

**Tool 2.1**

Inner Climate Journaling

CLARITY Competence Area:

Nurturing connection to oneself, others and nature

GreenComp Competence Area:

Embracing Complexity in Sustainability

Why use this tool?

Journaling on our inner climates or on the gratitude we experience helps open up to the emotions we feel, keep track of our health and wellbeing, reflect on relationships to ourselves, others and nature, and enhances our tolerance to experiencing multiple emotions, sometimes simultaneously. Even trying these exercises once can be a valuable experience for learners to connect with their inner worlds. The pupils who go on to establish a habit of journaling focusing on their feelings and emotions can experience emotional release and are gathering material to identify patterns or triggers that cause stress or are activated in times of stress. Gratitude journaling has been proven to reduce stress in times of uncertainty. Students who practice journalling will have an invaluable resource to draw on in times of crisis.

Activity 2.1.2

Gratitude journal

Overview

Gratitude journalling both regulates the sympathetic nervous system that activates our anxiety responses at the neurobiological level, and conditions the brain towards more positive thoughts at the psychological level. Therefore, exploring positive emotions such as gratitude can contribute to your personal resilience as it serves as a resource in times of stress. Journaling also contributes to opening up an inner conversation regarding new ways of living that would feel more fulfilling. Lastly, expressing feelings of gratitude supports human cooperation.

Curriculum linkage

Language & Literature and Physical Education & Health.

Competences built

Empathy, presence, self-reflection, compassion and authenticity.

Prep Work

Prepare by having a short brainstorm by yourself and writing down some examples of what you are grateful for. You can share some of these examples in the introduction so as to support learners during the exercise. Also make sure all learners have access to a journal – it could be a digital journal on a computer, or a regular journal or book.



BASIC INFO

Age range:

Any

Duration:

Max 10 minutes a day

Group size:

Individual task

Level of difficulty:

Basic to intermediate

Materials/space required:

Personal journals and pens for each student; or digital space for private journals

Location:

Flexible

Engagement of external stakeholders:

None



Competences/activities to practice first by the teacher:

None.

Levels in the activity

1. Try out in class
2. New habits
3. Follow-up

Level 1: Try out in class

1. Invite the learners to take two deep breaths and gently shake their shoulders.
2. Invite the learners to have a small brainstorm by themselves to consider the big or small things they are grateful for. A possibility is to list some of their responses on a black/white board for other learners to see.
3. Then, in their journal, have them list some little moments, meaningful gestures, small wins, and beautiful objects in their life that they are genuinely grateful for. Nothing is too small or too big to be included. For example: the warmth of a cup in their hand, the person who greeted them when getting to school today, the tree outside their window...You may need to remind learners to show gratitude for themselves as well.



Student writing in their journal while spending time in nature.

Photo by Carmelo Zamora, REAL School Budapest.

Level 2: New habits

Let the learners repeat this exercise several days a week, for a month. If you teach a class where you do this exercise only once a week, we suggest continuing for 2-3 months.

As they build this new habit, each learner's list will grow. Looking back at how much one has been grateful for is an important experience in itself.

Level 3: Follow-up

Have a discussion on how learners experienced the exercise and whether they would consider continuing this journalling exercise moving forward.

You can also encourage them to write a note to someone to express their gratitude.





Dos and don'ts

Do:

Regarding Step 2 of the first level, sometimes learners might come up with NOTHING! If so, you might find it appropriate to invite them to brainstorm in groups or to start the exercise with the whole group openly brainstorming together. This is also a way to adapt the exercise for younger learners: having an open brainstorm and writing down their ideas on the board or on a large sheet of paper can help younger learners choose their own topics and start journaling.

Don't:

- Don't pressure participants to share what they've written down about what they're grateful for.
- Don't judge their responses.

Adaptations:

Feel free to adapt the activity by inviting your learners to draw instead of write, if that suits them better. To support neurodivergent learners or those who may not be used to expressing their feelings – or find it difficult to recognize them – you can also use pictures, symbols, or emojis to help them engage more comfortably. When adapting tools and activities for neurodivergent learners, please note it is not about treating others how *you* want to be treated, but how *they* want to be treated. Ask, listen, and stay open to different ways of learning and engaging.

This activity can also be undertaken at home together with parents to create a space for sharing, common understanding and gratitude for everyday life.

References

Gratitude journaling exists in many forms and has been widely practiced in different settings. This version of the activity was designed by Legacy17 for the CLARITY project, drawing on a rich tradition of approaches already in use. We acknowledge and appreciate the many variations available and do not claim to have invented the practice.

For additional references and resources, please explore these links:

- Find out more about the gratitude journal at the Greater Good in Education, a free resource hub for educators from UC Berkeley's Greater Good Science Center:
<https://ggie.berkeley.edu/student-well-being/gratitude-for-students/>
- More on using gratitude journaling with parents:



- Toprak, B., & Sari, T. (2023). The effects of a 2-week gratitude journaling intervention to reduce parental stress and enhance well-being: a pilot study among preschool parents. *Discover Psychology*, 3(1). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s44202-023-00099-x>
- The cognitive benefits and support from that journaling activity contributes to a more positive cognitive style that can be a way to reduce stress:
 - Fekete, E. M., & Deichert, N. T. (2022). A brief gratitude writing intervention decreased stress and negative affect during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 23(6), 2427–2448. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-022-00505-6>

For print if needed

An example of a Gratitude Journal list.

I am grateful for...	I am grateful to...

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