

TITLE:

Gratitude: Does it have a place within media-practice education?

ABSTRACT:

Gratitude may be an important yet largely untapped aspect of media-practice education. This research uses an exploratory approach with media-practice academics and students in order to examine the evidence and nature of gratitude within media-practice education. Given the exploratory nature of the study, interim findings are reported.

The research finds media-practice students to be open to gratitude having a place within their educational experiences, indeed students exclusively speak about situations in which they feel grateful, as positive aspects of their student experience. However academics see gratitude in a more varied way. For some, gratitude and its cyclical nature resonate; for others, gratitude is inappropriate and loaded with notions of power. These different perspectives may be partially explained by the different ways in which students and academics perceive gratitude. Whereas initial student voices suggest that gratitude is a positive emotion associated with a desire to reciprocate, academics' interpretation seems to emphasise obligation. This mismatch may inhibit the current impact of gratitude within the media-practice learning context. The research suggests that gratitude may be a defining aspect of a functional, productive student experience which those working within media-practice education might usefully aim to generate.

KEYWORDS:

Gratitude; media-practice; student-experience; higher-education; relationship.

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Introduction.

As media-practice education considers the demands and implications of the Teaching Excellence Framework (BIS 2016), there is merit in considering aspects of the learning context which might sit alongside student satisfaction. A focus on the emotional aspect of the academic-student relationship may be helpful, reminding both parties of the human nature of their interactions, but also potentially generating larger rewards for both parties.

This paper argues that gratitude is a largely untapped but potentially critical influence within media-practice higher education. Gratitude plays to the reciprocal nature of relational exchange which characterizes the media-practice learning environment. Gratitude then, may provide a fulcrum between academic and student engagement enhancing the quality of media-practice HE.

This research is underpinned by a relational approach to media-practice HE which emphasizes ongoing exchange between partners: students and academics; students and institutions; academics and institutions. Relational partners interact in a manner informed by their intentions to continue to work together into the future. Co-operation is a key outcome of relational exchange (Morgan and Hunt 1994). A series of authors have drawn from these ideas in their analyses of higher education (e.g. Bowden 2011; Bowden and Wood 2011; Cownie 2014; Helgesen 2008; Raciti 2012). Central to these analyses are relational concepts commitment and trust (Morgan and Hunt 1994), alongside satisfaction (Bowden 2011; Bowden and Wood 2011; Helgesen 2008) but none include gratitude.

Gratitude is the emotional core of reciprocity (Becker 1986; Dewani and Sinha 2012; Raggio et al. 2014), in essence an emotional state characterised by an innate desire to give something back to someone who has provided a valued benefit. Palmatier et al. (2009) note that a series of scholars see a central place for reciprocity within relational exchange (e.g. Bagozzi 1995) indeed Houston and Gassenheime (1987) consider reciprocity to be the very process which transforms exchange events into exchange relationships. Thus if relational approaches can be usefully applied to higher education, such approaches in part characterised by notions of reciprocity and gratitude is at the heart of reciprocity, there is logic to investigating gratitude within the context of media-practice education.

The examination of gratitude's place within the HE context is new with very few scholars attending to this discussion. Exceptions include Fournier and Sheehan's (2015) recent work on gratitude within a body of undergraduate nursing students in the US, recommending the integration of a gratitude focus within student learning and assessment. Yuksel and Oguz Duran (2012) note that education is a relevant context for the study of gratitude and adapt McCullough et al.'s (2002) gratitude questionnaire for use by Turkish undergraduate students. Howells' (2004) initial reflections upon gratitude within higher education emphasise the constructive outcomes gratitude could lead to, and notes that an absence of gratitude can undermine the cohesion of an academic community. Howells' (2012) more substantial work on gratitude within secondary education in Australia, articulated in the text '*Gratitude in Education*', provides useful underpinning ideas for this study, illustrating the importance of gratitude-based reciprocity within relational exchanges between teachers and pupils.

This is the first study to explore gratitude within UK HE and the first to examine gratitude within the context of media-practice education. An understanding of gratitude may contribute to media-practice educators' thinking about the student experience, informing their approach to the forthcoming Teaching Excellence Framework.

Literature review.

Defining gratitude.

Gratitude permeates our social interactions: an emotional response accompanied by the innate desire to reciprocate when we receive a valued benefit, benevolently given, whatever the scale of that benefit. Gratitude is underpinned by notions of reciprocity, first articulated by Gouldner (1960) and associated with obligation. However Dewani and Sinha (2012:2) emphasise desire rather than obligation in their definition of gratitude as '*the emotional appreciation for the benefits received, accompanied by a desire to reciprocate*'. Dewani and Sinha (2012) suggest that nearly all researchers see gratitude as emotion. This is indeed the manner in which gratitude is considered in this study. Gratitude can be conceived as the positive feeling we have following receiving something we value, big or small, which stimulates a want rather than a need to respond in some way. This focus on a want rather than need to

reciprocate distinguishes gratitude from obligation. Thus this research sees gratitude as a concept which combines feelings of appreciation with desired intentions to respond to the instigator of those feelings.

