

GRATITUDE EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN THROUGH GRATITUDE BIRTHDAY ACTIVITIES

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Abstract

Gratitude is extremely important for the perfection and development of children's personality. Gratitude education for children through the gratitude birthday activities needs to be expressed through awareness, attitude and behavior based on many indicators such as feeling care, love, responding to positive emotions about gifts, being reinforced the good behaviors, enjoying the event, feeling the thoughtfulness, feeling grateful, happy and understanding the meaning of birthdays, the close connection. The article is based on the qualitative research (review, document analysis) and the quantitative research through a survey of 138 teachers in three kindergartens in order to answer two main research questions: 1) What is the current status of gratitude education for children through the gratitude birthday activities? 2) Evaluating the effectiveness of integrating the gratitude into children education through gratitude birthday activities? Research results show that gratitude education plays an important role; and is expressed through many indicators such as children's awareness, attitudes and behaviors of gratitude through birthday activities.

Key words: *Gratitude, gratitude education, gratitude birthday activities*

1. Introduction

Gratitude has been identified as “one of the most neglected emotions and one of the most underestimated virtues” (Solomon, 2004). Several religions of the world also teach the importance of gratitude (Emmons & Crumpler, 2000), and many claim that grateful expression makes themselves happy (Gallup, 1998). To date, many researchers have emphasized that gratitude should be considered as a moral virtue, an attitude, an emotion, a habit, a personality trait, or a coping response. (Emmons, McCullough, & Tsang, 2003). Sometimes, gratitude is simply the recognition of one person as the beneficiary of another's act of kindness. Emmons (2004) defines gratitude as the awareness of a gift from another person. However, many other researchers have gone beyond seeing gratitude as a mere

recognition of kindness, such as Simmel (1950) emphasized that gratitude is also a cognitive-emotional reminder to people of their need to reciprocate. Similarly, Fitzgerald (1998) identified three important components of gratitude, including: 1) A sense of appreciation for something or someone, 2) A sense of good will towards that person or thing, 3) A disposition to act positively towards that person or object. More specifically, gratitude may be an important component of happiness (McCullough et al., 2001; Watkins, 2004). A recent study has found that gratitude could predict 8% of the individual differences in satisfaction with life (Wood, Joseph et al., 2008), and between 2% and 6% in personal growth, positive relationships with others, purposes in life, and self-acceptance (Wood, Joseph, & Maltby, 2009). Gratitude seems to strengthen relationships and promote the relationship formation and maintenance, as well as relationship connection and satisfaction (Algoe, Gable, & Maisel, 2008), and experimental evidence suggests that gratitude may promote the conflict resolution and increase reciprocally helpful behavior (Baron, 1984). Adler and Fagley (2005) also discuss gratitude in a greater sense but called appreciation. This means “acknowledging the value and meaning of something—an event, a person, a behavior, an object—and feeling a positive emotional connection to it”. This approach to definition is used in the present study of gratitude education through gratitude birthday events for kindergarten children.

Jacqueline Woolley, PhD in psychology, Department of Developmental Psychology, University of Texas (USA) emphasizes advocating the significance of children's birthdays in a meaningful way, because children, just like adults, always seek explanations for private occasions. Especially, for children of kindergarten age, birthday is a milestone that marks the day when a child moves from one age to another. Therefore, the birthday party is an important event, reminding children that they have grown one year older; thereby improving children's self-esteem; increasing the emotional bond between parents and children; helping children establish social relationships; creating beautiful memories and helping children perceive time.

In particular, gratitude needs to be considered an important emotion and through the birthday celebration, it can be effectively integrated into children's education. However, the current situation of kindergartens shows that most young parents still misunderstand the issue of celebrating children's birthdays when they buy a lot of food to bring to school and thanks to teachers to organize their children's birthdays. The teacher and mother prepare everything, the children just need to rot the candles and wait for people to give gifts, congratulations...Those emotions do not leave children with many emotions and meaningful lessons. Besides, children have a default perception that it's their birthday, everyone is responsible for making them happy, which leads to wrong perceptions, attitudes and behaviors in children. If they continue to maintain the current form of birthday celebrations, children will not fully understand the meaning of birthdays; and through that activity, they will not be able to educate children about gratitude for the people who born and raised them.

Therefore, the article “*Gratitude education for children through gratitude birthday activities*” is conducted to answer two questions: What is the current status of gratitude education for children through gratitude birthday activities? Evaluating the effectiveness of integrating gratitude into children education through gratitude birthday activities?

