition to PTH when assessing the student's level of mental health; this additional dimension offers the most holistic picture of school functioning (Lyons, Huebner, & Hills, 2013).

Self-determination theory. According to the self-determination theory (SDT), the three basic needs for complete mental health are autonomy, relatedness, and

competence (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Autonomy refers to feeling that one has a sense of choice, as well as support for one's behavior. Relatedness is the experience of belonging and feeling genuine connection with others. Finally, when one experiences competence, he or she feels able to interact effectively in the environment while developing new capabilities. During middle school, adolescents begin to experience these growing needs as they explore what it means to mature. For example, students this age may be more interested in completing work independently and may also choose their own friends (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Unfortunately, there may be a mismatch between a student's needs and the school's environment. For example, students may not feel a sense of belonging and relatedness if they are bullied. When there is a gap between what the student needs and what the school environment can offer, students may suffer from decreases in SWB (Tian, Chen, & Huebner, 2014).

Subjective Well-Being

SWB is the psychological term for happiness, made up of three intertwined dimensions (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). The first dimension is positive affect; this is how frequently one experiences positive emotions in daily life. The second dimension, negative affect, is the frequency of negative emotions in one's daily life. The final aspect of SWB is life satisfaction. This is one's overall cognitive appraisal of his or her life (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005).

Development of SWB. In order to operationally define SWB and therefore find ways to develop this construct in individuals, Lyubomirsky et al. (2005) sought to determine what SWB consists of. One component of SWB is an individual's *set point*. *Set point* is genetically determined, remains relatively stable over time, and overall, accounts

for approximately 50 percent of a person's SWB. For example, a person who generally reports being happy overall is able to recover and eventually return to typical levels of happiness after a tragic event, like the death of a family member. On the other hand, a person who generally reports being unhappy will remain unhappy even when faced with good fortune, such as winning the lottery.

Life circumstances also play a part in SWB. These include but are not limited to: where a person lives geographically, culturally, and nationally; demographic factors such as age, gender, and ethnicity; personal history, such as trauma; and life status variables such as marital and occupational status, income, health, and religion. Life circumstances account for 8 to 15 percent of a person's SWB (Lyubomirsky et al. 2005).

The third piece of SWB is *intentional activities.* These activities can be separated into three categories: behavioral, cognitive, and volitional. Behavioral activities are purposeful actions, such as working out, keeping a journal, or planning events with friends. Cognitive activities are purposeful thinking about things in a positive way. For example, instead of feeling annoyed about a large homework assignment, a person may view it as a meaningful learning opportunity. Finally, a volitional activity is when one sets and works towards goals. One example of this is when a runner signs up for a marathon and then follows a training plan leading up to the event. In all, intentional activities account for 35 to 40 percent of a person's SWB (Lyubomirsky et al. 2005). Intentional activities make up a large percentage of a person's SWB and are more within one's control than set point and life circumstances, so researchers see this as the most effective component to target for interventions to increase SWB.

School-related benefits of SWB. While some may see being happy as a benefit in itself, there are many positive school-related outcomes associated with high SWB as well. Suldo and Shaffer (2008) sought to compare students in different quadrants (distressed, externally maladjusted, well-adjusted, or dissatisfied) on a variety of performance and self-reported measures. The researchers found that students who were in the well-adjusted quadrant had better reading skills, school attendance, academic self-perceptions, academic-related goals, social support from classmates and parents, self-perceived physical health, and fewer social problems than their peers in the dissatisfied quadrant.

Lyons et al. (2013) explored whether students in different quadrants also differed in school grade point average (GPA). To determine quadrant membership, students completed self-report surveys regarding life satisfaction, positive and negative affect, and use of coping strategies. The researchers also used self-reported surveys to determine between-group differences in emotional, cognitive, and behavioral engagement during a five-month period. Emotional engagement refers to feelings of belonging and finding value in what is being learned, as well as reactions to teachers, classmates, and school (Blumenfeld et al., 2005). Cognitive engagement includes being thoughtful and willing to work to understand ideas and develop skills. Behavioral engagement is related to participation in academic, social, and extracurricular activities (Blumenfeld et al., 2005). The researchers found that students in the well-adjusted group had the highest average GPAs and showed the highest levels of student engagement across all measures after five months. Students who were dissatisfied (low in SWB and PTH) showed variability across GPA and student engagement measures. Specifically, their emotional engagement was

significantly lower than those in the well-adjusted group, and their GPAs declined at a significantly faster rate than those who were well-adjusted (Lyons et al., 2013).

SWB and social functioning. Suldo and Shaffer (2008) sought to compare middle school students with complete mental health (high SWB and low PTH) to dissatisfied peers (low in SWB and PTH) through the use of self-report scales, school records, and teacher reports. When considering social functioning, the researchers found that students with complete mental health reported fewer social problems (i.e. loneliness, issues getting along with others, preference for younger friends), as well as greater social support from classmates and parents than peers who were dissatisfied.

SWB and physical health. In the same study, Suldo and Shaffer (2008) also reviewed the physical health of those with complete mental health compared to dissatisfied peers. They found that youth with complete mental health also reported better general health (i.e. sick less often, better feelings about overall health) and fewer limitations on their family activities because of health or behavioral problems when compared to dissatisfied peers.

An "upward spiral" of SWB. According to Stiglbauer et al. (2013), individuals experience an "upward spiral" of SWB when they experience positive emotions. They suggest that positive emotions lead one to experience a wider range of thoughts and actions than usual. This causes one to have increased cognitive and behavioral flexibility, creativity, and ability to identify new opportunities. When one takes advantage of opportunities, it can build both internal and external physical, psychological, intellectual, and social resources. For example, a student who is experiencing positive emotions may feel more inclined to interact with peers. These interactions may lead to friendships that

further increase positive emotions. These resources can then continue to increase the experience of positive emotions and SWB. In sum, positive emotions lead to a wider range of thoughts; these thoughts lead to an accumulation of personal resources, which in turn increase SWB. In this way, positive emotions activate an "upward spiral" that continually increases SWB overtime (Stiglbauer et al., 2013).