Whilst the desire to reciprocate is central to the concept of gratitude, scholars (e.g. Palmatier et al. 2009; Raggio et al. 2104) differentiate between the emotional or affective state of gratitude itself and the behavioural nature of expressions of gratitude. However Hasan et al. (2014) draw from Emmons and Crumpler (2000) to inform their distinction between the emotion of gratitude and the behavior of expressions of gratitude '*gratitude might be felt without being expressed and its behavioural components might not necessarily represent gratitude*' (Hasan et al. 2014:789).

Howells' (2012) useful analysis of gratitude within the context of secondary education, contributes valuable ideas to this study. The reciprocal nature of gratitude and its power to provide the relational glue which sustains interactions between partners, be they academics and students or academics and peers, is evident within Howells' (2012) notion of the cyclical process associated with gratitude. She articulates this important idea thus:

Gratitude invites us into a cyclical process: the more we are open to receive, the more students give, the more energy we feel for giving back. There is no doubt that we need to educate students to become givers rather than just receivers...but we need to model this for them first and also reflect on our potential to be open to receiving from them.

Howells (2012): 55.

The idea of the cycle of the learning process may not be new, but Howells' (2012) reference to the energy within the cycle is valuable, as indeed is that important place of academics as role models for giving and receiving. It will be interesting to explore these ideas further within the conversations with media-practice students and academics.

Gratitude and relational exchanges: drivers and outcomes.

Literature suggests that gratitude is an important glue within relational exchanges, maintaining relational bonds (Palmatier et al. 2009), strengthening existing relationships (Raggio et al. 2014) and enhancing relationship continuity (Bock et al. 2015). The impact of gratitude is not limited to interactions with the original benefactor, Fredrickson (2004) found that grateful people seek to further the well-being of other people, thus gratitude has an important knock-on effect which could arguably beneficially ripple across media-practice education.

Outside the context of education, Dewani and Sinha (2012) propose that gratitude is related to trust, commitment, loyalty and positive word-of-mouth. Recent work by Mishra (2016) found gratitude to be a more powerful driver of relational outcomes than trust and commitment. Bock et al. (2016) identify the importance of supportive employee-customer interactions as facilitators of gratitude's positive impact on relational behaviours. In the consumer context, scholars have discovered that gratitude is a driver of purchase intention (Palmatier et al. 2009; Soscia 2007; Simon et al. 2015; Dewani et al. 2016), sales growth (Palmatier et al. 2009), loyalty (Bock et al. 2015; Dewani et al. 2016), positive word-of-mouth communication (Raggio et al. 2014; Soscia 2007) and willingness to pay (Morales 2005). Whilst only positive word-of-mouth may be appropriate in the context of media-practice education, the range of outcomes indicates the potential power of gratitude.

Hasan et al. (2014) found that gratitude was a mediating factor between perceived relational investments and the perceived value of a relationship. Huang's (2015) work on gratitude in the Taiwanese consumer context, disaggregates relational investment and finds variability in the impact of aspects of relational investment on gratitude, with preferential treatment being the strongest aspect of relational investment driving gratitude, followed by interpersonal communication and rewards. The importance of communication as a driver of gratitude was also highlighted in Ting and Huang's (2015) work in Taiwanese special schools. This highlights some of the challenges of considering gratitude within the educational context, as a key driver of gratitude found in Huang's (2015) study, preferential treatment, is a relational investment which may be considered to be inappropriate within a media-practice education context, generating concerns about favouritism. Indeed favouritism is mentioned within qualitative comments regarding students' experiences of media-practice programmes in the National Student Survey.

Notions of intentionality and benevolence are important aspects of gratitude (Ceaser 2011). Hasan et al. (2014) find that perceived benevolence has a moderating effect between relational investments and gratitude. Gratitude can indeed be experienced as a result of effort rather than outcome, and win-win situations can generate gratitude (Raggio et al. 2014). These may be important findings for the context of HE as they suggest that aspects of the learning process associated with investment of effort may be generators of gratitude, rather than the outcomes of learning, for example final assessment grades. The notion that win-win situations can promote gratitude is of particular importance as media-practice academics work with students collaboratively towards the mutual goals of student engagement and achievement.

This research therefore argues that gratitude may be a driver of important relational outcomes within the context of media-practice education, its dynamic nature providing a motor for continued relational interaction, supported by the key relational pillars of trust and commitment (Morgan and Hunt 1994). We know however within contexts outside education, that beneficial outcomes of gratitude can be undermined by entitlement (Wetzel et al. 2014) and that entitlement decreases the positive effects of perceived value on gratitude (Pelser et al. 2015).

In summary, this research commences the study of gratitude within UK HE. It draws from literature informed by a relational perspective and largely from contexts outside education. Media-practice education provides a fertile context for analysis given its complexity and the varied nature of learning and teaching experiences it embraces. The research seeks to examine media-practice students' and academics' experiences and responses to the notion of gratitude. Exploration of these ideas is intended to provide an initial starting point to what is hoped to be a sustained area of interest, the role of gratitude within higher education.

Methodology.

