

Report on the Gratitude Project

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Dear teachers and parents: As you remember, we're collecting information on students' gratitude towards those that they think would be most likely to grant them their greatest wish. Although we're still a long way from finishing our study, we wanted to let you see some of the early findings. We'll continue to post new reports as we collect information from more students.

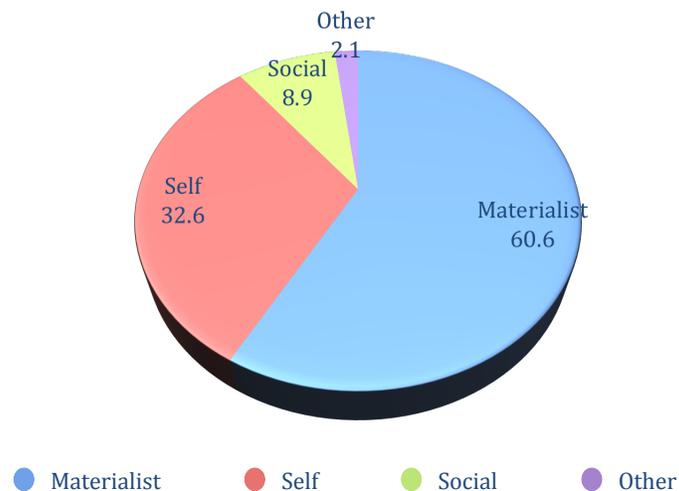
In this report, we're talking about the first 323 students aged 7 to 14 from whom we have gathered information. Most of them are in elementary school (250 students), with the rest (81) in middle school. So far we have collected information from more boys (171) than girls (151).

Our first question had to do with students' wishes: "What is your greatest wish?"

The students' responses fell into three main categories:

- **Materialist wishes**, in other words wishes for something immediately for themselves (for money, toys or games, a pet, etc.);
- **Self wishes**, such as wishes about their own personal future well-being (doing well in school, getting a good job, etc.);
- **Social wishes**, or wishes for others (for their family, the community, or the entire world).

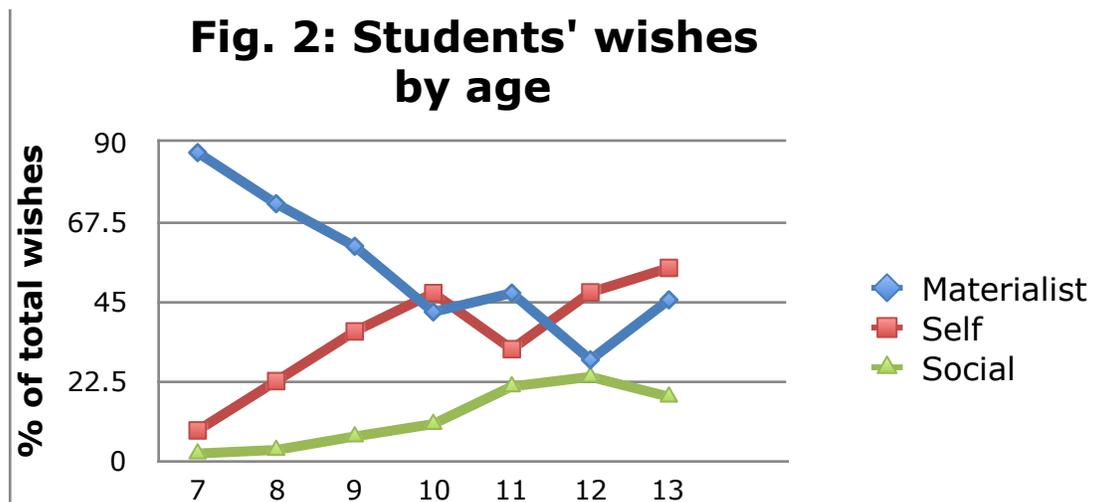
In addition, there were some "**other**" wishes that either did not fit into any of these categories or the student had written something that we couldn't understand.