SWB interventions. Suldo, Savage, and Mercer (2014) implemented a ten-week, 50-minute small group positive psychology intervention with middle school students who were experiencing lower than optimal levels of SWB (dissatisfied or distressed quadrants) based on a grade-wide screener. The treatment group included weekly lessons about gratitude, kindness, character strengths, optimistic thinking, and hope. When participants completed surveys after ten weeks, the researchers found that those in the treatment condition had significantly improved SWB at post-test when compared to pre-test. Despite this, there was a lack of significant changes when analyzing differences in internalizing and externalizing between pre- and post-test. This further supports the dual-factor model of mental health. It also suggests that an intervention that targets SWB is most effective for students who are dissatisfied (low in SWB and low in PTH), rather than students who are distressed (low in SWB and high in PTH).

Roth et al. (2017) conducted a follow-up study, this time targeting urban seventh graders in the dissatisfied or distressed quadrants. In addition to the weekly lessons, this study included parental involvement, as well as follow up sessions two months after the intervention. They found that students who participated in the intervention experienced significant improvement in all indicators of SWB (life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect). Additionally, there were meaningful reductions in internalizing and

externalizing problems when compared to the control group. One future direction

proposed in Roth et al.'s (2017) study was to consider what parts of the intervention

lessons facilitated change: gratitude, kindness, character strengths, optimism, or hope.

Gratitude

A review of previous research reveals that gratitude is a worthwhile area of study

when facilitating the development of SWB. Gratitude is defined as "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). Gratitude can be directed towards other people, as well as

impersonal sources, such as nature, God, or animals. From the perspective of moral

philosophy, gratitude is considered a human strength that improves an individual's

personal and relational well-being as well as in society as a whole (Froh et al., 2008).

Instead of viewing gratitude as simply politeness, gratitude can be a moral

emotion (McCullough, Emmons, Kilpatrick, & Larson, 2001). Other examples of moral

emotions include empathy, guilt, and sympathy, to name a few. As a moral emotion,

gratitude has three functions: *moral barometer, moral motivator,* and *moral reinforcer.*

As a *moral barometer*, gratitude measures the enhancement of an individual's SWB in

response to receiving a good deed from another person. For example, a shopkeeper may

feel gratitude towards a customer for spending money in his store. As a *moral motivator*,

individuals strive to help others after they have been helped. In this way, reciprocity for

good deeds is achieved. Finally, when gratitude is considered as a *moral reinforcer*, this

means that those who perform good deeds for others are re-affirmed when they receive

expressions of thanks and therefore, continue to perform good deeds (McCullough et al., 2001).

Gratitude and social functioning. One way that gratitude facilitates the development of SWB is through positive social relationships with significant others. According to Algoe's (2012) *find-remind-bind theory* of gratitude, the emotion and expression of gratitude strengthens one's relationship with whomever he or she is showing gratitude towards. This occurs when one finds something new to be grateful for in a partner or is reminded of a good quality in one's partner. This helps to bind the two partners closer together. This strengthening does not occur in a vacuum. Instead, once gratitude is expressed, Algoe (2012) theorizes that there is an upward spiral of mutually helpful behaviors between partners, even further reinforcing the relationship.

Additional outcomes. Researchers sought to compare African American high school students with varying levels of gratitude based on multiple outcomes (Froh, Emmons, Card, Bono, & Wilson, 2011). To do this, students completed measures of materialism, gratitude, academic functioning, envy, depression, life satisfaction, social integration, and absorption. The researchers found that higher gratitude levels predict higher GPA, life satisfaction, social integration, and absorption in activities, as well as lower levels of envy and depression.

Gratitude interventions in schools. In one gratitude study, the researchers implemented the *Nice Thinking!* five-session, class-wide intervention in which upper elementary-age students (eight to 11-year olds) were taught and given the chance to practice various facets related to expressing gratitude (Froh et al., 2014). For example, students learned to keep gratitude journals and to consider how kind things others do can

benefit them. They were also taught the cognitive appraisal skills to take notice when someone has done a nice thing for them. Compared to students in the control condition who received a 5-week attention-control intervention, students in the experimental group showed enhanced self-reported gratitude, optimism, life satisfaction, and decreased negative affect.

In another gratitude study, researchers implemented a five-week Gratitude Group Program for college students (Wong, McKean Blackwell, Goodrich Mitts, Gabana, & Li, 2017). Students explored different facets of gratitude, such as appreciating little things in life, savoring experiences, expressing gratitude toward others, reflecting on positive aspects of stressful experiences, and appreciating big things in life. In addition to the teaching component, students kept gratitude journals, practiced expressing gratitude with other members of the group, got structured guidance on completing gratitude activities like journaling, and received encouragement from other group members. Based on pre-test data, students had decreased psychological distress and increased levels of gratitude, satisfaction with life, and meaning in life (Wong et al., 2017).

Gratitude journals. Emmons and McCollough (2003) led the first studies to examine the effectiveness of gratitude journals. For their study, undergraduate participants were assigned to one of three conditions. In the first condition, students were asked to write about things they were grateful. In the second condition, students wrote about hassles in their lives. For the third condition, students wrote about neutral life events. Those in the gratitude journal condition experienced increases in well-being when compared to those who wrote about hassles in their lives and those who wrote about neutral life events (2003). One suggestion from Emmons and McCollough's (2003)

studies is that gratitude is a two-step thought process. First, a person acknowledges that

he or she has received a benefit or gift. Second, that individual acknowledges the external

source of what he or she received. For example, a college student may first feel

appreciative that class has been canceled, then feel gratitude towards her teacher for

canceling class. According to the researchers, the extra step of acknowledging the source

of the benefit is key to cultivating gratitude (Emmons & McCollough, 2003).

Froh, Sefick, and Emmons (2008) conducted another study relating gratitude to

SWB, this time with adolescents. Once again, participants were assigned to either write

about things they were grateful for, hassles in their lives, or neutral events. This study

was meant to further knowledge in the development of gratitude in youth. Results from

this study replicated ones found in Emmons and McCollough's original 2003 study; that

is, students in the gratitude condition experienced increased SWB and gratitude, as well

as less negative affect than students in the other two conditions. This study showed that

students could benefit from a gratitude journal in similar ways to adults, making it a

relevant intervention to consider within schools.

