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## Volunteering within Initial Teacher Education: Factors that Boost and Block Participation

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## **Volunteering within Initial Teacher Education: Factors that Boost and Block Participation**

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*Abstract: Voluntary professional experience can be a powerful way for initial teacher education (ITE) students to develop an understanding of schools and their communities. Do ITE students make use of these opportunities? There is little Australian research that explores genuine volunteering that does not “require” students to engage with the community. We conducted an on-line survey with 141 ITE students who were eligible to participate in a volunteer program. What factors reduced volunteering and what factors enhanced it? The results showed that, while students value volunteering and can point to benefits that come from it, most are unable or unwilling to participate. What factors differentiate those students who do volunteer despite the demands of complex, busy lives?*

### **Introduction**

A powerful narrative in teacher education is to give pre-service teachers more time in the classroom. However, some have argued that it is wider community engagement, rather than time in classrooms, that enables pre-service teachers to work more effectively within the school communities in which their future working lives will be situated (Salter, Hill, Navin, & Knight, 2013). Pre-service teachers are learning not only how to teach but also how to *be* teachers (Cornu & Ewing, 2008, cited in Salter et al., 2013).

There is limited evaluation of university-community engagement (Le Clus, 2012) and a need for a more systematic consideration of the purpose, models, and impact of such engagement (Bernardo, Butcher, & Howard, 2012; Caspersz, Olaru, & Smith, 2012). Community engagement in higher education includes teaching and learning, partnerships with educational providers, and participation of tertiary students (Winter, Wiseman & Muirhead, 2008, cited in Bernardo et al., 2012), and is “framed by mutuality of outcomes, goals, trust and respect” (ibid, p.189). Professional experience programs within initial teacher education (ITE) are avenues for engagement between universities and community organisations, including schools and learning centres.

Australian researchers tend to focus on the value of service learning, particularly in professional or vocationally-oriented degrees (Carrington, 2008; Chambers & Lavery, 2012; Hackett, 2010; Parker, 2009; Pavitt, 2010). Evidence suggests that community-based service learning can assist ITE students preparing for professional experience (Coffey & Lavery, 2015). The impact of service learning is well established in the American context given its capacity to blend academic outcomes with community service (Williams Howe, Coleman, Hamshaw & Westdijk, 2014). Case studies providing non-Western analyses of service-

learning also are emerging (Bernardo et al., 2012, Shalabi, 2013). However, there is little research analysing *voluntary* participation in community-generated, professional experience placements.

Service learning models require students to engage with the community and provide elective or core courses with academic credit towards the degree. As such, enrolled students have little choice but to get involved. But if academic credits, course requirements, and other incentives do *not* exist, what factors make pre-service teachers volunteer within their community? How might teacher educators promote and enhance voluntary participation?

Teach Outreach is based on a concept of mutual or reciprocal benefit, where ITE students volunteer in broad community-initiated educational placements as an addition to the professional experience component of their program. The number of students volunteering is predictably low even though the potential benefits are high. Given the value of volunteering, we conducted a research project to explore the factors that reduce and enhance participation in Teach Outreach. Our study was guided by the following questions:

1. How is *mutual benefit volunteering* understood by ITE students who have, or have not, taken part in it?
2. Is *mutual benefit volunteering* valued by ITE students?
3. What are the ‘boosters’ and ‘blockers’ for participation in *mutual benefit volunteering*?

To answer these questions we conducted a survey involving 141 teacher education students at the University of Newcastle. Some of the results surprised us. Factors we expected would block participation did not emerge as significant. In addition to quantitative data, we used thematic analyses of open-ended responses to deepen our understanding of blockers noted by potential volunteers.

The first part of our article reviews the literature on volunteering within ITE, with particular attention paid to the Australian context. We examine volunteering within universities and, perhaps unintentionally, how this volunteering can position students as a means to other ends. We then describe the Teach Outreach program, the study design, survey results, and finally discuss the implications for volunteering in ITE.

