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Expressions of gratitude in education: an analysis of the #ThankYourTeacher campaign

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Abstract

Teachers play a significant societal role, yet many feel underappreciated, and commonly cite this as a reason for considering leaving the profession. This study investigated responses to the #ThankYourTeacher social media campaign, which was created to generate public expressions of gratitude towards teachers. Data were collected from Twitter, Instagram, a campaign website, and public events and thematically analysed. Orr's (1992) Head, Heart, and Hands Model of Transformational Learning was used as a framework for understanding the qualities of teachers and their teaching that participants appreciated. Notably, more individuals expressed gratitude for teachers' motivational and compassionate qualities (Heart) and their enthusiasm and leadership (Hands) than for their subject knowledge (Head). These findings underscore the importance of the teacher-student relationship and relational qualities over subject expertise. This study also highlights the potential for further research into the impacts of practicing gratitude towards teachers and increasing teachers' sense of being valued and appreciated.

Keywords Teachers, Teaching, Gratitude, Social media, Transformational learning

Introduction

According to global education research, a concerning proportion of teachers are leaving or intending to depart from their roles as educators (Allen et al. 2020; Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond 2017; Doherty 2020; Longmuir et al. 2022). In the global Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), 15% of teachers reported contemplating leaving the profession within their initial five years (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2020). In Australia, a recent study of more than 2,000 working teachers found that 58% intended to leave the profession (Heffernan et al. 2022). Furthermore, it is anticipated that global teacher attrition rates are likely to experience modest increases as the economy recovers after the pandemic (Goldhaber and Theobald 2022). Understanding the reasons behind teachers leaving the profession is a key step towards learning how teacher retainment may be improved.

Teachers in Australia have cited insufficient respect as one of the most significant challenges facing them in the profession, with approximately 71% reporting a lack of perceived appreciation, and 10% of those intending to quit teaching citing

underappreciation as the reason behind this sentiment (Heffernan et al. 2022). However, the Australian public has not reflected the same underappreciation of teachers; in a survey of over 1,000 Australians, the majority of respondents expressed a sense of respect (82%) and trust (93%) in teachers (Heffernan et al. 2022). This suggests that while the public holds teachers in high regard, there is a disconnect in this appreciation being felt by teachers. Bridging this gap and ensuring that teachers feel recognised may be a step towards addressing teacher attrition.

Conceptual frameworks
Gratitude
The apparent gap between the level of appreciation individuals have for teachers and the actual respect that teachers feel can be understood by examining the role of gratitude. Gratitude, as a state emotion, involves recognising and feeling appreciation for positive events or entities (such as places, objects, people, or animals) in one's life (Armenta et al. 2017; Emmons and McCullough 2003; Waters and Stokes 2015). Related to this, the outward communication and acknowledgement of gratitude is a primary feature of the practice of gratitude, which can lead to benefits for both the giver and recipient, such as increased prosocial behaviours (Emmons and Mishra 2011; Waters and Stokes 2015). That teachers feel undervalued, despite public appreciation, suggests that while the majority of people feel gratitude towards teachers, there may be a gap in how this gratitude is being expressed and received.

The advantages of expressing and receiving gratitude are widely reported and include a sense of connection (Boehm et al. 2011), more robust social ties (Fredrickson 2004), conflict management (Bartlett et al. 2012; Lambert and Fincham 2011), sleep quality improvement (Wood et al. 2010), and improved psychological wellbeing (Bale et al. 2020). Experiencing gratitude also serves as a protective factor against depression and anxiety (Wood et al. 2008), while receiving gratitude can increase motivation to perform actions for the good of others (Emmons and Mishra 2011; Waters and Stokes 2015). Given the extensive advantages linked to expressing and receiving gratitude for overall wellbeing, it is highly likely that it could improve teachers' sense of value in their role. To gain a deeper understanding of these possibilities, we need to examine the application of gratitude and its benefits in the context of the teaching profession.