In a study conducted by O'Connell, O'Shea, and Gallagher (2017), the researchers

examined the effects of a gratitude journal on individuals' SWB. The researchers studied

a sample in which the majority of participants were between ages 18 and 30. Participants

were randomly selected for one of three conditions that lasted three weeks: 1)

Participants reflected on things they were grateful for and wrote them down in a journal;

2) Participants wrote down things they were grateful for in a journal and then expressed

gratitude to one person through face-to-face contact, a letter, a Facebook message, etc.

(added personal contact); or 3) Participants wrote down things that happened to them during the day (control group).

While participants in the second group who wrote in a journal and expressed gratitude experienced most enhanced SWB immediately after the intervention, by one month follow up, the journaling group with and without the added personal contact experienced similar results in SWB when compared to the control group (O'Connell et al., 2017). This indicates that while personal contact can increase subjective well-being, it is not necessary. When considering the variety of pulls on a middle school student's time, taking out this added step of contacting a person to express gratitude could increase intervention compliance in this population.

Efficacy of gratitude journal interventions. There is still disagreement about the actual effectiveness of gratitude journaling. Bolier et al. (2013) conducted a meta-analysis of 39 positive psychology intervention studies, many of which included a gratitude journaling component. The meta-analysis raised questions of efficacy due to methodological issues cited within studies, including poor randomization procedures and biased reporting. Additionally, many studies report the effectiveness of gratitude journaling when it is included as part of a larger gratitude intervention without considering the effectiveness of gratitude journaling alone (Bolier et al., 2013).

In addition to addressing methodological issues, it is necessary to determine what variables maximize effectiveness of gratitude journaling due to limited time and resources within a school district. Some variables are how often the individual journals, how many items they write about, how much time they spend writing, and how much

detail they include in their journal entries. For these reasons, further research into the effectiveness of gratitude journaling is necessary.

Present Study

With nearly one in four middle school students living with mental health disorders and suicide the second leading cause of death for this age group, the urgency to find and implement effective interventions to increase SWB is significant. Interventions that specifically target the development of gratitude are an important possibility to consider, as past research has shown higher levels of gratitude linked to increased SWB, positive relationships, and higher GPAs, among other variables (Emmons & McCollough, 2003; Froh et al., 2008; Froh et al., 2011; O'Connell et al., 2017).

The purpose of the present study was to examine the effectiveness of prompted daily gratitude journaling compared to free response gratitude journaling. The purpose of the prompted daily gratitude journaling was to examine what happens if students are asked to think of things others have done for them. The researcher determined effectiveness by measuring levels of gratitude and SWB. The free response group of students wrote in a free response style for five minutes. The prompt group of students wrote for five minutes using the prompt "I am grateful to _____ because _____." Outcomes were measured using self-reported scales for SWB, positive affect, negative affect, and gratitude.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

Research Question and Hypothesis

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of prompted daily gratitude journaling compared to daily free response gratitude journaling in a group of suburban seventh grade students when measuring levels of SWB and gratitude. The present study had one research question: What is the effect of prompted daily gratitude journaling compared to daily free response journaling on seventh grade students' levels of gratitude and SWB?

It was hypothesized that when examining pre and post-test measures, the group assigned to the daily gratitude journal prompt would experience greater gains in gratitude and SWB than the group assigned to the daily free response gratitude journal condition. Furthermore, students in the prompt condition were expected to experience long-term increases in gratitude and SWB at two week follow up.

This hypothesis was based on previous research from McCollough and Emmons (2003). McCollough and Emmons (2003) found that in order to develop gratitude, and therefore enhance SWB, an individual must both acknowledge a benefit they have received and attribute that benefit to an external source. By using the prompt "I am grateful to ____ because ___" students were encouraged to write more in depth about

what others have done for them. For example, a student in the free response condition may write, "I am thankful for no homework on Fridays," while a student in the prompt condition may write, "I am grateful to my teacher because she does not give us homework on Fridays." By asking students to fill out the prompt, they were guided to consider the source of their gratitude.

Research Design

This quantitative study utilized a quasi-experimental design to compare the effectiveness of a daily gratitude journal prompt versus daily free response gratitude journaling on seventh grade students' levels of SWB and gratitude. The independent variables were the two conditions- 1) a gratitude journal prompt and 2) free-response gratitude journaling. The dependent variable was scored on surveys measuring SWB and gratitude. There was no control group. The study was quasi-experimental because students in an existing classroom were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions.

This study utilized a pre and post-test design to compare journal conditions. First, the researcher administered a pre-test to both the prompt group and the free response group. Then, both groups wrote in gratitude journals for five minutes a day every other day for two weeks (five class sessions) in the style (prompt or free response) to which they were assigned. Initially, students were supposed to write in journals everyday to mimic Emmons and McCollough's (2003) study. This schedule had to be altered due to district testing, so the every other day schedule was agreed upon.

After students wrote in their journals for five sessions, the researcher administered a post-test to examine short-term effects of both journaling conditions. The researcher

then returned to the class two weeks later to administer another post-test to determine delayed effectiveness of both journaling conditions.

This design was chosen because it was minimally disruptive to the school environment, while still providing the opportunity to measure outcomes in students after the intervention. Examples of outcomes included: level of gratitude, positive affect, negative affect, and level of overall life satisfaction. These outcomes were measured by the Gratitude Questionnaire-6 (GQ-6) to assess one's inclination to express daily gratitude (McCullough et al., 2002); Positive and Negative Affect Scale for Children (PANAS-C) to assess positive and negative affect (Laurent et al. 1994); and Brief Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (BMSLSS) to assess overall life satisfaction across multiple domains (Seligson et al. 2003). These measures will be described in detail in the Method section.