2. Method

2.1. Demographic characteristics and sampling

In addition to qualitative research methods including document analysis, in-depth interviews, this study uses a quantitative method which is a survey by questionnaire to obtain numerical data to collect information. Quantitative research method through surveying teachers at Dai Mo A Kindergarten (Hanoi), Dich Vong Hau Kindergarten (Hanoi) and Thanh Lam Kindergarten (Bac Giang). . The data collection technique used is a semi-structured questionnaire sent to managers and teachers at 3 kindergartens. The mean age of the participants is 33.51 years old (SD = 5.61, range = 20 - 47). Teachers have an average of 10.82 years of the teaching experience in kindergarten (SD = 4.01, group of 1 - 23 years of experience). The sample size of the study is all kindergarten teachers selected with 138 participants who answer the questionnaire

2.2. Tools and data collection

Data are collected by using a questionnaire which has the fixed-question combination with a Likert scale running from 0 to 4 (0= Lowest, 4=Highest). The questionnaire is divided into three main parts including (1) information of survey respondents: mainly provides information about the purpose and meaning of the survey form, basic information about the survey respondents; (2) main information of survey responses including questions and choice of answer options according to different levels of gratitude value indicators through gratitude birthday activities and (3) the quality assessment information of effectively integrating the gratitude value indicators through gratitude birthday activities. After collecting the questionnaires, the research conducted to clean information, filter the questionnaires and encode necessary information in the questionnaires, import information and analyze data by using SPSS statistical software - version 22.

3. Results

3.1. Descriptive statistics

Gratitude is a grateful heart, always remembers people's merits of raising and helping for us; or expressed in both thoughts and actions from the concrete to the great. That is the awareness, the attitude of respect, esteem, and the action of oneself towards those who are grateful to us. The results are partly shown through the survey when up to 72.5% of teachers rated the gratitude education for children through the activities of celebrating gratitude birthdays. Of which, 89.1% of teachers highly appreciated the effectiveness of the

implementation plan of the Board of Directors on gratitude education for children; 89.1% of teachers think that it is necessary to raise teachers' awareness about gratitude education for children and 86.1% of teachers highly appreciate the effectiveness of integrating the gratitude into education for children. Gratitude here has been concretized through indicators and partly affirms gratitude as aspects of awareness, attitude, emotion, and personality and behavioral traits.

Table 3.1: Children's awareness, attitudes and behaviors of gratitude through gratitude birthday activities

Variables on the gratitude value	Likert scale				
	0	1	2	3	4
B1. Understanding the efforts and merits of parents	2.9	1.4	21.0	33.3	41.3
B2. Understanding the meaning of birthdays	1.4	2.9	19.6	23.2	52.9
B3. Understanding emotional values, the close connection	2.9	2.9	18.8	25.4	50.0
B4. Feeling the love, care, happiness	-	-	13.0	31.9	55.1
B5. Feeling Appreciated, Modest	-	-	10.1	38.4	51.4
B6. Feeling Satisfied, Grateful, Acknowledged	-	-	10.1	37.0	52.9
B7. Appreciating the birthday event	-	9.4	18.8	29.7	42.0
B8. Evaluating gifts positively	-	10.9	18.1	29.0	42.0
B9. Being reinforced the positive behaviors	-	8.1	15.9	34.8	41.3

Research results in Table 3.1 show three groups of factors named F1 - Awareness of gratitude including Understanding the efforts and merits of parents (B1), Understanding the meaning of birthdays (B2); Understanding emotional values, close connection (B3); F2 - Attitudes of gratitude include Feeling love, care, happiness (B4), Feeling appreciated, modest (B5), Feeling satisfied, grateful, acknowledged (B6); and F3 - Behaviors of Gratitude include Appreciating the gratitude birthday event (B7), Evaluating gifts positively (B8), Being reinforced the positive behaviors (B9). The survey results show that the majority of children achieve gratitude indicators of approximately over 71% in terms of awareness,

attitude, and behavior of gratitude through aspects such as feeling care, love, responding to positive emotions about gifts, being reinforced good behaviors, enjoying event, feeling thoughtful, feeling grateful, happy; understanding the meaning of birthday, the close connection. At the same time, the results also show a small difference between the three groups assessing children's awareness, attitude and behavior of gratitude through gratitude birthday activities.