This study is exploratory in nature and adopts a qualitative research approach to generate ideas related to gratitude within media-practice academics' and students' experiences of HE. Whilst it notes the underpinning scholarship highlighted within the literature review and areas which warrant exploration, it recognises that many of these ideas are generated within contexts arguably quite distinct from that of HE (e.g. Hasan et al. 2014; Palmatier 2009; Mishra 2016; Raggio et al. 2014).

Whilst Howells' (2012) ideas are clearly generated within the context of education, they too are somewhat removed from UK media-practice HE. Therefore the research approach is abductive in nature, seeking to explore areas within the literature review, but also to capture new ideas expressed by research participants.

The aim of the research is:

To explore academics' and students' experiences of gratitude within media-practice education.

The research is interested in exploring thoughts and experiences of participants within media-practice education. Participants were drawn from the Media Production department of a leading HE media provider within the UK. The Media Production department is one of five departments within a larger faculty and is of substantial size with 48 full-time equivalent academics and 850 students. The department offers a range of media-practice programmes at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. Cohorts comprise in the majority UK students, but with overseas students studying at both undergraduate and postgraduate level.

A series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with academics and students were conducted during the period September 2015-March 2016. Academics were purposively selected by the researcher in order to provide opinions from a balance of females/males, durations of employment within HE and academics with/without PhD qualifications (although all academics were at the minimum studying for their doctoral qualification). All academics taught media-practice students, but whilst eleven were production/practice-focused in their teaching, two were theory-orientated academics teaching media-practice students. Whilst a relatively systematic approach regarding sample selection was pursued, the small scale and exploratory nature of the research and sample mean that generalizability cannot be claimed.

The student sample included both undergraduate and postgraduate students, male and female. Students were recruited via programme leaders' signposting of the research opportunity and students volunteering to participate. Thus from the outset it is acknowledged that these students are likely to be engaged and not representative of the overall student body. This again limits the generalizability of the research outcomes.

The research tool was designed to explicitly ask participants about their experiences of gratitude within HE. A pilot interview permitted a review of the interview guide which was subsequently shortened. In total the study embraced twenty in-depth interviews capturing an equal number of male and female participants although it should be noted that there were more male voices within the academic participants and more female within the student participants. Twenty interviews aligns with data collection in previous studies in HE (e.g. Haywood 2014) satisfying Guest et al. (2006)'s guidelines that data saturation can be as early as within six interviews but frequently within twelve. Nevertheless it is acknowledged that this is a small-scale case study.

The dataset comprised 21 hours of discussion. All interviews were transcribed by the researcher in order to retain proximity to the data. Transcriptions were analysed inductively, using NVIVO 11, first with open coding and then developing emerging themes which addressed the research aim.

Discussion.

Given the exploratory nature of this study, it is important to highlight at the outset that the discussion is based upon interim findings about the place of gratitude in media-practice education.

A relational approach.

The relational approach which frames this study, seemed to be supported by academic participants who in the main spoke about developing relationships with students as part of their educational approach, for example:

I would say there is a relationship. I think that's a useful term for it.

Academic/female/PhD/6years in HE.

For programme leaders relationships seemed particularly important, one academic moving away from the programme leader role he had occupied, spoke about the wrench of being disconnected from his students and their work.

UK students welcomed the idea of relationships with academics, although overseas' students were more guarded.

Yes, because by the end of your time they do get to know your name and little things about how you work. And you do engage with them quite a lot in media production because it's such a practical subject. You're always discussing ideas and that, and they get to see parts of you in your work, because you have to put your style into it. So I think that it definitely does build up some sort of relationship.

Student/female/undergraduate year 2/UK(a).

Therefore there was a sense that a relational approach to HE may be appropriate within media-practice, though not without its challenges, thus legitimising the pursuit of inquiry into key relational concepts including gratitude.

Experiences of gratitude within media-practice education.

Many participants were open to the idea of gratitude within higher education, but hadn't previously thought of education through this lens. All students interviewed reported feelings of gratitude within their student experience. To illustrate, one mature student notes his gratitude for being able to access higher education:

Yeah I'm grateful about the whole situation, when I left education the first time, I never ever thought I'd get to university. University was something out of my reach, so that if you like gives me a context for the whole thing. And within that, the lecturers themselves, when I reflect I feel grateful, but I don't think about it all the time, because you know you're getting paid, it's your job, as in the lecturers, so it's not all one way, so then enthusiasm I'm grateful for that.

Student/male/undergraduate year 2/UK.

Importantly, there was a sense that gratitude related to positive aspects of the student experience. Feelings of gratitude could be evoked by small actions or words from tutors and the sense of appreciation so central to notions of gratitude, could ripple across the student body in a positive manner. Therefore, whilst these participants were engaged students,

responding as they did to programme leaders' calls for involvement in this research, the fact that they all reported feelings of gratitude might be positive for the wider student body. Gratitude in some students may beget gratitude in others.

Tutors' help and emotional support appears to be a particular source of gratitude. A second year student comments about her feelings of gratitude towards tutors who she perceives care about her education and gratitude for the facilities she can access:

You can tell that they (tutors) really care about...that we're enjoying it, and that we understand it, and that we're not having a horrible time with it, which is really good, I definitely feel grateful for that, it makes it a lot easier to try hard, if you know that someone else is caring about it.