Participants and Setting

The setting was a middle school located in a Southwest Ohio school district. According to Ohio's School District Typology, the district was suburban, with low student poverty (median income=$47,000) and a large student twenty-two seventh grade students in one homeroom classroom (n=22). One half of the class was assigned to the gratitude journal prompt condition, while the other half was in the free response journal condition. Group membership was determined based on the students' seating arrangement in the classroom. Students were also randomly assigned numbers in order to ensure confidentiality and to correctly match journals and surveys.

Participants were chosen using convenience sampling because all of the participants were in one class. According to school administration, homerooms were

formed at random, so they were considered a representative sample of the school's overall population.

Students were excluded from final data analysis if they missed more than one day of gratitude journaling or if they missed any of the testing administration. That is, students had to attend at least four sessions, as well as the pre and post-test sessions, or their data were not used. Three students were excluded from data collection based on these criteria.

According to the school counselors in the district, character education has already been an integrated part of the district's curriculum for over ten years. For the purpose of this study, character education is defined as "an educational movement that supports the social, emotional, and ethical development of students" (Character Education Partnership, n.d.). Because character education was already an established, normal educational practice in this district, students and parents were asked for consent to collect data through surveys, instead of consent to participate in the intervention itself. Based on a review of character education curriculum and interviews with counselors, students learned about being a good citizen, but gratitude was not specifically covered.

Materials

Measures. The Gratitude Questionnaire-6 (GQ-6; McCullough et al., 2002), Positive and Negative Affect Scale for Children (PANAS-C; Laurent et al., 1999), and Brief Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (BMSLSS; Seligson, Hueber, & Valois, 2003) were used as measures for the current study. Each measure will be discussed in detail in the following sections.

Gratitude Questionnaire-6 (GQ-6). According to McCullough et al. (2002),

highly grateful people are different from less grateful people in four ways: they

experience gratitude more intensely when a positive event occurs; they experience

gratitude more frequently throughout the day; they are grateful to more people; and they

are grateful across a wider range of experiences. On this basis, the GQ-6 (see Appendix

A) was used to assess one's inclination to express daily gratitude (McCullough et al.,

2002). It is a six-item form in which participants use a Likert scale to answer questions

about gratitude in their lives. Sample items include: "I have so much to be thankful for"

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

In Froh et al.'s (2014) study, the researchers used the Gratitude Attitude Checklist

(GAC) when assessing gratitude in children, because at that time, the GAC was the only

validated gratitude scale for children. Since then, it has been found that the GAC and the

GQ-6 are moderately correlated at .58 for 10 to 11-year-olds. For the current study, the

GQ-6 was used for its length and ease of administration. According to Froh, Fan,

Emmons, Bono, Huebner, and Watkins (2011), the GQ-6 has correlations with positive

affect (r=.31), life satisfaction (r= .53), negative affect (r= -.31), and depression (r= -.30).

Because the correlations for positive affect, negative affect, and depression are not very

high, other measures were included to capture these dimensions.

Positive and Negative Affect Scale for Children (PANAS-C). The PANAS-C

(see Appendix A) was used to assess positive and negative affect (Laurent et al., 1999). It

is a 27-item scale that includes words that describe positive and negative affects to

evaluate how an individual has felt in the past week. Words include *interested, ashamed,*

proud, afraid, etc. Individuals rate how often they feel emotions in the past few weeks as "not much or not at all," "a little," "some," "quite a bit," and "a lot."

The PANAS-C was developed from the original Positive and Negative Affect Scale for Adults (PANAS) (Laurent et al., 1999). The PANAS-C has a .90 alpha coefficient for the Positive Affect scale and a .94 for the Negative Affect scale for internal reliability. These are similar psychometric properties to the PANAS, which has alpha coefficients of .87 for both Positive and Negative Affect scales for internal reliability.

Furthermore, the PANAS-C has convergent and discriminant validity when compared to other established measures of anxiety and depression in children, including The Anxiety Disorders Interview Schedule for Children (ADIS-C/P), The Children's Depression Inventory (CDI), Multidimensional Anxiety Scale for Children (MASC), and Revised Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale (RCMAS) (Hughes & Kendall, 2009). When considering traits of negative affect (NA), there were low correlations between NA and measures of worry (RCMAS-Worry, $r = .38$) and depression (CDI, $r = .40$). With regard to positive affect (PA) there was a significant negative correlation between PA and depression (CDI, $r = -.55$) (Hughes & Kendall, 2009).

Brief Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (BMSLSS). The BMSLSS (see Appendix A) was used to assess overall life satisfaction across multiple domains (Seligson, Hueber, & Valois, 2003). This 6-item measure uses a Likert scale to assess one's life satisfaction overall as well as specific areas including family, friendships, and school.

The BMSLSS has acceptable internal consistency estimates with an alpha coefficient of .75 for middle school students (Huebner, Seligson, Valois, & Suldo, 2006). Test-retest coefficients after two weeks include .85 for family, .80 for living environment, .79 for self, .75 for school, .62 for friends, and .91 total. Additionally, the BMSLSS correlates strongly with the Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale Total score *(r*= .66 and .81) and the Students' Life Satisfaction scale (*r*= .62). Furthermore, the BMSLSS is positively correlated with positive affect (*r*= .43) and negatively correlated with negative affect (*r*= -.27) when compared to measures of the PANAS-C (Seligson et al., 2003).

Acceptability measure. Acceptability measures should have been distributed during the two-week follow up in order to gather information about what students and the classroom teacher liked and did not like about the intervention. The measure (see Appendix B) was not passed out due to scheduling issues with the teacher and the end of the school year, so this data were not collected. Therefore, it is unknown how interested or invested participants may have been in the intervention.

Intervention Materials

For both conditions, students were provided with a six-page packet, one page for each day of journaling and a cover page for privacy. For students in both conditions, each page included the following directions: "Write down up to five things that you are grateful for." These directions were also read aloud at the beginning of each journaling session.

For students in the free response condition, there were blank lines on each page. For students in the prompt condition, there was the prompt "I am grateful to _____

because _____" five times with ample space included to respond. Students were asked to write a randomly assigned number on the cover page, so that a student's journal condition could be matched to surveys. When collecting pre and post-test survey data, the researcher provided students with paper copies of each survey to fill out.