Gratitude interventions in schools primarily target student outcomes but can yield valuable insights into potential benefits for teachers as well. Students who engage with gratitude interventions, where gratitude is communicated and received between students and teachers, have experienced a wide range of positive outcomes, including increased academic motivation, performance, and overall school satisfaction (Bono et al. 2014; Chan 2010; Shankland and Rosset 2017). While no studies have explored gratitude's influence on teachers' perceptions of appreciation specifically, being the recipient of gratitude can significantly enhance teachers' self-image and job satisfaction (Bentea and Anghelache 2012; Demirtas 2010; Spruyt et al. 2021). Consequently, job satisfaction can increase work engagement, performance (measured by student skill development), and intention to stay in the job (Arnup and Bowles 2016; Banerjee et al. 2016; Granziera and Perera 2019), and can have a protective effect against negative work aspects such as exhaustion, and workload (Zang et al. 2022). It is likely that teachers' sense of

appreciation may be enhanced in a similar way to self-image and job satisfaction with increased reception of gratitude from others.

In addressing teacher attrition, problems such as unreasonable workloads and high stress levels will be important to address (Heffernan et al. 2022). Increasing expressions of gratitude towards teachers may not shift systemic issues within schools that are affecting teachers' choices to quit the profession. However, boosting job satisfaction, a protective factor, can also have a significant impact on reducing attrition (Madigan and Kim 2021). With teachers citing underappreciation from both those within school communities and the public as a major source of dissatisfaction (Heffernan et al. 2022), increasing opportunities for the expression of gratitude towards teachers may offer a cost-effective way to address these issues.

Head, heart, and hands model for transformational learning

Various approaches to learning and teaching have evolved over time, with recent models emphasising constructivist learning, student-centredness, competency-based education, and blended learning (Hattie and Donoghue 2016). The Head, Heart, and Hands Model for Transformational Learning, originally proposed by Orr in 1992 and further developed by Sipos and colleagues in 2008, is a contemporary model that has been applicable for a wide range of educational perspectives, including inclusive education (Ahsan 2012; Florian and Rouse 2009; Sharma et al. 2019) and sustainability education (Orr 1992; Sipos et al. 2008). Tröhler (2013) argued that the Head, Heart, and Hands Model draws inspiration from the work of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, an 18th-century educational reformer who viewed teaching and learning as the integration of the head, heart, and hands, being distinctive areas of the educational experience. The 'Head' component of the model represents cognitive learning processes and the attainment of knowledge; the 'Heart' represents the affective features supporting teaching and learning, such as social and emotional support, a sense of connectedness, and a love for learning; and the 'Hands' represent the practicing, 'doing,' hands-on processes involved in teaching and learning. This model embraces a holistic approach to education, asserting that it should foster personal growth alongside knowledge. Moreover, it should prepare students for adulthood and cultivate their capacity to contribute meaningfully to society (Widdowson et al. 2015).

While there is limited research into the effectiveness of using the Head, Heart, and Hands model in teaching practice, research into the characteristics of effective and impactful teachers have consistently revealed qualities that align with the head, heart, and hands domains. This suggests that the model is helpful for understanding the reasons that people may be grateful for their teachers. When asked open-endedly what a 'good' teacher looks like, elementary school students reported that having good content knowledge (head), being kind and understanding towards them (heart), and using interactive tools such as games and Smart Boards to facilitate learning (hands) were important (Bullock 2015). Interviews and focus groups with secondary school students revealed similar results (Almonacid-Fierro et al. 2021). Teachers' subject-based training (knowledge; head) has been found to have a measurable effect on students' academic outcomes (Coenen et al. 2018), while experiential learning and real-world experiences (hands) has been found to have long-term effects on students' knowledge (Handler and Duncan 2006) and has the potential to inspire and model future action (Cottafava et al.

2019). Emotional support from teachers (heart) have also been shown to contribute to students' motivation levels, which may, in turn, affect student outcomes (Ruzek et al. 2016). The head, heart, and hands model effectively captures a wide range of teaching practices considered important to students. However, characteristics that the public (rather than students specifically) are grateful for in teachers, and which of the domains they tend to fall under, is more unknown.

Aims

On World Teachers' Day 2019, a university in Melbourne, Australia launched a public social media campaign called #ThankYourTeacher, which provided a public platform for people to express gratitude toward their teachers, past and present. The aim of the current study was to identify the qualities and/or factors that people are most grateful for in their teachers by examining responses to #ThankYourTeacher, using the Head, Heart, and Hands Model for Transformational Learning as a framework. These findings may inform teachers' practice and teacher training curricula, enabling them to focus on the qualities and types of learning support that connect best with students. The findings could also inform interventions for increasing teachers' perceived level of appreciation, by demonstrating how well-received they can be by the public and how social media can provide an effective means of collecting messages of gratitude and positive experiences.