Student/female/undergraduate year 2/UK(b).

Whereas the student participants all spoke positively about the place of gratitude within their student experience, academics were split in their reported experiences of gratitude. There was considerable variety in academics' views regarding gratitude's appropriateness within media-practice education. Whilst a number of academic participants welcomed the notion of gratitude as having a place within their exchanges with students and colleagues, others were concerned that gratitude implied power-based interactions. One academic speaks positively about gratitude in media-practice education, but notes the ephemeral and momentary nature of gratitude:

I think it's very important, I think it's very important in the context of academia. I think that it's quite empowering I think that if I'm analyzing it, I think that it's quite ephemeral and that I think is potentially an issue with it. Someone says say thank-you you say 'Oh brilliant that's really appreciated', and then it's gone the next moment. It's always like a euphoric moment or a mutual connection, but it's a momentary thing.

Academic/male/no PhD/15 years in HE.

Whilst students talked about their desire to reciprocate as part of gratitude, more than one academic appeared to be viewing gratitude through the lens of obligation rather than desire to reciprocate.

Academics emphasized strongly that they thought that neither staff nor students should feel grateful within HE.

I don't, I can't see why I would use that word, or think in that way, I'm not looking for gratitude and I wouldn't expect them to look for gratitude in anything that informs our relationship.

Academic/male/PhD/15 years in HE(b).

Therefore several academic participants expressed concerns around gratitude relating it to hierarchy and power and interpreting it as about obligation rather than desire, speaking about: 'having to' feel grateful; 'should' feel grateful. A small number of academics (all male) explicitly linked these ideas to their own sense of self and background, for example:

Maybe it's me and my own biography, but gratitude is loaded with inequity, that sounds odd, there's almost a compulsion to be grateful for something you've been given.

Academic/male/ PhD/21 years in HE.

Interestingly this power-based concern appeared to have a place in discussions regarding academics' interactions with students but far less in the context of discussions regarding gratitude-based interactions with academic colleagues.

The academic who spoke most strongly against gratitude in HE suggested that gender might have a role to play:

I'm not very good at gratitude or receiving gifts, I just don't like it, I don't like the anything outside of the formal environment. I wonder if it's a gender thing as well.

Academic/male/PhD/15 years in HE(b).

Indeed it was interesting to note that in the sample of academic participants, there did appear to be a possible tendency for females to be more welcoming of ideas regarding gratitude than males. Thus gender may provide an interesting opportunity for future research within the context of gratitude and HE.

In summary it appeared that student and academic participants thought about gratitude in different ways. Whilst gratitude was allied to notions

of obligation in the minds of academics, there was some evidence that students interpreted gratitude in the manner suggested by Dewani and Sinha (2012), focusing on a desire to reciprocate.

Focus of gratitude. Many of the conversations with participants focused on gratitude between academics and students (cohorts, groups and individuals). Academics in general felt little gratitude towards their institution beyond members of their faculty. The head of the department within the study was the focus of considerable gratitude from academics, whereas few participants spoke about gratitude towards university leaders, indeed strong voices articulated the opposite.

Students spoke about gratitude within the context of group production projects, being grateful when peers attended group meetings and feeling gratitude when the group was functional and productive. This seemed to be particularly evident when students had previously experienced working within dysfunctional or less productive groups.

Expressions of gratitude. Gratitude was most frequently aligned to notions of thankfulness and its emotional nature was acknowledged by participants. Academics in particular noted the distinction between feelings of gratitude and expressions of gratitude reflecting the thrust of scholarship (e.g. Dewani and Sinha 2012; Raggio et al. 2014; Hasan et al. 2014; Emmons and Crumpler 2000):

You can be grateful to somebody without expressing it, you're aware that somebody has helped you in some way, somebody has done something for you, to make you feel better, so it doesn't have to be an expression. An expression of gratitude is something, is a good thing.

Academic/male/studying for PhD/6 years in HE.

It is interesting to note this comment about an expression of gratitude being a 'good thing', reflecting Raggio et al.'s (2014) findings that a lack of expression of gratitude can be problematic for the sustenance of relational exchange. However another academic emphasised that expressions of gratitude didn't equate to feelings of gratitude:

I think we all offer up a sense of gratitude or not in different ways. Some people are very quick to say thank-you, but that doesn't necessarily mean that they are more grateful, there are people, I

share an office with a couple of folk. I don't remember us ever saying thank-you to each other explicitly for anything, but we're very grateful to each other for the support we offer. You can feel it. You know, it can get quite love-in at times we know that we are supporting each other sometimes in the most bonkers way. But we don't really feel the need to say we're grateful and to say that we're thankful, but it's there.

Academic/male/ PhD/2 years in HE.

Arguably the notion of knowing feelings of gratitude exist without evidence through its expression, is dependent upon a close relationship between the parties. One academic noted that showing gratitude is part of relational glue.