Procedures

    IRB approval. The researcher obtained university IRB approval from University of Dayton in order to complete this study. In order to do this, the researcher filled out the IRB Application for Exemption and included the appropriate documents including school consent, parent consent, student assent, and recruitment materials.

    District/School consent. The lead researcher met with the school psychologist and school counselors at the middle school in order to obtain permission from the school. The lead researcher also met with the Director of Pupil Services in order to receive consent and confirm that the program was feasible for the district.

    Parent consent. Parents received a consent form (see Appendix C) two weeks prior to the beginning of the study. The researcher went into the classroom and passed out paper copies of the consent form. The school counselors also sent parents an email alerting them to the consent form, as well as an attachment of an extra copy to sign and return. Because class wide character education interventions already occur frequently at this school, the consent letter specifically asked for permission to collect pre- and post-test data, not for permission to participate in the intervention itself. For students whose parents do not want them to participate in data collection, they received a word search to work on during this time. Four students did not return parent consent forms and were excluded from data collection.

Student assent. Students were given a letter (see Appendix C) on the day of the pre-test measures prior to the beginning the measures, so that they could opt out of data collection if they chose. The student assent letter was read aloud to accommodate students with reading or visual difficulties. Because students are under 18, the letter asked for their assent. Students who did not want to participate in data collection received a word search to work on during this time. No students declined to participate.

Teacher consent. Consent was obtained from the teacher who was willing to participate in the intervention (see Appendix C).

Incentives. Students earned raffle tickets for turning in parent consent and student assent forms, regardless of responses. Additionally, students earned a raffle ticket for everyday they wrote in their journals. At the end of the intervention, a student's name was drawn, and they won a $10 Amazon gift card.

Data collection. Data were collected in the students' classroom using paper copies of surveys distributed by the researcher at the beginning of the class during the first and last gratitude journal session. Students filled out the survey themselves, and each question was read aloud by the researcher. If any students needed help filling out the survey, the classroom teacher and researcher were available for assistance.

Recruitment. One classroom was recruited through an email from the school counselors to all homeroom seventh grade teachers. Teachers who volunteered their classes had their names put into a random generator to determine who was chosen. A script for this recruitment email is included in Appendix D.

Baseline. Baseline data were collected on the first day of gratitude journaling for both groups. Data were collected through the use of the three measurements.

Intervention. During the intervention phase, attendance data were collected to confirm that each student was present for each journaling session. If a student missed more than one journaling session, or if they were not present for survey administrations, they were not included in the data analysis. The researcher supervised each daily journaling session with the classroom teacher in the room as well.

On the first day of intervention, the researcher introduced herself and introduced the concept of gratitude by asking students to define what they thought gratitude meant. Definitions were written on the board. Students came up with answers such as, "satisfied with what you have," "saying thank you for things," and "appreciating things." The researcher then explained that gratitude is a sense of thankfulness and joy in response to receiving something. One can feel grateful to a variety of things from people to circumstances (Emmons & McCollough, 2003). After the explanation, gratitude journals were passed out. Students received either the blank journals or journals with prompts, depending on previously assigned groups. Students were then asked to write up to five things in their lives that they were grateful for.

Students were given five minutes to complete their journaling activity for the day. When the journaling session was completed, journals were collected and stored in the researcher's office until the following day. For journal sessions 2-5, the researcher greeted students at the beginning of the session and once again reminded them to write up to five things in their lives that they were grateful for.

Debriefing. Because data were not analyzed by the end of the school year, results were not shared with the classroom teacher or with school counselors. The researcher

interviewed both of these groups to gain qualitative information, and they all agreed that they enjoyed the intervention and it was not too time consuming.

Post assessment. Post assessment data were collected on day five of the journaling sessions after journaling. The researcher also gave a post-assessment two weeks after the end of the intervention in order to examine long-term effects. Data were collected once again using paper copies of the three measurements.

Participant confidentiality. Participant confidentiality was maintained by randomly assigning numbers to students and asking them to write those numbers on their journals and surveys. A list of numbers and corresponding names was kept using an Excel file on the researcher's computer. Additionally, surveys included a cover sheet, so that answers were not visible. Surveys were stored in a locked drawer in the main office of the school. Journals were also stored in a locked drawer. After the end of the intervention, students had the option to keep their journals or throw them away.

Data Analyses

In order to determine the effectiveness of the intervention, a non-parametric Wilcoxon test was conducted using SPSS to account for each student's scores of each of the three measures. This statistic can be used to analyze data when there is a repeated-measures design with an intervention (Green & Salkin, 2010). The Wilcoxon test examined the difference in an individual's pre and posttest scores on each of the three measures. The Wilcoxon test was chosen because this experiment was quasi-experimental and had a small sample size (n<40). Furthermore, the prompt group and the free-writing group were independent of one another. In order to reject the null hypothesis

that there is no difference between mean scores of those in the prompt and free response

groups, the significance p-value must be equal to or less than .05.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Effects on Level of Reported Gratitude

A Wilcoxon test was conducted to evaluate whether students in the prompt group reported greater levels of gratitude on the GQ-6 after the intervention and at two-week follow up. The results indicated that there was no significant difference from pre-test to initial post-test, p=.51. This result was also not significant from post-test to two-week follow up, p=.51.

A Wilcoxon test was also conducted to evaluate whether students in the free write group reported greater levels of gratitude on the GQ-6 after the intervention and at two-week follow up. The results indicated that there was no significant difference from pre-test to initial post-test, p=.24. This result was also not significant from post-test to the two-week follow up, p=.38

Effects on Levels of Reported Positive and Negative Affect

A Wilcoxon test was conducted to evaluate whether students in the prompt group reported greater levels of positive affect on the PANAS-C after the intervention and at the two-week follow up. The results indicated that there was no significant difference from pre-test to initial post-test, p= .51. This result was also not significant from post-test to two-week follow up, p= .51.

A Wilcoxon test was conducted to evaluate whether students in the free write group reported greater levels of positive affect on the PANAS-C after the intervention and at the two-week follow up. The results indicated that there was no significant difference from pre-test to initial post-test, $p= .31$. This result was also not significant from post-test to two-week follow up, $p= .80$.