Method

Research design

A thematic qualitative analysis was conducted on public social media responses to the #ThankYourTeacher social media campaign administered by Monash University.

#ThankYourTeacher campaign

The #ThankYourTeacher campaign ran from 24th October to 10th November 2019, by Monash University. The Australian public were encouraged to share what they appreciated about past or present teachers openly on social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn, using the hashtag #ThankYourTeacher. Additionally, a campaign website was created to display examples of social media postings containing #ThankYourTeacher, provide further information on related campaign events, and enable users to share feedback about their experiences and interactions with the campaign (Table 1).

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 University 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%)

Table 2 Total number of posts per platform included in the analysis

Platform	Number of posts included in analysis
Instagram	74
Twitter	73
Monash University Website	43
Federation Square Event	107
Monash University Event	31
TOTAL	328

Data Collection

Data extraction

Raw data (publicly available social media posts published between 24th October 2019 and 30th May 2020 containing the hashtag #ThankYourTeacher) were manually identified and collected over four days by three researchers. In addition, written feedback shared on the campaign website and at two public events organised as part of the #ThankYourTeacher campaign was included as study data.

The following inclusion criteria were used for posts or reposts to be included in the final dataset:

- contained the hashtag #ThankYourTeacher;
- contained original content displaying expressions of gratitude or thanks to any teacher or teachers more generally;
- were publicly accessible for download (i.e., not limited in visibility due to privacy settings); and.
- were written in English.

Posts not relating to the campaign's sentiments or forming part of an advertisement were excluded.

Inter-rater reliability

A unique coder with postgraduate qualifications reviewed a blind sample of 10 social media posts from each social media platform (i.e., 40 posts out of 586; 6.83%) to ensure that posts meeting inclusion criteria were reliably extracted from social media sites. Posts from the website of Monash University and the two #ThankYourTeacher events were excluded from this inter-rater reliability analysis as they were all directly related to the campaign.

The inter-rater review revealed discrepancies between the total number of identified posts and the number of posts meeting the inclusion criteria for LinkedIn and Facebook. Further investigation of these sites' search algorithms revealed that the user's previous searches, their networks, and their activity on the platforms affected the search results on both sites, with researchers consistently identifying different posts across multiple searches. To eliminate such confounding variables, Facebook and LinkedIn posts were excluded from the data analysis.

Inter-rater reliability was measured using Cohen's Kappa, using the sample of posts taken from Twitter and Instagram (20 posts out of a total of 534, 3.75%). The coefficient of Cohen's Kappa ($\kappa = 0.86$) was determined by comparing two ratings of the posts from the present sample and indicated strong inter-rater reliability (McHugh 2012).

Data filtering

After filtering out the Facebook ($n=2$) and LinkedIn ($n=16$) data, a total of 343 posts met the inclusion criteria. Duplicate screening was then conducted – only the original post was retained from each platform, determined based on time of post. Fifteen duplicate posts were removed from the analysis (Table 2).

Ethical considerations

This study ensured the confidentiality of data, the privacy of users, and their anonymity by adhering to the highest ethical standards for social media research (Ayers et al. 2018; Gruzd al., 2016). Users' personal information, such as their usernames, biodata, and social media handles, was not extracted. The data collected was stored electronically using encrypted passwords to ensure accessibility to the data was only given to the research team.

Data Analysis

The researchers used both inductive and deductive thematic analysis, systematically using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six stages (data familiarisation, development of initial codes, identification of themes, reviewing and refining initial codes and themes, defining themes, and summary/interpretation), to conceptualise the data in themes and subthemes. These themes and subthemes were deductively organised within the a priori categories provided by the Head, Heart, & Hands Model of Transformational Learning. Models of sentiment analysis guided the analysis, enabling the coding of emotions that lay behind the posts (Bogen et al. 2021). Data analysis, including reviewing and refining themes and subthemes, was conducted by authors KA, CG, FM, and NG.