Table 3.2. Awareness, attitude and behavior of gratitude

Awareness, attitude and behavior of gratitude	Number (N)	Min	Max	Mean	SD
F1. Awareness of Gratitude	138	0	4	3.16	.94
F2. Attitude of Gratitude	138	2	4	3.42	.38
F3. Behaviors of Gratitude	138	1	4	3.05	.78

Specifically, the mean score of the variable on gratitude attitude F2 (B4, B5, B6) is the highest (M=3.42, SD=0.38); next is the perception of gratitude F1 (B1, B2, B3) (M=3.16, SD = 0.94); and finally is the gratitude behavior F3 (B7, B8, B9) (M=3.05, SD=0.78). This means that there are many factors that show children's gratitude through gratitude birthday activities, but the most obvious factor is the attitude of gratitude, the awareness of gratitude and the lowest factor is the behavior of gratitude. From the achieved results, it partly reflects the plan to implement the children's gratitude education through the gratitude birthday celebration. Gratitude shows to be positively associated with reciprocal care, emotional and material support, and satisfaction with school, family, friends, community, and self. In addition, gratitude seems to be associated with a range of social outcomes and positive relationship; the awareness quality of the relationships through the achieved indicators. Therefore, gratitude education for children through gratitude birthday activities is very important and has a high human value.

3.2. Analysis of Reliability and Exploratory Factor

The statistical method used to test the reliability of the scale is Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. The results of testing the reliability of the scale show that all Cronbach's Alpha values reach 0.828 and are greater than the required value, and the Cronbach's Alpha of Ttem Deleted values are lower than Cronbach's Alpha values and the value of Correted Item-Total Correlation are all greater than 0.3. Therefore, the scales in this study have high reliability and the items of each group of factors are kept in the research model. Table 1 summarizes the results of analyzing the reliability of the scales of the variables.

Table 3.3: Cronbach's Alpha analysis synthesis

Group of variables	No of item	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
F1.Awareness of Gratitude	3	.714	.317

F2. Attitude of Gratitude	3	.511	.403
F3. Behaviors of Gratitude	3	.396	.373

The results of testing the suitability of EFA are shown through the KMO index. The analysis results of the research model of the article, the KMO coefficient reached 0.727, ensuring the fit with the actual data (Required $0.5 \leq KMO \leq 1.0$). The results of testing the correlation between the observed variables are expressed through the Chi-square index of Bartlett's test which reached the value of 557.992 with Sig.=0.000. Therefore, the variables in the teacher quality model are correlated with one another and satisfy the conditions of factor analysis. Perform the factor analysis according to Principal components with Varimax rotation. The results show that 3 groups of factors with a total variance of 67.134% > 50% meet the requirements, so these 3 groups of factors are explained by the data evaluation variables. The score used when extracting factors at the 3rd factor with Eigenvalues results is .598 It shows that the results of factor analysis are a perfect fit. The (EFA) exploratory factor analysis results of 3 factors as shown in the table below are retained in the model and will be analyzed in the next step.

Table 3.4: Results of the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with independent variables - Rotated Component Matrix^a

Group of variables	Variables	Component		
		Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
F1	B1	.962		
	B2	.958		
	B3	.951		
F2	B4		.783	
	B5		.762	
	B6		.818	
F3	B7			.733
	B8			.607
	B9			.555

Similarly, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with the dependent variable of the research model also gives EFA results: $0.5 \leq KMO=0.838 \leq 1$. Factor analysis is suitable for actual data. Test the correlation between observed variables: Sig = 0.000 ≤ 0.05 . The evaluative variables are correlated in each factor. The results of Varicance Explained Analysis explain for 62.19% of the change of factors which are explained by the evaluative variables including the awareness factor, the attitudes factor and the behaviors factor of children's gratitude.

3.3. Linear regression analysis

Linear regression analysis is carried out to find out the linear regression coefficient of the gratitude value variable which is expressed by the children's awareness, attitude, and behavior of gratitude through gratitude birthday activities. The results of the correlation coefficient test show that the correlation coefficient values are within the limits between the variables in the model, which are significant and most of them have no abnormal signs. The results of the regression analysis are performed with 3 independent variables, whose results are shown in the table below.

Table 3.5: Regression analysis results - Coefficients^a

Variables	Coefficients β	Errors	t	Significance level (P)
<i>Constant</i>	1.548	.247	6.263	.000
<i>F1. Awareness of Gratitude</i>	.209	.075	2.793	.006
<i>F2. Attitude of Gratitude</i>	.400	.180	2.223	.028
<i>F3. Behaviors of Gratitude</i>	.221	.074	.2.981	.003