A Wilcoxon test was also conducted to evaluate whether students in the prompt group reported fewer levels of negative affect on the PANAS-C after the intervention and at the two-week follow up. The results indicated that there was no significant difference from pre-test to initial post-test, $p= 1.00$. This result was also not significant from post-test to two-week follow up, $p= .23$.

A Wilcoxon test was conducted to evaluate whether students in the free write group reported fewer levels of negative affect on the PANAS-C after the intervention and at the two-week follow up. The results indicated that there was no significant difference from pre-test to initial post-test, $p= .24$. This result was also not significant from post-test to two-week follow up,, $p= .23$.

Effects on Level of Reported Life Satisfaction

A Wilcoxon test was then conducted to evaluate whether students in the prompt group reported greater levels of overall life satisfaction on the BMLSS after the intervention and at the two-week follow up. The results indicated that there was no significant difference from pre-test to initial post-test, p= .34. This result was also not significant from post-test to two-week follow up, p= .15.

A Wilcoxon test was then conducted to evaluate whether students in the free write group reported greater levels of overall life satisfaction on the BMLSS after the

intervention and at the two-week follow up. The results indicated that there was not significant difference from pre-test to initial post-test, *p*= .32. This result was also not significant from post-test to two-week follow up*, p*= .68.

Conclusion

Because there were no significant differences for each group between evaluation sessions, no further statistical analyses were conducted. There were no significant effects on reported levels of gratitude, positive affect, negative affect, and life satisfaction based on pre- and post-test measures.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Major Findings

The present study had one research question: What is the effect of prompted daily gratitude journaling compared to daily free response journaling on seventh grade students' levels of gratitude and SWB? The findings suggest that the use of a gratitude writing prompt intervention had no statistically significant effects on gratitude, levels of positive and negative affect, and life satisfaction when compared to the effects of a free response gratitude journal intervention. These findings are relevant because choosing and implementing effective interventions within a school setting leads to maximum benefit for students.

Previous studies examined the effects of gratitude journaling when compared to control groups that wrote about life hassles or mundane events (Emmons & McCollough, 2003; Froh et al., 2008). These studies found that writing in a gratitude journal resulted in increased SWB. Emmons and McCollough's 2003 study also suggested that taking the extra step of thinking about people to feel grateful towards increases one's SWB, hence why the prompt was "I am grateful to _____ because _____." Furthermore, Shankland and Rosset (2017) found that gratitude journaling taught students to shift their attention for negative areas of their lives and focus on positive aspects and people who have

contributed to these areas. Finally, according to Algoe's (2012) *find-remind-bind theory* of gratitude, feeling and expressing gratitude strengthens one's relationship with whomever he or she is showing gratitude towards, leading to increased SWB. The present study sought to combine these areas of research to find the most effective gratitude journaling condition.

Alternative Explanations of the Findings

One explanation after briefly reviewing student journal entries is that the students in the journal prompt condition did not always write about people they were grateful to. For example, a student may have written, "I am thankful to my Xbox because it is fun." Because of this, the prompt may have been too vague and may have required more explicit instruction or different wording to have a significant effect.

Another possible explanation for these findings is that a gratitude-teaching component is necessary for the intervention to be effective. For example, in Froh et al.'s 2014 study, there was a lesson each day that went along with the gratitude journaling. In this way, students could learn more about gratitude as a concept and think more deeply when it was time to write in their journals. Additionally, other gratitude journal studies included some teaching component before each journaling session (Emmons & McCollough, 2003; Froh et al., 2008). According to a meta-analysis by Boiler et al. (2013), one of the major problems with gratitude journal studies was that the effects of journaling were not separated from the effects of other components of the intervention, including a teaching piece. This current study may support the idea that gratitude journaling by itself is not enough to increase gratitude and SWB.

A third explanation is that students may have already had relatively high levels of gratitude, positive affect, and SWB, along with low levels of negative affect. The highest score a student could earn on the BMSLSS is a 35. The class average pre-test on the BMSLSS was x̄=32.27. The highest a student could earn on the PANAS-C for positive affect is 60, and the class average pre-test was x̄=44.36. On the PANAS-C for negative affect, the lowest score one could earn was 15, and the class average pre-test was x̄=28.27. On the GQ-6, the highest score one could earn is 42, and the class average pre-test score was x̄=33.95.

Limitations

One limitation was student attendance. To address this, students were allowed to miss up to one journaling session before their data were excluded. Furthermore, data collection took place during the school district's testing period, which caused schedule alterations. In addition to contributing to student absences from the classroom for testing, the intervention took place every other day for two weeks instead of daily for one week. These schedule shifts, as well as the standardized testing, could have also diminished effects of the intervention.

Risks to validity. One risk to validity was teachers' attitudes towards the intervention. For example, if they did not like the intervention, they may have said negative things that influenced the students' opinions and willingness to participate. Alternatively, they may have gone too far to encourage students to express gratitude. In order to address this, the teacher was asked to make an effort to not change her behavior during the intervention period. Due to time constraints and scheduling conflicts, data

were not collected on the teacher's attitude towards the intervention using the proposed acceptability measure (see Appendix B). This is a limitation of the study.

Another threat to validity was response bias if students felt they were expected to respond in a certain way to surveys. To address this, students were reminded that all surveys were anonymous, and they should answer as honestly as possible.

Risk mitigation. Because incentives were involved in the form of raffle tickets, this may have also influenced the results of this study. For example, a student may have reported that they are happier, not because of the intervention but because of the raffle tickets.

Implications for Future Practice

Due to the limited time and resources that schools often face, the use of effective, efficient, evidence-based interventions to address student's well-being is imperative. The purpose of this present study was to see if the use of a prompt was more effective than free writing when measuring levels of gratitude and SWB, but these results were not found. Because of this, schools may still consider using interventions that include both a teaching component and a gratitude journal component in order to increase SWB and, in turn, improve outcomes in academic self-perceptions, academic achievement, social relationships, and physical health.