Results

Overview of themes

Thematic analysis of 328 social media posts yielded various themes and subthemes that were arranged into the three broad categories provided by the Head, Heart, & Hands Model of Transformational Learning. This model's framework assisted in identifying and comprehending the learning and teaching processes that participants valued most (Table 3).

Head

The Head category comprised of social media posts containing expressions of gratitude for instructional elements, general knowledge, or subject-focused learning experienced by participants with their respective teachers. From a total of 328 social media posts, 31 (9.45%) were identified as relevant to this category under the theme of General and Subject Area Knowledge.

General and subject area knowledge

Posts under this theme expressed gratitude for a teacher's competence in imparting knowledge to the participants. Some posts thanked teachers for general knowledge imparted:

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

Table 3 Overview of themes and subthemes per Head, Heart, and hands learning category

Head (*n* = 31)

Themes/subthemes	Number of posts	Example post/s
General and Subject Area Knowledge	31	"Do you know what I will always remember? Learning my times tables both forwards and backwards in year 4 with Teacher A."

Heart (*n* = 137)

Themes/subthemes	Number of posts	Example post/s
Passion/ Inspiration	51	"My Year 12 English teacher was the reason that I chose to become a teacher. Thank you Teacher B."
Belief/ Encouragement	36	"Teacher C made me sing in front of the class for the first time ever in primary school and started my passion for music."
Kindness/Empathy/Support	40	"Teacher D spent every lunch time with me, helping me to catch up. I will never forget her kindness."
Connection/ Belonging	10	"Teacher E was Jono's teacher in Grade 5 who helped him feel like he belonged."

Hands (*n* = 120)

Themes/subthemes	Number of posts	Example post/s
Teaching practices (*n* = 43)		
Engagement	5	"#thankyourteacher goes to Teacher F, Teacher G and Teacher H. They ran and taught such interesting & engaging #immunology units."
High expectations	5	"Teacher I was my science teacher who praised the virtue of consistency over sporadic excellence."
Critical/independent thinking	5	"Teacher J supervised my honours diss. He was incredibly generous with his time. I'd pop into his office with a simple question and emerge an hour later dizzy from galloping across dozens of different topics. He always answered in a way that sparked further enquiry."
Humour/fun	11	"Teacher K is a great teacher because he makes me laugh."
Individualised learning	6	"My English teacher is important to me as she understands the different levels at which the class operates".
Making connections beyond the classroom	11	"Teacher L taught me to look to the past to understand the present and to search for those voices missing in history."
Mentoring/ Leadership	38	"Thank you Teacher M, Principal at School X, for teaching us about two important life skills; humility and perseverance."
Dedication/ Commitment/ Hard Work	39	"Teacher N was just the best - in a one teacher school X. He went out of his way to guide a Dutch speaking immigrant pupil to learn English."

Other posts within this theme expressed gratitude for specific-subject teaching and knowledge:

> *Teacher O was my Year 12 English teacher. She encouraged us to see every character we studied as real and authentic individuals.!*

Participant appreciation for both general and subject-specific knowledge learned from a teacher could be seen across many posts, with many also linking this knowledge to impactful change in their lives and careers:

> *Thank you to my former English and literature teacher, Teacher P. Teacher P instilled my love of writing and reading which led to a communications degree and the past ten years working in roles that require high levels of written and oral communications.*

Heart

A total of 137 (41.77%) social media posts in the Heart category expressed gratitude for the emotional and social support, motivation, connection, and compassion provided by teachers. Four themes were identified within this category: 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

This theme, in which participants described being impacted by their teachers' passion, was the largest theme within the 'Heart' category:

> *My politics teacher Teacher Q because she is so passionate and smart.*

Many participants described a sense of inspiration arising from their teachers' passion, which had influenced their future decisions:

> *My Year 12 English teacher was the reason that I chose to become a teacher. Thank you Teacher B.*

Belief/Encouragement

This theme included posts expressing gratitude for a teacher's ability to support participants to feel a sense of confidence in themselves, encouraging a belief in their abilities that appeared to extend beyond the subject itself:

> *Thank you to Teacher R 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

This was another large theme in the 'Heart' category, including posts expressing gratitude for the teachers providing emotional support to the participants:

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

Participants described enduring positive outcomes of their interactions with teachers beyond the classroom:

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

Connection/Belonging

This theme highlighted the role that teachers played in helping their students to develop a sense of belonging and social connection to others, which had far-reaching impacts:

> *In grade 5, Teacher F helped Participant A feel like he belonged. He says that experience is a big part of why he became a teacher.*

Hands

The Hands category contains posts that emphasised the significance of teaching activities, leadership, and practices of teachers. In all, 120 posts (36.59%) were aligned with this category, comprising 3 themes: Teaching Practices (13.11%, $n=43$); Mentoring/Leadership (11.59%, $n=38$); and Dedication/Commitment/Hard Work (11.89%, $n=39$).

