



Teaching and Modeling Gratitude

By Mark Taylor, College/University Representative

A special day is coming soon! We will celebrate Thanksgiving on November 25. Many people will enjoy family time, great food, parades, and football. Hopefully, they will also take time to **celebrate the blessings of the past year.**

God's Word reminds us many times to be thankful. Here are some of my favorites:

"Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for mankind, for he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things." (Psalm 107:8-9, NIV)

"I will praise God's name in song and glorify him with thanksgiving." (Psalm 69:30, NIV)

"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful." (Colossians 3:15, NIV)

Other words or synonyms of thanksgiving include appreciation, appreciativeness, gratefulness, and gratitude. I would like to focus on gratitude. You can define gratitude as "a feeling of appreciation or thanks."

A Challenge for Educators

So, here is my challenge for educators this month. Plan to challenge ourselves and our students to give thanks and express gratitude.

The website For the Love of Teachers has a great article called, "Teaching Students to Give Thanks and to Express Gratitude." This article challenges us to apply these four principles:

1. We are not really entitled to anything. We are entitled to what we work hard for and earn.
2. Each day is a gift.
3. Be thankful for and accept struggles because we learn from them.
4. Showing gratitude is good for our heart and for our soul. (Weis, 2017)

As educators, model gratitude by providing ways students can express gratitude (Walker, 2018).

1. Send a note to students' parents expressing your gratitude for the privilege of knowing them and their child.
2. Have students make a list of who and for what they are thankful.
3. Have students send thank you notes.
4. Keep a class gratitude jar.
5. Pass around a piece of paper with each student's name at the top, and have every student write one positive note.
6. Brainstorm and plan ways to make a positive contribution for others in the community.
7. Write each letter of the alphabet and have students try to produce at least one item they are grateful for under each letter.
8. Have students create a gratitude journal.
9. Make a gratitude collage.
10. Form a circle of gratitude. Ask students to go around the circle sharing something for which they are grateful to the person on their left or their right.
11. Make gratitude paper chains to hang around the classroom.
12. Discuss what random acts of kindness are and encourage students to practice random acts of kindness.
13. Create gratitude artwork or photos.
14. Read books about gratitude such as *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein or *The Thank You Book* by Mo Willems.
15. Host a gratitude party.

Gratitude Relieves Anxiety

As a teacher, take time to appreciate the students around you, not for what they have learned, accomplished, or done for you but just for being in your life. A grateful attitude can help both students and educators who experience anxiety. Realizing how much you should be grateful for can take your mind away from current troubles. It helps you relax and worry less.

I would like to close my thoughts on gratitude by sharing about Positive Psychology's website that had an excellent article about the "13 Most Popular Gratitude Exercises and Activities." The article has free resources such as exercises and activities, gratitude quizzes and questionnaires, worksheets, games, apps, and podcasts. The research highlighted in the article shows that gratitude can: help you make friends, improve your physical health, improve your psychological health, enhance empathy, reduce aggression, improve your sleep, enhance your self-esteem, and increase your mental strength (Oppland, 2021).

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