Future Research

One area of future research is to work with a larger sample size when examining the effects of gratitude journaling. The sample size of the current study was small (n=22) and therefore may have reduced the power of the study or increased the margin of error (Green & Salkind, 2010).

Because a teaching component may be a necessary piece of a gratitude intervention, another area of future research could be designing a quick informational lesson about gratitude before each journaling session delivered in the form of a video. For example, Froh et al. (2014) designed and implemented *Nice Thinking!,* a gratitude intervention that taught students the cognitive skills to recognize when people sacrifice their time, energy, and resources for them. There were 5 lessons that lasted around 30 minutes (Froh et al., 2014). These lessons were coupled with gratitude journaling. Future research could examine whether a brief, less time intensive lesson combined with journaling could have the same effect as the longer lessons.

Another area of future research is to change the writing prompt to be more specific. For example, the prompt could be, "Think of three people who have done something for you recently. Who are they and what have they done?" This prompt could cause students to think more deeply about people instead of things. As noted in Algoe's (2012) *find-remind-bind* theory of gratitude, the feeling and expression of gratitude strengthens relationships as each partner is reminded of one other's good qualities. Once gratitude is expressed, there is an upward spiral of mutually beneficial behaviors between partners, even further reinforcing the relationship. It is possible that such a vague writing prompt as the one used in this current study did not activate this upward spiral of gratitude to improve the student's levels of gratitude and SWB.

Students could also complete journals on a weekly basis instead of a daily basis in order to give them more experiences and time to reflect upon. While examining gratitude journal responses, some students wrote the same items down each day. By spreading the journaling sessions out, students may get into the habit of looking around them during the

week to collect ideas of things to write about. Teachers could also remind students throughout the week to plan what they would write during journaling time.

Conclusion

The current study did not show a significant effect between prompted gratitude journaling, levels of gratitude, and levels of SWB in middle school students when compared to free writing gratitude journals. Despite these outcomes, previous studies suggest that using journals specifically to foster feelings of gratitude towards other people can have a positive effect on levels of gratitude and SWB (Algoe, 2012; Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Froh et al., 2008; Froh et al., 2014). Because gratitude and SWB is linked to greater satisfaction in school, positive academic self-perceptions, higher academic achievement, higher quality social relationships, and better physical health, the need to find effective SWB and gratitude interventions to implement within a school setting is great (Stiglbauer et al., 2013). Further research needs to be conducted to determine how to most effectively and efficiently implement gratitude interventions within schools.

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Measures

The Gratitude Questionnaire-Six Item Form (GQ-6)[1]

Using the scale below as a guide, write a number beside each statement to indicate how much you agree with it.

1= 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 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 for something or someone.

Rules for Scoring:

1. Add up your scores for items, 1, 2, 4, and 5.

2. Reverse your scores for items 3 and 6. That is, if you scored a "7," give yourself a "1," if you scored a "6," give yourself a "2," etc.

3. Add the reversed scores for item 3 and 6 to the total from Step 1. This is your total G6-Q score. The number should be between 6 and 42.

[1] McCullough, M. E., Emmons, R. A., & Tsang, J. (2002). The grateful disposition: A conceptual empirical topography. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 82, 112–127.

Positive and Negative Affect Scale-Children (PANAS-C)[2]

This scale consists of a number of words that describe different feelings and emotions. Read each item and then circle the appropriate answer next to that word.

Indicate how much you have felt this way during the past few weeks.

	Not much or not at all	A little	Some	Quite a bit	A lot
Interested	1	2	3	4	5
Sad	1	2	3	4	5
Frightened	1	2	3	4	5
Excited	1	2	3	4	5
Ashamed	1	2	3	4	5
Upset	1	2	3	4	5
Happy	1	2	3	4	5
Strong	1	2	3	4	5
Nervous	1	2	3	4	5
Guilty	1	2	3	4	5
Energetic	1	2	3	4	5
Scared	1	2	3	4	5
Calm	1	2	3	4	5
Miserable	1	2	3	4	5
Jittery	1	2	3	4	5
Cheerful	1	2	3	4	5
Active	1	2	3	4	5
Proud	1	2	3	4	5
Afraid	1	2	3	4	5
Joyful	1	2	3	4	5
Lonely	1	2	3	4	5
Mad	1	2	3	4	5
Disgusted	1	2	3	4	5
Delighted	1	2	3	4	5

Blue	1	2	3	4	5
Gloomy	1	2	3	4	5
Lively	1	2	3	4	5

[2] Laurent, J., Potter, K., & Catanzaro, S. J. (1994, March). Assessing positive and negative affect in children: The development of the PANAS-C. Paper presented at the 26th annual convention of the National Association of School Psychologists, Seattle, WA.

Brief Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale[3]

These six questions ask about your satisfaction with different areas of your life. Circle the best answer for each.

1. I would describe my satisfaction with my family life as:
   a) Terrible
   b) Unhappy
   c) Mostly dissatisfied
   d) Mixed (about equally satisfied and dissatisfied)
   e) Mostly satisfied
   f) Pleased
   g) Delighted

2. I would describe my satisfaction with my friendships as:
   a) Terrible
   b) Unhappy
   c) Mostly dissatisfied
   d) Mixed (about equally satisfied and dissatisfied)
   e) Mostly satisfied
   f) Pleased
   g) Delighted

3. I would describe my satisfaction with my school experience as
   a) Terrible
   b) Unhappy
   c) Mostly dissatisfied
   d) Mixed (about equally satisfied and dissatisfied)
   e) Mostly satisfied
   f) Pleased
   g) Delighted

   I would describe my satisfaction with myself as:
   a) Terrible
   b) Unhappy
   c) Mostly dissatisfied
   d) Mixed (about equally satisfied and dissatisfied)
   e) Mostly satisfied
   f) Pleased
   g) Delighted

4. I would describe my satisfaction with where I live as:
   a) Terrible
   b) Unhappy
   c) Mostly dissatisfied
   d) Mixed (about equally satisfied and dissatisfied)
   e) Mostly satisfied
   f) Pleased
   g) Delighted

5. I would describe my satisfaction with my overall life as:
   a) Terrible
   b) Unhappy
   c) Mostly dissatisfied
   d) Mixed (about equally satisfied and dissatisfied)
   e) Mostly satisfied
   f) Pleased
   g) Delighted

[3] Seligson, J., Huebner, E. S., & Valois, R. F. (2003). Preliminary validation of the Brief Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale. *Social Indicators Research, 61*, 121-145.