We wanted to know whether these wishes varied by age, gender, and ethnic group.

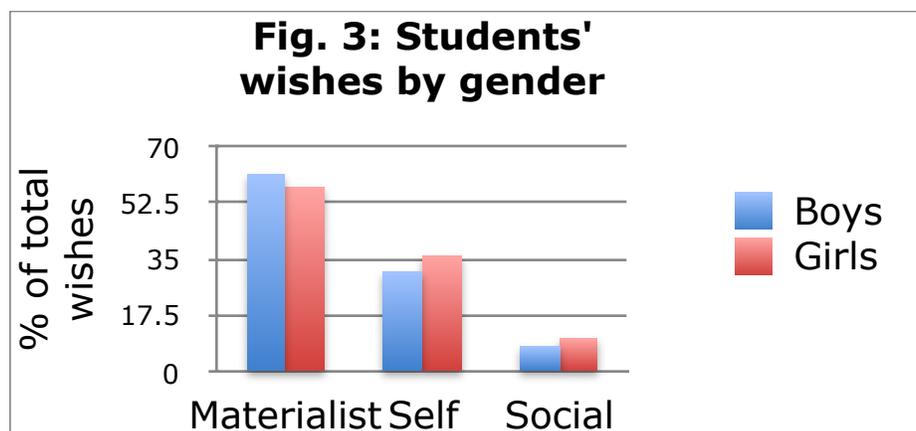
Do students' wishes vary by age? Yes, they do.

As you can see in Figure 2, students who were younger were more likely than those who were older to express wishes for something that would immediately benefit themselves. By contrast, older students were more likely than those who were younger to wish for something that would benefit them in the future. Wishes for others' well being were least likely to be expressed, but showed a steady increase with age. (Because so far we only have completed information on three 14-year-olds we haven't included their data.)



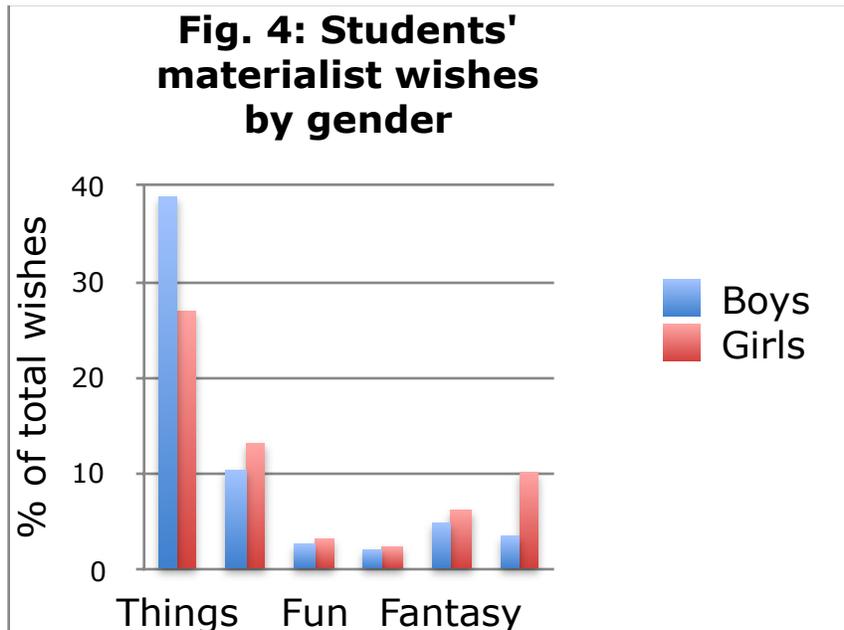
Did boys and girls have different types of wishes?

As you can see in the figure below, boys were slightly more likely to express materialist wishes and less likely to express self-related wishes or wishes related to others' well-being than were girls. However, these differences are not large enough to be worth considering—boys and girls had very similar types of wishes.