I think most people must be generally grateful, because people who aren't, always stand out. So I'm always surprised when I meet someone who is very ungrateful, who I would describe as ungrateful. I would notice. I would think 'what's up with you' it would be a character I would notice so I think generally it is one of the key things of how a group holds together, giving, and being able to receive. It's very difficult when people won't accept. There's something awful about people who won't accept, I know that giving is different, it's that idea of you wanting to be grateful to someone and they won't allow you to be grateful.

Academic/female/PhD/4 years in HE.

Student participants spoke about their desire to express gratitude towards academics, but their hesitancy and uncertainty in doing so. Email communication of thanks was favoured in comparison with face-to-face communication. Indeed students spoke about their hesitancy in sending an isolated message of thanks, instead looking for opportunities to piggy-back other messages in order to express their gratitude to academics. In fact one of the few points in which power was spoken about by student participants was in relation to expressions of gratitude, one student commenting:

I really want to do it [express gratitude], but I need to have something else and I will say thank you with that. It comes down to the whole they're your lecturer, it's an academic environment, there's the whole question of power and stuff like that, um, so it's kind of weird if you just email someone just to say thanks. They

would probably appreciate it, but my way of thinking is oh they're probably think that is weird that I'm emailing them just to say thanks.

Student/female/year 3 undergraduate/overseas.

Thus the feelings of gratitude spoken about by students are not fully enacted in expressions of gratitude. The relative lack of expressions of gratitude may impact academics' sense of the extent to which gratitude is present within the student body and in turn the potential role of gratitude within media-practice education.

In summary whilst students report feelings of gratitude within media-practice education and associate these with functional rather than dysfunctional (power-based) relationships, academics have more varied perceptions of the actual and normative place of gratitude within media-practice education. The implication of these differences is that a potentially potent and positive aspect of the student experience based on a desire to reciprocate is being ignored or downplayed by academics whose interpretation of gratitude emphasises obligation rather than desire to reciprocate. The paradox is that academics are often the source of gratitude in the eyes of students, their behaviours stimulating a desire in students to reciprocate. However there appears to be real diversity within academic participants regarding whether such responses do exist or should exist within media-practice HE. This situation is arguably further exacerbated by the apparent lack of expressions of gratitude by students: certainly students appear to report more feelings of gratitude than expressions of gratitude in the context of their experiences of media-practice education.

Thus the opportunities afforded by gratitude may be being missed. Sharing students' perceptions of the nature and place of gratitude within their educational experiences, may be one way in which academics might respond more positively and proactively about the role of gratitude in media-practice HE.

A cycle of gratitude.

Howells' (2012:55) notion of the cyclical nature of gratitude was corroborated by all participants' responses, although academics offered a range of alternative conceptualisations of the notion of the gratitude-cycle: sharing; dialogic; loop. There was a sense within all participants, students and academics, that academics had responsibility for starting the

cycle/loop/dialogic/sharing process, arguably corroborating Raggio et al.'s (2014) findings.

I think it's our responsibility to start the ball rolling. I'll give you an example..I didn't give as much to the first cohort as I did to the second, um and that wheel of reciprocity didn't really establish itself with that year group until the unit I was just talking about, the client brief when suddenly everything clicked and suddenly there was warmth coming back to me. Up until that point I was actually rather, I felt I'd rather let them down, and some of them, certainly in the first year, some of them were not that thrilled about the course and that was partly my responsibility. By comparison, this last year, with the second cohort, I have a completely different attitude and I'm all over it like a rash, in a way that I wasn't in the first year, and by doing that it's much more fulfilling for me, ok so it takes a lot of my time, but that's the job isn't it, and it's worth it.

Academic/male/PhD/3 years in HE.

Whilst Howells' (2012) cycle resonated with all participants, there was a real lack of understanding amongst students about what they might be able to give back to academics within such a cycle. A final year undergraduate student expressed it as:

I think, if someone was to explain what students could give academics, then we could understand the whole cycle. Because for me it's difficult to understand what I can give, um, so that, um, people could receive. I am completely aware of what I can receive and it would be as the person says, educating students to be givers as well as receivers. I think that students should receive, a lot, but we also should understand what we can give, as I personally don't understand what I can give to people.

Student/female/year 3 undergraduate/overseas.

This was interesting, as this sample of students, responding as they had to a request for research, were arguably more likely to be engaged, thoughtful students than the average student within the department, and yet even these students were finding difficulty in seeing their agency within the learning process, not for themselves, but as givers to academics. A mature postgraduate articulated similar ideas, and sees a 'fantasy' future expression of thanks as the only way she might be able to give something back.

I do feel like that, that I'm taking and I've got nothing to offer back, which I do feel a challenge because I don't know what I could offer, I do feel it's very one sided in that respect. I don't lose sleep over it, and I do think, I'll make sure I put their name on my thank-you list when I receive my BAFTA [laughs].

Student/female/postgraduate/UK/mature.

One academic acknowledged the challenges the notion of giving may present to students:

Giving something back say academically, or experientially, that's a big weight on their shoulders to think this person who has been around the world, has made lots of projects, is my tutor, to somehow uncovers something which would reflect their gratitude, it's very difficult.

Academic/male/studying for PhD/6 years in HE.