## **Literature Review: Stakeholders in Volunteering and Professional Experience in Initial Teacher Education**

Standard professional experience in early childhood, primary and secondary ITE occurs largely in school-based or centre-based settings. Pre-service teachers are assessed by their supervisors according to the Australian Professional Standards for Teaching (note relevant focus areas described in the Graduate Career Stage (AITSL, 2011)). These experiences are fundamental for professional accreditation. However, Salter, Hill, Navin and Knight argue that wider professional experiences “are crucial in developing future teachers who are cognisant of and engaged with the complexities of the communities in which they teach” (p.81, 2013), including engagement and reflection on professional practice, student diversity, and moral and social issues. Wider professional experience is valued in the majority of teacher education institutions. In addition, there should be ‘purposeful frameworks of structured reflection’ to enrich these experiences (Salter et al., 2013).

Wider professional experiences include (but are not limited to) teaching experience in community settings, for example, tutoring in adult learning, migrant education, youth camps, sports coaching, museums, galleries, homework centres, disability services programs, and

working with students in schools. If Salter et al.'s (2013) arguments are justified, then there are good reasons to provide pre-service teachers with opportunities to engage with broad-based educational activities in a variety of communities. Traditional credited professional experience in pre-service teacher education could be broadened and enhanced by programs that go beyond classrooms.

Like credited professional experience, voluntary professional experience is complex, with a range of stakeholders involved. Volunteering itself is considered a valuable activity for multiple reasons from a variety of viewpoints including individuals, family groups, not-for-profit community groups, economists, psychologists, sociologists, health professionals, and government bodies. It can contribute to community building and social capital (Stukas, Daly, & Cowling, 2005), although the factors explaining how it does so remain under-theorised (Stern & Fullerton, 2009). It can be a pathway for the unemployed to develop skills for employment (DEC, 2012). Voluntary action can support those in need of services, providing for marginalized social groups (Haski-Leventhal, Ronel, York, & Ben-David, 2008). It can be individually satisfying, giving the volunteer a sense of personal meaning and enhanced health and wellbeing (Haski-Leventhal, 2009). Further, it has been understood as a reaction to neoliberal urban politics (Rosol, 2012).

It is insufficient to characterize volunteering from one of these perspectives alone. We point to the growing literature attempting to capture the complexity of voluntary behavior. Researchers are building 'hybrid' models to explain volunteering (Hustinx, Cnaan, & Handy, 2010), and conducting phenomenological work to gain holistic insights about volunteering (Yeung, 2004). Measurement matrices have been postulated to account for its diversity and to broaden definitions of voluntary activity (Petriwskyj & Warburton, 2007).

In higher education, community-university engagement is seen as a means to enhance the reputation of the institution as a responsible member of the local community. The QS Ranking Scale (Quacquarelli Symonds Limited, 2015) is commonly used by universities as a measure of international success in various fields. It includes a criterion for Social Responsibility that indicates 'Engagement with local communities.' University-funded community engagement tries to harness the energies of tertiary students (Esmond, 2000). Volunteering students are told they can differentiate themselves from their peers by getting something 'extra' to add to their curriculum vitae. With these issues in mind, we raise questions about the purposes of voluntary, community-based professional experience for pre-service teachers. What are the boosters and blockers of participation? Is it worth the effort?

Research indicates there are barriers to 'volunteerability' – people's capacity to take part in voluntary activities. These barriers include willingness, capability, and availability. Organisations can recruit more volunteers by improving accessibility, resources, networks, and cooperation (Haski-Leventhal, Meijs, & Hustinx, 2009). The literature points to combinations of factors that predict low levels of volunteering. For example, a survey of young Australians revealed that youth, lower education level, and poor access to networking and mentoring were linked to a lower rate of engagement in social-cause services (Webber, 2011).