The theme of Teacher Practices further branched into 6 subthemes: Engagement (1.52%, $n=5$); High Expectations (1.52%, $n=5$); Critical/Independent Thinking (1.52%, $n=5$); Humour/Fun (3.35%; $n=11$); Individualised Learning (1.83%, $n=6$); and Making Connections beyond the Classroom (3.35%, $n=11$).

Teaching practices

This theme included posts expressing gratitude for a teacher's style and modality of education that was received well and appreciated by participants.

Engagement

Teachers who elevated the participant's motivation to engage with educational experiences were appreciated in this subtheme:

> *#thankyourteacher goes to Teacher F, Teacher G and Teacher H. They ran and taught such interesting & engaging #immunology units.*
> *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 helped to build my confidence and interest in English. Never a dull moment in your classroom #ThankYourTeacher.*

High expectations

Gratitude was expressed for teachers who held high educational standards for their students and communicated this to them:

> *Teacher I was my science teacher who praised the virtue of consistency over sporadic excellence.*

Critical/Independent thinking

Participants expressed gratitude for their teachers' encouragement of the development of their analytical thinking skills:

> *Another teacher I have to thank is Teacher T my Year 11&12 Biology teacher. She would always welcome my never-ending list of questions and go the extra mile to spark my interest.*

Humour/Fun

Gratitude was expressed for teachers' abilities to enhance the participants' educational experiences through incorporating elements of humour and fun into the classroom:

Teacher U because he brings fun to the classroom.

Individualised learning

Participants expressed gratitude towards teachers who provided them with opportunities for personalised learning tasks and experiences:

Teacher V creates a really positive teaching environment for all students. For different groups of students, he will use different ways to communicate with them.

Making connections beyond the classroom

Gratitude was expressed for teachers who had encouraged meaningful connections between what was taught in the classroom and wider society:

Teacher L taught me to look to the past to understand the present and to search for those voices missing in history.

Mentoring/Leadership

This theme included posts that conveyed gratitude for teachers who role-modelled and inspired positive qualities in the participant:

My mentor teacher V helped me become a better teacher by encouraging me to find my own identity and allowed me to establish her classroom as my own.

Dedication/Commitment/Hard work

In this theme, gratitude was expressed for a teacher's time, energy, and effort towards enhancing participants' educational experiences:

Not my own teacher but a teacher who tutored me in year 12. She showed ongoing patience and dedication to make sure I achieved what I set out to do. She's an absolute legend. #ThankYourTeacher.

In-person learning was closed by many schools in March 2020 in Australia due to COVID-19 restrictions, with some variations in the time of these restrictions across the different states and sectors of schooling. Many posts acknowledged how a teacher enhanced their learning-from-home experiences:

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

Discussion

The current study aimed to explore the teaching and learning approaches that people were most grateful for in their teachers by examining public responses to the #ThankYourTeacher campaign by Monash University. Expressions of gratitude were thematically analysed within the framework of the Head, Heart, and Hands Transformational Learning Model, revealing a substantially higher number of posts falling under the Heart and Hands categories of learning compared to the Head category. Additionally, there were

many examples of participants expressing gratitude for the lifelong transformative effects of teachers whose learning practices primarily aligned with the Heart and Hands categories of learning. Although Head learning has traditionally been given priority in schools (Allen et al. 2017), the results of the present study suggest that people are more impacted by and appreciative of Heart and Hands learning.