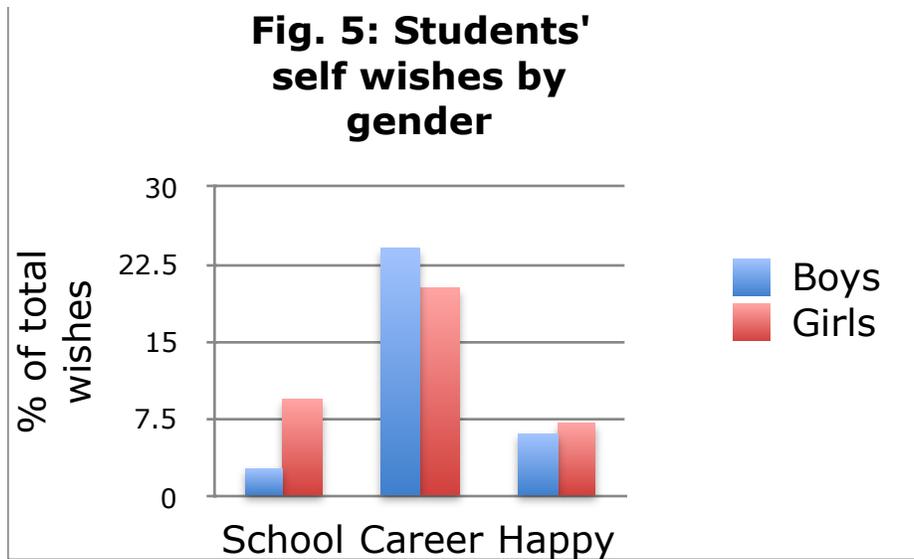


What do students wish for?

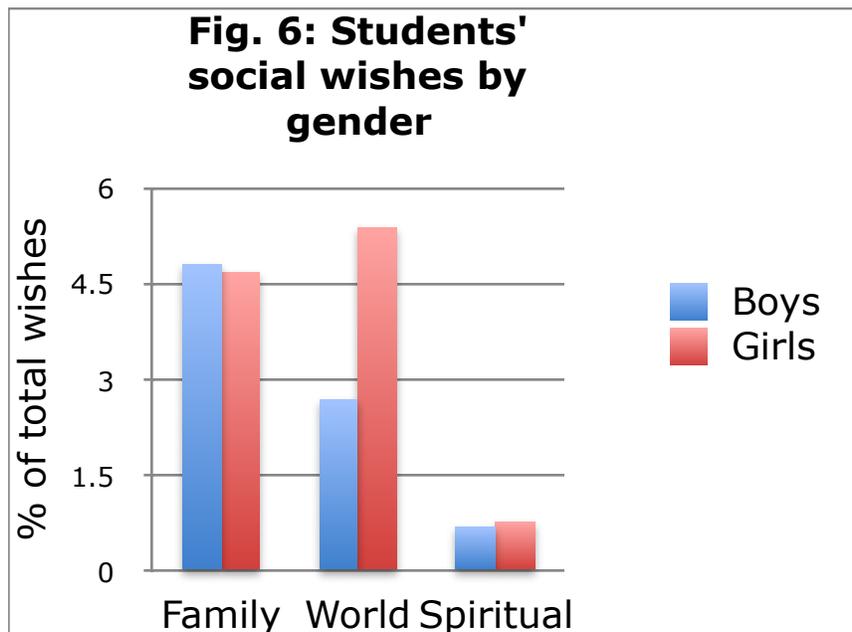
What exactly are these materialist, self, or social wishes, and do they vary by gender? As you can see from Figure 4, the most common type of materialist wish was for things, such as a car, pokemon cards, a nice house, an I-pad, a pet, and toys. Fun, fame, and fantasy involved wishes such as not having to go to school, to be famous and live with Justin Bieber, and to turn into superman or have magic powers.