Wilson and Spoehr (2009) pointed to age, class, ethnicity, and gender as factors impacting on civic participation and volunteerism. There is a relationship between location and civic participation, with residents of wealthier suburbs more likely to be older and to volunteer for organizations than resident of poorer suburbs. Residents of lower income towns are more likely to have undertaken neighbourly activities such as lending goods or providing child care rather than volunteering in a more formal sense (Wilson & Spoer, 2009).

In other studies, volunteers cited health and time commitments as factors affecting volunteering (Wolcott, Ingwersen, Weston, & Tzaros, 2008). Demands by employers and caring responsibilities can reduce volunteering, as revealed by Volunteering Australia

(Mitchell, 2006). On the other hand, intrinsic rewards, altruism, a sense of community, along with the development of skills for future work were identified as motivating factors for volunteers in emergency services (Wallace & Baxter-Tomkins, 2006).

Professional experience in ITE can serve a range of purposes – economic, social, moral, and educational. It has been argued that the profession requires critical, intelligent practice that accommodates contextual and individual differences and enables ITE students to become good teachers in the fullest sense of the term (Connell, 2009; Mockler, 2013). Participation in voluntary community-based educational activities can complement the aims of ITE. Teach Outreach is a sustainable university-based program of voluntary participation. It is flexible, cost-effective, and responsive to the needs of both ITE students and community groups, but it is not without its limitations.

### **The Teach Outreach Program**

Teach Outreach provides a brokerage for community groups to gather volunteers for projects of an educational kind from the teacher education student population across three NSW areas: the Central Coast, greater Newcastle, and Taree/Port Macquarie. Since its inception in 2009, Teach Outreach has been steadily growing. So far, the program has involved approximately 1000 teacher education students who have volunteered with hundreds of community organisations and schools for an unknown number of student recipients. Each year up to 200 ITE students from undergraduate and post-graduate degrees in Early Childhood, Primary, and Secondary teacher education programs participate. Of eligible ITE students, averaging 4000 each year, up to 4.95% volunteer with Teach Outreach.

Teach Outreach seeks and accepts opportunities from the local community. The volunteers are not remunerated financially either in terms of the costs of travel or time. Participation in Teach Outreach must involve the volunteer in some aspect of the professional role of teaching. The volunteering opportunity is formalised in the sense that it occurs in a supervised public space, at an arranged time, and in an agreement with the coordinator of the activity. Pre-service teachers must demonstrate that they undertook the activity, using a signed Completion form from their supervisor. Organisations that approach Teach Outreach for volunteers are required to provide support for pre-service teacher volunteers to help them develop their confidence in professional skills and dispositions for teaching.

At any time Teach Outreach has between 60 – 80 community partners, most of whom return each year and others who join Teach Outreach for the first time. Annually, they request support for over 100 different types of activities with positions available for over 850 volunteers. Most community partners are from the government school sector (over 60% on average), but each year, approximately 15% not-for-profit organisations are involved. Some community partners request volunteers for more than one activity. On average, about 70% of volunteer opportunities are for primary aged children, 23% for secondary school children, and 5% for early childhood age groups, with adult learning (for example, teaching refugees conversational English) a marginal 2%. The educational communities have many unmet requests for assistance. Approximately 30% of advertised volunteering opportunities are taken up each year, sometimes a single ITE student takes more than one opportunity.

Activities available to Teach Outreach volunteers must meet criteria that include the provision of a supportive, safe, supervised environment in which educationally valuable activities take place. These activities are approved on the basis of their expected benefit for extending the professional learning of volunteers, and their low level of risk. The nature of these activities varies enormously. For example, ITE teachers can help in homework clubs, for not-for-profit groups and in libraries on a regular and extended basis, and for sports clubs

and schools. Activities include athletics carnivals, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural activities, adjudicating debates, literacy and numeracy support, geography, history or science excursions or projects, leading small group work for disadvantaged children, homework support for the children of non-English speaking refugees, or adolescents who need a mentor and role model, specialized assistance in mathematics, English and senior sciences, creative play with clay, textiles and drama, or providing one-on-one support for children and adolescents with special needs.