And yet, anyone who has spent any time in a classroom environment, lecture theatre, seminar room or tutorial space, must have experienced the gift of engagement that student cohorts can bring to the learning and teaching experience. Clearly if gratitude stimulates increased participation and engagement within the learning process, this is a valuable outcome to both students and academics. Indeed such engagement sustains the cycle of gratitude. When asked whether he was grateful for students' input into the classroom learning context, one academic commented.

Genuinely yes, I've mentioned that there's a few frozen moments when the students shut down and I have nothing, so when the students do engage I'm grateful for them playing along, because if they don't, then we have nothing. My pedagogy doesn't work. There is nothing for us to do here people. We're in this together, if I'm opening myself up and trying to get everyone to have a voice, then we all have a responsibility, and that core one is being there and playing along,

Academic/male/ PhD/2 years in HE.

All academics but one, felt similarly, for example:

Fridays for me are five hours of seminars and I'm knackered and I've got a two and half hour drive home, I think oh God, and you go into some seminars when the students are engaged and committed and you feed off that energy and yes I'm grateful for that, because they're getting me through the seminar, because their energy is taking me through, I sail through the five hours.

Academic/male/studying for PhD/6 years in HE.

I'm incredibly grateful for people making the effort.

Academic/male/studying for PhD/8 years in HE.

If they're contributing I'm definitely grateful, because that takes, we're working as a team, the learning becomes a team experience rather than me doing the leg work.

Academic/male/PhD/3 years in HE.

I'm grateful when they're all getting so much out of it, and they seem to be enjoying and developing. It's not that they're consciously giving me anything, but I'm experiencing something that makes me feel, I think great guys, you're doing really well. You don't know it, but I'm really pleased that you're doing well.

Academic/female/PhD/6 years in HE.

It was interesting to note that those academics who saw a place for gratitude within HE, were the ones who reported their own feelings of gratitude as a response to student engagement. Therefore students' engagement and effort is central to the gratitude cycle: academics saw this clearly; students less so.

Conditions for the cycle of gratitude: Environment. It was clear that an appropriate learning environment, both tangible and intangible, was seen as critical underpinning for this cycle of gratitude. Academic participants talked about the importance of their role in initially establishing an appropriate environment for learning. One practice-based academic speaks about the importance of establishing an appropriate environment for a cycle of gratitude to develop:

I think it is not the teacher, it is not the students, it is the environment. Obviously there is the physical environment, but the environment is something that probably the teacher creates. The environment is how I approach the class, who I am? How I approach myself, this creates the environment, I normally ask them what do you like to do outside the university, your passions, things that make you happy. This is what I want to know and I will tell the same about myself. I'm not talking about academic things, I want to create the environment, the environment is the key thing.

Academic/female/PhD/3years in HE.

It was interesting to hear from one of the media theory academic participants how important a non-judgmental environment was in terms of encouraging practice-orientated students to engage within the theoretical and cultural contexts of students' studies.

I think it's great that we have practice students, because they can make great things and they're invested in the subject, but the downside is, they don't always see the benefit of cultural politics, I find especially when I interview students, they're interested in best practice, but I think the only way you can know about best practice is through the cultural context, so in some sense the practice is a great thing because they're interested in making things and interested in ideas, but it is also a bit of a problem, because they tend to see the theory guys as the bad guys...It's a bit disappointing sometime, I think you've got to be judgmental in some senses, but you've got to be non-judgmental in other senses really, like with, offering a non-judgmental environment is the way to get people going... so I think non-judgmental environment, encouraging an environment when you can say anything almost.

Academic/male/PhD/15years in HE(a).

A practice academic also stressed the importance of environment to facilitate student contributions, suggesting that likeability can contribute to this.

I think you have to like people to do this job. I think for us it's really important that students feel comfortable, I suppose as another idea. I think fundamental to creativity which I think is

really important, I think you need to, to be creative I think you need to feel supported and taking risks, that sounds like a cliché, but I think it's important. And I think if you feel, if you're in a position where people are constantly criticizing you I think there's a tendency to try to pull out. What's that expression? You can't have, you can't pick the low hanging fruit. You try to deliver the one hit wonders, which will be mostly clichés or things you know have been successful in the past, so I think to go beyond that, you need to create some kind of space that students can throw up ideas which aren't particularly well formed and might actually not be very good. So I think the likeability is part of that, creating an environment for people to take risks.

Academic/male/PhD/20years in HE.

Alongside the intangible learning environment spoken about by academics, the tangible aspects of the learning environment were mentioned by some students. The physical environment, buildings and media production facilities were referred to by students as aspects of the media-practice learning environment which stimulated feelings of gratitude. This student focusses on the currency of facilities available to her as a driver or facilitator of gratitude:

I feel grateful for like the facilities we've got, I know that it could definitely be further behind, I looked at [another university] and it definitely was more dated so I definitely feel grateful that it is so up to date.

Student/female/undergraduate year 2/UK(b).

Therefore the learning environment, the tangible facilities and the less tangible context which academics seek to develop to generating learning, appear to be important aspects of media-practice education which facilitate gratitude. Indeed the opportunity that media-practice educators have as creative practitioners to influence both aspects of the learning environment, arguably make media-practice HE a particularly potent context for gratitude to play a role.