Most of the students' wishes for their own self were about their future career although some of those careers might have fit better under the "fantasy" section, particularly for boys! More than 60% of the boys who wished for some type of career wanted to become a successful sports star (whether in soccer, baseball, or the NFL). Among the girls, although some wished for careers as a singer, dancer, or model, more wanted to become a teacher, vet, or chef. The other types of wishes that the children expressed were for their long-term happiness and also for school success (something that girls were more likely to wish for).

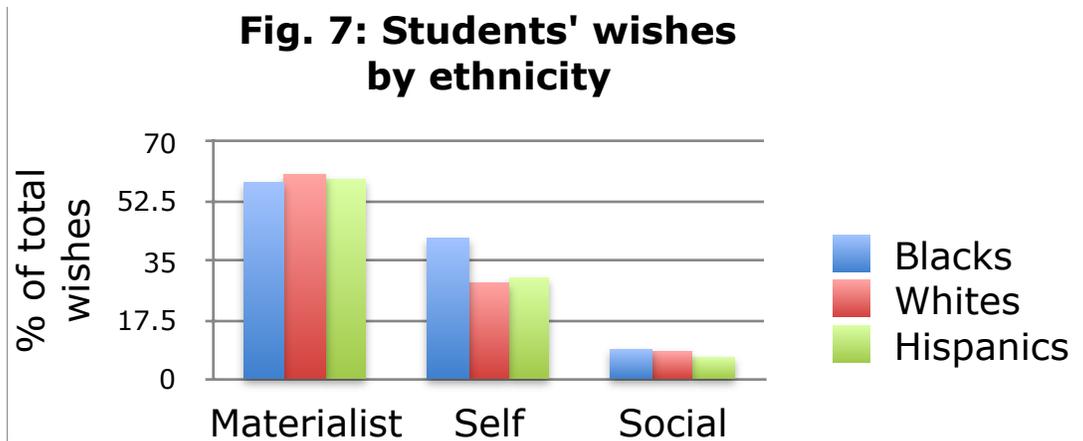


In terms of social wishes, the most common were wishes for the family to be happy and for others to do well. One boy and one girl also wrote about the spiritual welfare of others. The number of social wishes was very low, however—between 1% and 5% of all wishes—much lower than was the case for either materialist or self wishes.



Did students' wishes vary in relation to their ethnic background?

We had too few students who self-identified as “other ethnicity” but we are able to look at the differences between Black, White, and Hispanic students.



There were very few differences between the ethnic groups, with the single exception that Black students were a little more likely to express wishes for their future well-being than were White or Hispanic students. It's worth pointing out, however, that the students' age was also related to their types of wishes (see Figure 2), and Black students were slightly older, on average (10.69 years) than were the White (8.41 years) and Hispanic (9.66 years) students, so we can't tell yet whether these differences are due to age or to the students' ethnicity.

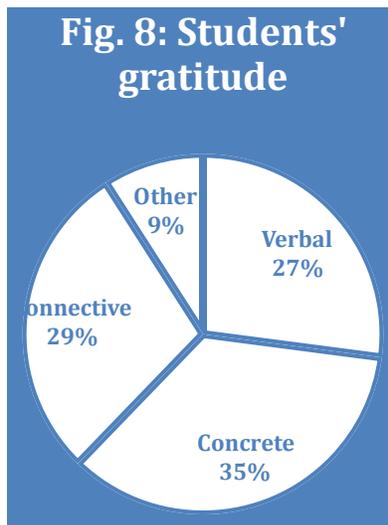
Our second question had to do with the ways in which the students said they would respond to someone who granted them their wish.

“What would you do for the person who granted you your wish?”