Note: R²=.047; F= 77.881 p<.001

The regression coefficient test ensures the statistical significance with 95% reliability (Sig<0.05). The importance order of each variable (According to the normalized Beta coefficient) is F3, F1 and F2. The coefficient of R² (The fit of the overall model) is 0.540 and the adjusted R² (Adjust Square) of the model is 0.571 This coefficient means that there are 57.1 awareness, attitudes, and behaviors of gratitude that tend to be appreciated through gratitude birthday activities. The model has a coefficient of Sig.=0.000 (<5%), so the independent variables are linearly correlated with the dependent variable. The regression equation of the model is shown as follows (According to unnormalized Beta coefficient):

$$\text{Appreciate Gratitude} = 1.548 + .209 * F1 + 400 * F2 + .221 * F3$$

Thus, it can be concluded that the model is tested. The factors affecting gratitude are arranged in descending order of importance: attitude of gratitude, behavior of gratitude, awareness of gratitude. The results of the linear regression equation show that, when other conditions are constant, the assessment of gratitude increases by 1 unit, the variable of the gratitude attitude also increases by .400; the variable of gratitude behavior also increases .221; the variable of gratitude awareness also increases .209. This means that children's awareness, attitudes and behaviors of gratitude through gratitude birthday activities are highly appreciated.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

4.1. Discussion

Gratitude is extremely important for the perfection and development of a child's personality. If gratitude is closely related to happiness and there are indications that this relationship may be unique and causal, the question arises on how to effectively educate children about gratitude. The gratitude interventions have commonly been highlighted as a key success of the positive psychology movement (Bono et al., 2004; Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005), and as an especially clinically relevant technique (Seligman et al., 2006). These interventions have can be classed into three categories: (a) listing of things for which to be grateful, (b) grateful contemplation, and (c) behavioral expressions of gratitude. Therefore, in order to comprehensively educate children about gratitude, it is necessary to see the objectivity in assessing the quality of gratitude education for children.

Specifically, gratitude education for children has been partly shown through children's awareness, attitudes and behaviors in gratitude birthday activities. Most children have understood the meaning of birthdays, emotional connections and recognized the merits of their parents. Therefore, they can feel the care, love, respect and satisfaction, and recognize what they currently have. Moreover, children also know how to appreciate the event, show positive behavior about gifts, and are reinforced by those positive behaviors. In addition, the assessment results have revealed the positive effects on children about gratitude through celebrating gratitude birthdays; as well as have shown the importance of the school; staff, teacher, parents in the children education.

Gratitude education for children has partly shown the important meanings and roles in perfecting the child's personality. Therefore, the survey results in three kindergartens show not only strives for the quality of children's education, but also aims at comprehensive education for children in life skills as well as education on gratitude, so that children can realize the importance and meaning of those who have given them the best. The school also has a plan to evaluate and monitor through practical activities and report on the organization and effectiveness of teachers' classroom activities. Towards educating children about gratitude through gratitude birthday parties, the kindergarten has held professional meetings; has widely spread the importance of educating children about gratitude; has developed the implementation and evaluation plans; committed to supporting teachers in the process of organizing educational activities.

4.2. Conclusion

Gratitude education for children is not only the task of the school but also the responsibility of children's parents, the community, mass organizations and social organizations. For the gratitude education for children to be effective, the educational environment of the family, school and society must be unified, and at the same time have a close coordination, towards the same goal of educating children. As a kindergarten administrator, I also want to contribute my efforts to educate gratitude to children in a

practical and effective way. Research results show that, during the implementation process, the kindergarten has shown high support and determination in planning the gratitude education for children through specific activities. The principal is also the one who initiates, attracts, gathers forces, encourages and motivates teachers and staff to implement; well organize and supervise the activities of assigned teachers in the process of planning and organizing the implementation of the plan. Besides, families will also contribute to the activity when participating in gratitude birthday activities in the classroom with their children, sharing interesting stories about children, young siblings in the family, children's experiences...By that way, the teacher will contemplate, and honor the children's unique life experiences, while at the same time, associate them with the passage of time, the growth day by day. Furthermore, teachers will also honor the event, interpret its meaning and suggest questions for children to answer about the meaning of the activity, their feelings, etc. Parents can experience children's care for them, that is, feeling grateful for the merits of birth and nurturing through practical activities such as expressing children's feelings about their parents, giving flowers, do-it-yourself paintings and sharing the meaningful action that is sometimes just the act of gently wiping the mother's hand with a towel...This is also an exciting time for children, who find themselves organized by the two closest sources: family and friends, teachers. At the same time, the gratitude birthday activity is also a very touching experience for families who have the opportunity to join along with the school on their children's special day to uniquely, surprisingly record when seeing their children grow up every day. And this is also a special moment to reflect on how exciting it is for parents when seeing the journey of their children, from children with daily experiences until becoming the unique, wonderful children under teacher's care.

5. References

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