APPENDIX B

Acceptability Measure

Please respond to the following questions in regards to gratitude journals. Thank you!

Did you enjoy writing in a gratitude journal? Why or why not?

What was your favorite thing about writing in a gratitude journal?

Do you think writing in a gratitude journal was helpful? Why or why not?

APPENDIX C

Consent Letters

UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON
Parental Consent for Minor/Child to Participate in a Research Project

Project Title:	Effects of free response and prompted gratitude journaling on middle school students' subjective well-being
Investigator(s):	Rachel Boyd, M.S.E.
Description of Study:	For this study, the researcher plans to come to your child's classroom three times. The researcher plans to ask your child questions about gratitude and overall well-being through the use of brief surveys. These surveys will be used to determine how well a character education program aimed at teaching gratitude is working.
Adverse Effects and Risks:	No foreseeable adverse effects or risks.
Duration of Study:	Data collection will occur three (3) times lasting around twenty (20) minutes per collection.
Confidentiality of Data:	Data will be kept confidential through the use of student ID numbers. Individual data will not be shared with teachers, students, or administrators.
Contact Person:	Parents or guardians of participants may contact: Beth Siders, elizabeth.siders@beavercreek.k12.oh.us, 937-458-2536 Lindsay Mann, lindsay.mann@beavercreek.k12.oh.us, 937- 429-7577 x2539 Rachel Boyd, boydr2@udayton.edu, 317-250-0125 Dr. Sawyer Hunley, shunley1@udayton.edu , 937-229-3316 If you have questions about your rights as a research participant you may also contact the chair of University of Dayton's Institutional Review Board, Candise Powell, J.D., at (937) 229-3515, IRB@udayton.edu.

Student's Full Name (please print)

Parent's Full Name (please print)

Parent or Guardian Signature

University of Dayton - Participant Assent Form

TITLE OF STUDY: Effects of free response and prompted gratitude journaling on middle school students' subjective well-being

Who is doing this research?
Rachel Boyd
Dr. Sawyer Hunley

Why should I do this?
The purpose of this project is to learn about gratitude and how we can feel and act more grateful in our everyday lives. We will learn about how you show gratitude by asking you to fill out surveys three (3) times. By participating in this study, you can help your school to learn more about character education programs.

How long will it last?
You will fill out a survey three (3) times for about twenty (20) minutes.

What will happen?
You will be given a paper copy of a survey three (3) times. We will read each item on the survey and give you time to respond. No answer is right or wrong, just answer honestly! You are free to ask any questions as you fill out the surveys. You will put your student ID number on the surveys, so no one will know it's you.

How will you feel?
You should not feel any different during these surveys than you do on a normal day at school.

Will anyone know I'm doing this?
Your teacher, parents, and classmates will know that you are participating in taking surveys because your whole class will be involved. When you answer questions, those answers will be kept private.

What if I have questions or am worried about something?
If you have questions, you may talk to Rachel Boyd.

Consent to Participate
I agree to work with Rachel and her team on this project. I understand all that is expected of me and promise to do my best. Rachel has answered all my questions. I understand I may stop this activity at any time.

_____   _____
Participant's Name   DATE

_____
Participant's Signature
Researcher's Name: Rachel Boyd

UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON

Teacher Consent for Class to Participate in a Research Project

Project Title:	Effects of free response and prompted gratitude journaling on middle school students' subjective well-being
Investigator(s):	Rachel Boyd, M.S.E.
Description of Study:	For this study, the researcher plans to come to your classroom to introduce the concept of gratitude journals and to supervise student writing for five minutes daily for one week. The researcher will also come three times administer surveys about gratitude skills as well as overall well-being. Survey data will be collected on the first day of journaling, the last day of journaling, and two weeks after the last day. In total, the researcher will come into your classroom six times. This is done to determine the effectiveness of gratitude journaling.
Adverse Effects and Risks:	Because the researcher is asking students to think of things in which they are grateful, they may feel sadness if they struggle to come up with ideas.
Duration of Study:	Data collection will occur three (3) times lasting around twenty (20) minutes per collection. The study will last three (3) weeks total.
Confidentiality of Data:	Data will be kept confidential through the use of student ID numbers. Individual data will not be shared with teachers, students, or administrators. Journals will be kept in a locked office at Central Office.
Contact Person:	Rachel Boyd, boydr2@udayton.edu, 317-250-0125 Dr. Sawyer Hunley, shunley1@udayton.edu , 937-229-3316 If you have questions about your rights as a research participant you may also contact the chair of University of Dayton's Institutional Review Board, Candise Powell, J.D., at (937) 229-3515, IRB@udayton.edu.

Teacher's Full Name (please print)

_____

Teacher's Signature

_____

APPENDIX D

Recruitment Email Script

Good morning,

Rachel Boyd, a student in University of Dayton's School Psychology program and ███████'s Graduate Assistant, is planning to conduct thesis research at ██. Her project consists of measuring the outcomes of five-minute daily gratitude journaling for one week.

Rachel hopes to come into your classroom during Connect to administer student surveys and explain gratitude journals. Then, she will come in each day for five minutes to supervise gratitude journaling at the beginning of class for one week. After one week, she will re-administer student surveys during Connect. Surveys will also be administered two weeks later during Connect to measure long-term outcomes.

She is looking for one homeroom teacher who is willing to allow her to administer surveys three times total and supervise gratitude journaling in the classroom for five minutes one week. The whole project will span three weeks.

Parent consent forms and student assent forms will be passed out, and students' confidentiality will be protected through the use of student ID numbers and coversheets for the surveys.

If you are willing to volunteer your class or would like more information, please contact Rachel at boydr2@udayton.edu.

Thank you for your consideration!