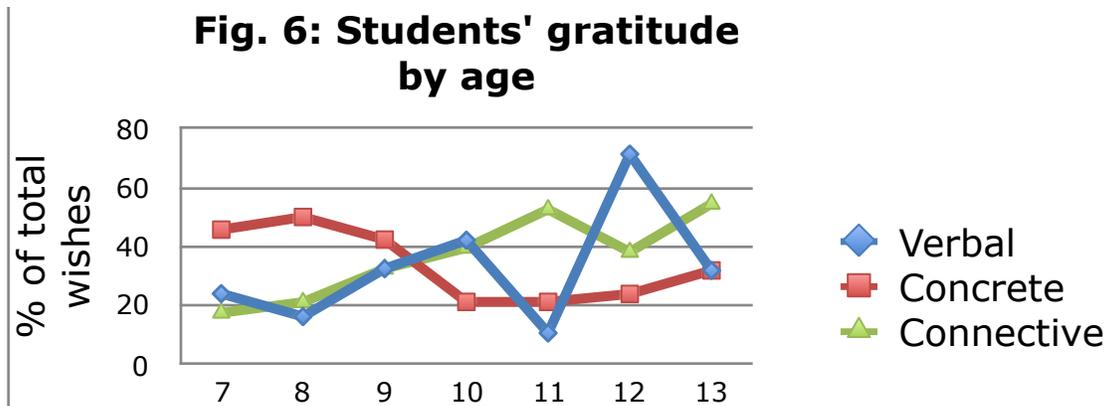
Again the students’ responses were of three main types:

- **Verbal gratitude** (saying thank you, or writing a letter of thanks, etc.);
- **Concrete gratitude** (saying that they would give something in return that they personally would like; in other words, students expressing concrete gratitude showed no evidence of considering the needs or wishes of the person who had granted their wish); for example, a child whose greatest wish was for a doll house might offer a doll as a way of expressing gratitude;
- **Connective gratitude** (saying that they would give or do something in return, but what that was depended on what the benefactor would like or need, for example, by saying that they would do anything they could to help this person).

There were also some other responses that did not fit into these major categories.

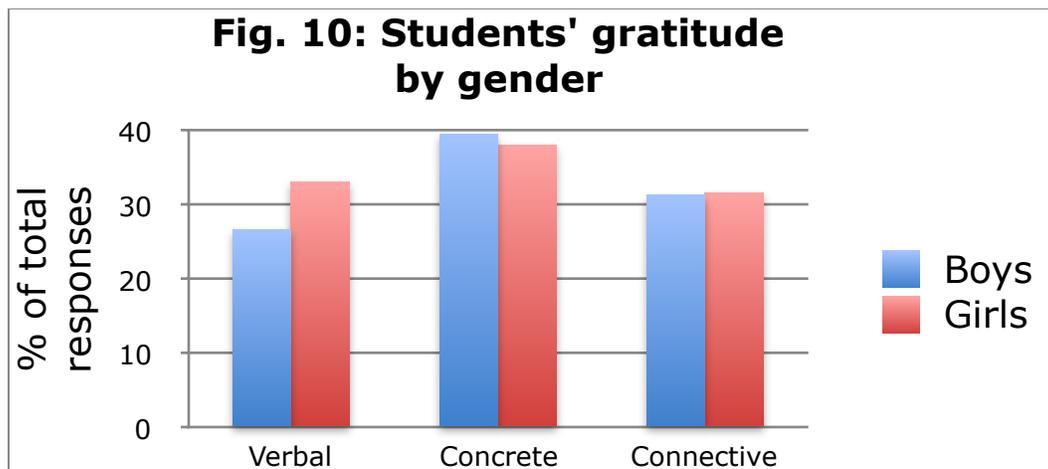


As with the students’ wishes, we were first interested to see whether there were any changes with age.