Conditions for the cycle of gratitude: Acknowledgement. Conversations with academics generated insight about acknowledgement as a particular characteristic of media-practice education which broadly spoke to the cycle of gratitude. In particular, acknowledgement of tutor or

student support or inspiration was seen as an important and indeed necessary part of the creative-process, the lack of which could be problematic. Acknowledgement can be seen as a formal expression of gratitude particular to the context of media-practice. One academic spoke to the role of acknowledgement, whether it be of tutor inspiration or extant creative artifacts/ideas, and the absence of acknowledgement within his experiences of some media-practice students' work, explaining:

There's a guy I helped, he worked on a quite famous animation and in his final year I pretty much spent lots of time working on the script idea, there's some comment I saw online when he said he had no one to support me as a student and I thought that is [wrong], that annoyed me. I think...[this example] is a way of building himself up, I've done it all by myself. Maybe it's a western idea that, about the individual, all that I've done is the result of my efforts, and no-one has really helped me to get here. I don't think there's much of an awareness, I would say the opposite. I would say to the students, ideas don't come from you, you borrow them, you better do something good with them and put it back it's your obligation, you've stolen them otherwise, so I think part of this, rather than this being me helping someone and wanting this result, for them to explicitly demonstrate that they're appreciative, I would say that there needs to be some awareness that if I've given any contribution it is acknowledged in some way.

Academic/male/PhD/20years in HE.

In contrast one academic spoke warmly about a student who had made a point of acknowledging her peers.

We had a screening the other day, and one student got up and she said 'I just want to say to my whole crew that they really did honour my script and they were really respectful for the rewrite and that really was great' and she stood up on stage and she acknowledged and thanked and I thought, you've done a good thing there you know, because you've articulated what was really important to you and you've validated back.

Academic/female/PhD/6years in HE.

Therefore this suggests that within the media-practice sector, acknowledgement of the source of creative inspiration and the role of collaborators may be an important, possibly necessary contribution to the

cycle of gratitude. There may be an opportunity for media-practice educators to use acknowledgement of creative sources and tutor input as a device to speak to students about the importance of expressions of gratitude and the problems a lack of expressions of gratitude can present in both the professional and educational media-practice contexts.

In summary, Howells' (2012) ideas of a cycle of gratitude appeared to resonate amongst some if not all student and academic participants. Academics saw engagement as central to this cycle and suggested that the cycle of gratitude was contingent upon contributions from academics and students. Academics had responsibility for establishing an appropriate environment to facilitate reciprocal exchange, students were responsible for acknowledging the contributions of others (academics, students, practitioners) to the creation of media-practice artefacts. Indeed the relevance of environment and acknowledgement to the media-practice educational context arguably make this subject area particularly appropriate for gratitude to play a constructive role in educational exchanges.

Defining gratitude within media-practice education.

This research proposes that gratitude has a place within media-practice education and can be defined as:

A positive emotional response accompanied by an intention to demonstrate appreciation to the perceived giver of valued benefits.

This definition seeks to encapsulate the inherently positive nature of gratitude alongside its intentional dimension. Media-practice student participants report that they experience such feelings of gratitude; the opportunity is for academics to create outlets for responses to these feelings of gratitude whether such responses be engagement-based or avenues for expressions of gratitude.

In summary this exploratory study provides early evidence that gratitude may form an important part of a positive student experience within the context of media-practice education. Figure 1 seeks to summarise the study's findings. Clearly opportunities to develop these ideas further do exist. Future research should engage with a broader sample of media-practice HE participants, this might usefully include alumni who are able to reflect back upon their HE experience. Qualitative work can be followed by quantitative study which seeks to develop measures for

gratitude constructs, measure their evidence within the media-practice HE context and establish relationships with some of the ideas raised here, contingencies such as environment and acknowledgement, outcomes such as engagement.

Insert figure 1 here.

Limitations.

This initial exploratory study focuses on the experiences of students and academics within media-practice education at a single UK HEI. It embraces the voices of male and female academics and students, undergraduate and postgraduate students and UK and overseas students, however its scale is recognised as a limitation. The sample comprised a broader range of academic voices than student voices which may account for the diversity of opinion evident within the academic participants. Certainly further in-depth interviews with students could usefully be conducted prior to a quantitative examination of gratitude within a broader HE context. The researcher had not taught any of the student participants, but was a colleague of the academic participants, working within a different department, but within the same faculty. It is possible that these existing relationships may have impacted the validity and credibility of the data. Such a concern would be reduced in future studies, qualitative or quantitative with participants from other HEIs delivering media-practice education, be they UK based or across the globe.

Scholarship supporting the study is drawn largely from outside the context of education, although Howells' (2012) work in secondary education does draw from student-teacher interactions and learning experiences. Clearly the scholarship informed the research tool and the contextual differences in the scholarly domains may have been limiting and compromised cultural validity (Cohen et al. 2011).

The research tool was designed to facilitate semi-structured interviews and thus arguably, in asking questions explicitly about gratitude, may have generated responses which speak to gratitude more comprehensively than had a more open research tool without prompted questioning about gratitude. Thus it is acknowledged that the research approach may have led participants to discussions about gratitude more readily if a more open approach had been adopted.