This study adds to the literature on qualities that are most appreciated by students by asking the public to reflect on experiences with past teachers that were impactful for them, rather than surveying current students, as other studies (e.g. Almonacid-Fierro et al. 2021; Bullock 2015) have tended to do. By approaching the question of what qualities in teachers are most appreciated from a gratitude lens, this study also opened up the possibility for the public to reflect on the lasting impacts teachers have had on them without focussing on specific outcomes such as academic achievement. The results support holistic models of learning such as the Head, Heart, and Hands Model, which posit that learning should not only focus on the acquisition of knowledge, but the development of a broad range of skills that can support learning and function beyond the classroom (Jarvis and Parker 2006). They do this by demonstrating that the lifelong learnings from and impacts of teachers may be driven by social and emotional support, fostering connectedness and passion for learning, and practical experiences more than the impartation of new and specific knowledge alone. Previous studies that surveyed or interviewed current students demonstrated more even distributions of responses between the head, heart, and hands components (Almonacid-Fierro et al. 2021; Bullock 2015), which suggests that subject expertise and information impartation may be more important for shorter-term educational goals and less important beyond leaving school.

These findings also support research that highlights the link between social-emotional wellbeing (the Heart component), and the capacity and ability to learn (Grove and Laletas 2020; Jarvis and Parker 2006; Ruzek et al. 2016), as well as the importance of practical learning in extending and imparting skills and values beyond the classroom (the Hands component) (Allen et al. 2020; Harris and Bruin 2017; Kavenagh et al. 2012). Participants in this study often alluded to values or learnings that they had taken into future experiences, such as the importance of consistency, confidence in their abilities, guidance in developing their identity, and a sense that they belonged. This was also present in responses that fell into the Head category, with participants describing skills learned such as writing and communication as useful in future work, but appeared more dependent on those students pursuing further studies in similar areas to the teachers they were grateful for.

The current study's findings demonstrate that many people appreciate teachers for a range of reasons, consistent with the global literature, which suggests that most individuals hold teaching as a valued and trusted profession that is critical to society's progress (Roy Morgan, 2017; Sim et al. 2019). As teachers currently feel unappreciated and undervalued (Heffernan et al. 2022; Roffey 2012; OECD, 2020), there may be an issue with how effectively this common sentiment is communicated and received. The number of posts included in the current study demonstrates that social media campaigns can be a successful way to generate messages of gratitude that may otherwise not have been shared. Not included in the current study's analysis is the additional sharing of posts that occurred, as well as missed posts due to posters' profiles being private or posts not using the campaign's hashtag, which suggests that the campaign's spread was even more widespread.

It is essential to consider the current findings within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although most retrieved posts were from before COVID-19, several were from the months during the pandemic, when many Australian schools switched to remote education. Several comments praised teachers' dedication and perseverance and how quickly they adapted to remote learning procedures. According to Hargreaves (2020), this shift could have provided an opportunity for students and parents to gain a better understanding of and increased respect for teachers' work. In the current study, appreciative comments centred on teachers' support of students during this time support this claim.

Limitations

In order to maintain campaign participants' confidentiality, the geographic location of the posts was not accessed. As such, the impact of demographic and cultural differences on engagement with the campaign and which category of factors they were most thankful for in teachers. Participants from certain cultures may have experienced more frequent and intensified response barriers. For example, in some cultures (e.g., in Southeast Asia), expressing gratitude can be associated with higher degrees of associated awkwardness, guilt, and indebtedness (Layous et al. 2017; Watkins et al. 2006). Several studies also suggest that expressing gratitude may yield fewer benefits for participants within some Eastern collectivist cultures compared to individualistic Western participants (Armenta et al. 2017; Boehm et al. 2011; Layous et al. 2013), suggesting that its positive outcomes cannot be guaranteed.

Another restriction related to the use of anonymous data is the inability to identity the presence of mental health difficulties, which could also have affected engagement with the campaign or response patterns. Individuals suffering from depression have been observed to more frequently struggle to identify what they are grateful for, and even when they do, positive feelings do not always follow (Armenta et al. 2017; Sin et al. 2011; Watkins and Donnelly 2014).

Finally, the current study gathered data from the hashtag #ThankYourTeacher social media campaign, which aimed to generate as many expressions of gratitude as possible for teachers. Due to the highly focused and promotional objective behind the campaign, the results should be interpreted with some caution. While negative comments were not excluded from analysis, it is likely that those with more negative experiences chose not to respond to the campaign and, therefore, the full range of views on teachers is not likely to have been captured in this study. Being a public campaign, it is also possible that some participants were influenced by a sense of social pressure, resulting in some insincere gratitude being posted (Armenta et al. 2017; Layous and Lyubomirsky 2014). Those with more private social media profiles or who did not wish to make a public post could also not be captured in this study.