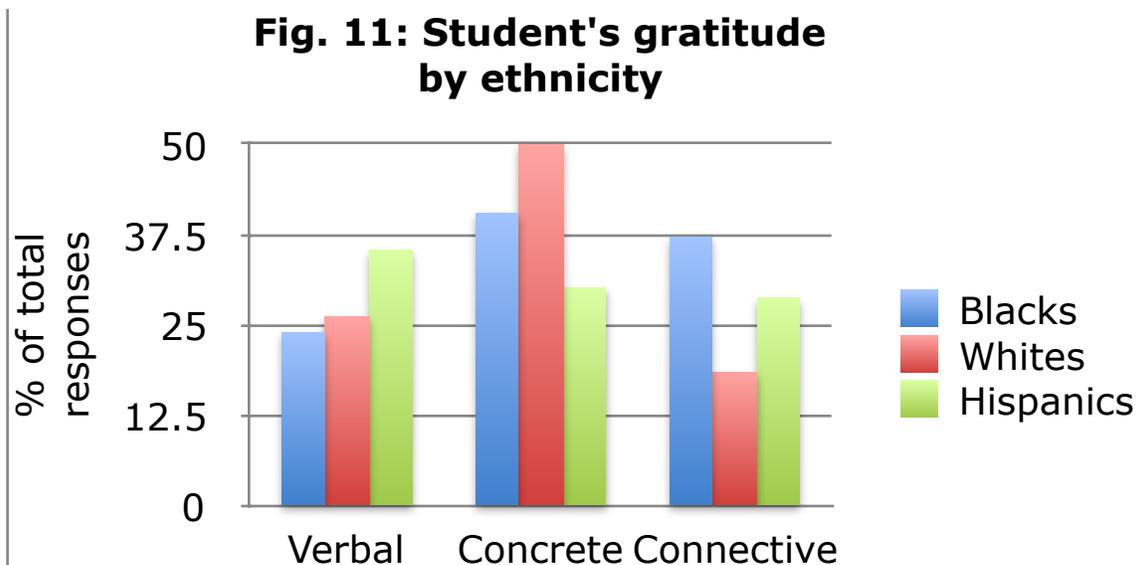


As you can see, younger students' were more likely to respond to their wish being granted by expressing concrete gratitude. Older students, however, were more likely to express either verbal gratitude or connective gratitude. We don't know why 11-year-olds were least likely to express verbal gratitude whereas 12-year-olds were most likely to do that.

As before, we were also interested in seeing **whether boys and girls expressed gratitude differently** (see Figure 10), and **whether differences were also found by ethnic group** (see Figure 11).



Girls were slightly more likely than were boys to express verbal gratitude, whereas boys were a little more likely to express concrete gratitude, but these differences are so small that we can say that they are not meaningful.



Both Black and White students were more likely to express concrete gratitude than either verbal or connective gratitude, whereas the percentages for Hispanic students were fairly evenly distributed across the three types of gratitude. Black students were more likely than the other two groups to express connective gratitude, but, as we mentioned before, they were slightly older, on average (10.69 years) than were the White (8.41 years) and Hispanic (9.66 years) students. We already saw that older students were more likely to express connective gratitude than were younger students.

Finally, if you remember, we were interested in knowing whether there's any relation between the students' written responses to these two questions ("What is your greatest wish?" and "What would you do for the person who granted you that wish?") and their responses to some questionnaires that the students completed a little later.

The results, so far, are interesting. Students who were more likely to wish for things such as toys, money, cars, and so on (materialist wishes) and students who expressed concrete gratitude were more likely to respond on the materialism questionnaire that they would like to have a big house when they grew up, to have a job that paid them a lot, and so on. By contrast, those students who wished for the well-being of others (social wishes) were less likely to think that a big house, etc., was important. The students who expressed social wishes were also more likely to say that they would give money to the poor after having received an "imaginary windfall."

The future

We're continuing to collect information from students in other schools, and so this is only a preliminary report. The percentages of children responding to these questions will almost certainly change, and so we'll have updated reports on this web site as soon as we've collected and analysed more data.

We also will have reports on other information that the students and their parents provided. If we have an email address for you, we'll be happy to alert you as to when more information has been posted. Please send a message to either Jonathan Tudge (jrtudge@uncg.edu) or Lia O'Brien (ltobrien@uncg.edu) if you'd like to get these alerts, available on our web site <http://morethankthanks.wp.uncg.edu/>.

If you have any questions, please write to us!