For these reasons the generalisability of these interim findings is limited. The ideas which have emerged from this research will inform future research on gratitude in media-practice education but cannot at this stage be taken as representative of the current situation across the sector.

Summary.

This study seeks to commence research into gratitude's place within media-practice higher education. Its aim was to explore academics' and students' experiences of gratitude within media-practice education. It finds that gratitude appears to resonate within these early conversations however the negative feelings which exist are expressed strongly. These include voices from academics which speak strongly regarding the appropriateness of gratitude as a lens for analysis within HE. This initial study provides a definition of gratitude within media-practice education, however it notes that whilst media-practice students have intentions to reciprocate they are unsure about how to do this appropriately. Table 1 seeks to illustrate the differences between academics' and students' responses to the ideas of feelings of gratitude and expressions of gratitude.

Insert table 1 here.

Moving forward, these initial suggestions that gratitude has some resonance within media-practice education, provide justification for integrating gratitude within a broader relational framework for HE. There is initial evidence here that understanding and practice of gratitude strategies may be a constructive approach within preparations for the forthcoming Teaching Excellence Framework. In particular gratitude's potential link to engagement will be of value in engaging with the TEF. As this is exploratory research, a number of further research areas are naturally precipitated including: What are the expressions of gratitude within media-practice education? What are the drivers and outcomes of gratitude within the context of media-practice education? Does gender have a role within the evaluation of gratitude's place within HE? Importantly, gratitude may have a role to play within higher education as a driver of engagement: above all, this is the topic worthy of future research attention. Further work could usefully disaggregate feelings and expressions of gratitude and examine the impact of each on students' and academics' engagement within media-practice HE.

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Figure 1: Conceptualising gratitude's place within media-practice education.

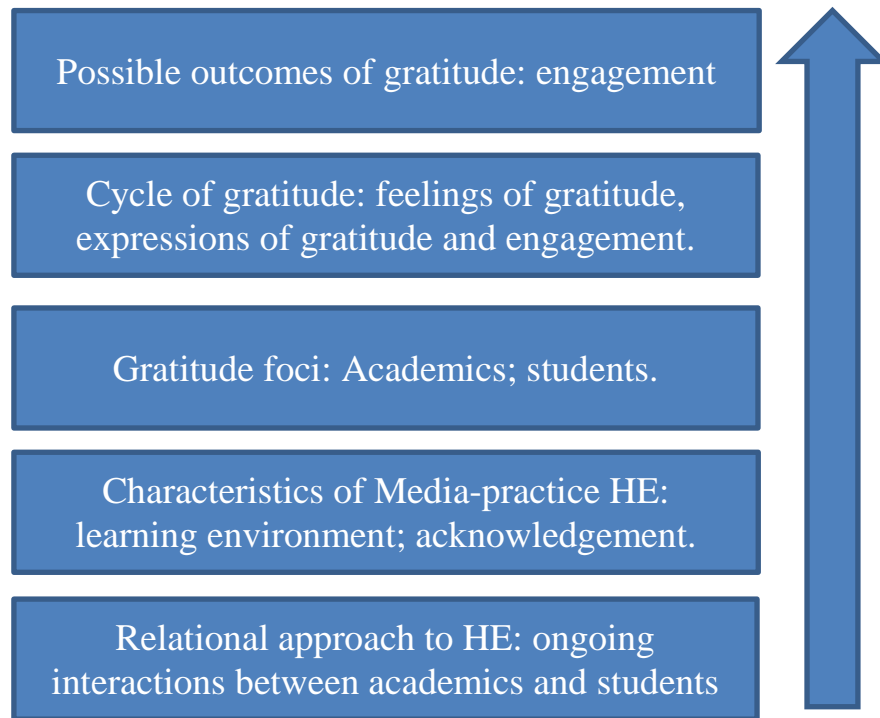


Table 1: Academics’ and students’ responses to gratitude.

	Feelings of gratitude	Expressions of gratitude.
Academics	Towards students for what students give within the classroom context: including participation; new examples; feedback. Don’t feel grateful for students’ expressions of gratitude, but in the main find these ‘nice’ and uplifting. Some academics find all expressions of gratitude from students to be uncomfortable and even inappropriate. Feelings of gratitude towards colleagues, but rarely at institutional level.	Variable but in the main, limited expression of gratitude by academics towards students. Feeling for some academics, that acknowledgement of source of ideas and support was an important expression of gratitude which didn’t always happen but was central to the media-practice process.
Students	Feelings of gratitude towards staff for things they do, often small things. Grateful for a sense of care shown towards them or their cohort. Feelings of gratitude appear to be generally associated with a positive student experience. There is little evidence that feelings of gratitude are related to power imbalance. A sense that students want to reciprocate or work harder as a response to feelings of gratitude. Feelings of gratitude towards other students particularly in functional groups.	Some discomfort regarding expressing gratitude to academics. Seeking opportunities to piggyback email communications rather than send specific unsolicited expressions of thanks. Feelings of uncertainty regarding how expressions would be interpreted by academics and other students.