Practical implications

These findings have practical implications for current and future teachers. Professional development opportunities and teacher training programs should highlight the potential of Heart and Hands learning for supporting Head learning. The practical teaching practices (e.g. setting high expectations, incorporating humour, individualising learning, and teaching real-world applications of things being learned in the classroom) that participants highlighted as being impactful can be incorporated into training opportunities as

tangible ways of connecting with and imparting lasting learnings on students. Training that is focussed on developing teachers' social and emotional competencies, including self-awareness, management of their own emotions, and relationship-building skills, will also be important in light of the findings that empathy and fostering a sense of belonging, connection, and passion. The ability for teachers to provide social and emotional support and foster positive relationships with students not only leaves the most lasting impact on students, but has also been shown to support academic outcomes (Cornelius-White 2007). Developing teachers' social-emotional competence enables them to deliver this support to students, but can also have direct impacts on teachers' own wellbeing, included lowered stress (Collie 2017).

With research suggesting that communicating gratitude towards teachers can reduce their levels of burnout and increase their sense of accomplishment (Chan 2011), creating more opportunities and prompts to do so, such as in campaigns like #ThankYourTeacher, is important to bridge the gap in public sentiments and teachers' perceived levels of appreciation. The number of duplicate posts or shares captured in the initial data extraction also suggests that future campaigns may consider creating posts about common experiences that can be easily shared as another way of spreading awareness about the impact teachers can have on individuals. The post extraction data also suggests that social media users are dramatically moving towards newer social media sites or applications to share posts on. Future campaigns will need to consider future-forward ways of spreading gratitude messages such as encouraging posters to use short-form videos.

The posts generated in the #ThankYourTeacher campaign largely named or referred to specific teachers from the poster's past, which suggests that people tend to think of individuals rather than teachers as a whole when communicating gratitude. There is room for future campaigns to experiment with ways to generate more general and less personalised messages of gratitude towards teachers to communicate appreciation for their role in society. Making sure teachers are receiving messages shared on social media platforms and determining whether such personalised messages are effective for communicating gratitude towards teachers as a whole will also be important considerations for future campaigns.

Future research

The current study focussed on the reasons that members of the public appreciate teachers and how well a social media campaign could generate messages of gratitude towards them. A key next step would be to investigate how such campaigns, as well as messages of gratitude in general, are received by teachers and whether they have an impact on their perceived levels of appreciation. Given the well-researched benefits of gratitude for wellbeing across various populations (Emmons and Mishra 2011; Wood et al. 2010), it is plausible that increased communications of gratitude to teachers could help them to see their role in society more positively and reduce stress and burnout. Implementation research looking at how opportunities for expressing gratitude towards teachers can be increased and embedded in the current education system would also be warranted, to encourage the practice of gratitude beyond isolated campaign periods.

Observing others performing good deeds has been demonstrated to elicit positive emotions (Haidt 2003). The large amount of public posts generated by the

#ThankYourTeacher campaign introduces an opportunity for further research into the potential for positive social media to be used for communicating gratitude. This could include research into whether public communications of appreciation can affect public perceptions of teachers (positively or negatively) and lead to more gratitude communication, and whether receiving gratitude on social media leads to the same positive effects seen by other means.

Conclusions

This study sought to explore what people were grateful for in their teachers, using a social media analysis of responses to the #ThankYourTeacher campaign. Using the Head, Heart, and Hands Model of Transformational Learning as a framework, it was found that Heart and Hands aspects of teaching were most appreciated. That is, people were more likely to appreciate their teachers' kindness, empathy, social and emotional support, and impartment of values than their subject-specific knowledge. These findings have implications for teacher training and development, suggesting that a greater emphasis should be placed on developing competencies in providing social, emotional, and practical support and developing positive relationships, rather than solely on Head-based teaching strategies. Findings from this study echoed current literature suggesting that high levels of appreciation are felt for teachers by the general public, and showed that social media campaigns can be effective ways of generating messages of gratitude.

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

Declarations

Competing interests
No potential competing or conflicts of interest are reported by the authors.

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