The Teach Outreach program differs from service learning (Caspersz et al., 2012) and narrowly-defined work-integrated learning (Rowe, Winchester-Seeto, & Mackaway, 2012) because the volunteers' experience is parallel to, rather than embedded in, their formal program. The experience is not connected to assessment tasks that give credit in ITE and is entirely optional.

## Research Aims

The purpose of the study was to explore why students participated, or did not participate, in Teach Outreach. We assumed that factors limiting free time and personal resources would reduce volunteering. For example, students who act as carers for others might be expected to have lower participation rates than those who were not carers. What were the experiences of students who did volunteer for Teach Outreach? For students who did not volunteer, what reasons did they give for not volunteering? What factors might enhance their likelihood of volunteering?

Human Research Ethics approval was granted under HREC number: H-2012-0313. Participants were recruited through a Teach Outreach mailing list with an email explaining the purpose of the research and that participation is voluntary. An Information Statement was provided via the Blackboard site for Teach Outreach, with a link also available in the invitation email. The anonymous survey was conducted on-line using Survey Monkey. The survey was constructed specifically for this investigation. However, survey items drew on similar surveys conducted into volunteering.

## Method

### Participants

Participants were 141 students enrolled in secondary, primary, or early childhood initial teacher education programs and a small number of postgraduate programs. The response rate represented approximately 3.5% of a total eligible student population of 4044.

The sample was predominantly female (115; 81.6%). Of the 141 participants, 39.0% were aged between 18 and 23; 18.4% aged between 24 and 28; 9.2% aged between 29 and 33; 12.8% aged between 34 and 38; and 20.6% aged 39 or older. Two participants identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

Of the participants, 70 (49.6%) were preparing to teach in primary schools (or in both primary schools and early childhood settings), 44 (31.2%) were preparing to teach in secondary schools, 2 (1.4%) were preparing to teach in early childhood settings, 16 (11.3%) were in Masters programs that were not preparing initial teachers (for example, the Masters of Leadership and Management), and 9 (6.4%) did not respond to the question.

## Data Collection

### *On-line survey - quantitative questions*

In addition to demographic data, participants responded to nine questions that had quantifiable responses.

Question 1 asked if participants had volunteered for Teach Outreach (response option of yes or no). Question 2 asked if participants had volunteered in areas other than Teach Outreach (response option of yes or no). Question 3 asked if participants had carer responsibilities (for example, caring for children or parents) (response option of yes or no). Question 4 asked how often participants worried about living expenses (for example, food, electricity) (response options of rarely, sometimes, often, and constantly). Question 5 asked how often participants worried about education expenses (for example, textbooks and transport) (response options of rarely, sometimes, often, and constantly). Question 6 asked if participants were the first in their family to attend university (response option of yes or no). Question 7 asked if participants were full time or part time students (response option of full time or part time). Question 8 asked if participants were satisfied with their program (response option of yes or no). Question 9 asked how many hours per week participants were in paid employment (participants entered hours of paid employment).

### *On-line Survey - Qualitative Questions*

Participants responded to six open-ended questions.

Question 1 asked participants who volunteered for Teach Outreach to describe their volunteer activity and whether or not they enjoyed it. Question 2 asked participants who volunteered in activities outside Teach Outreach to describe their volunteer activity and whether or not they enjoyed it. Question 3 asked participants to explain what the term *mutual benefit volunteering* meant to them. Question 4 asked participants to indicate what factors would enable them to participate more in volunteer opportunities (for example, more free time, better transport, different types of volunteer activities). Question 5 asked participants to indicate what factors would help them to maintain a longer term commitment to volunteering while they were at university. Question 6 asked participants to indicate what factors prevented or limited their volunteering (for example, caring for others, work commitments, bad experiences with volunteering).

## Data Analysis

### *Chi-square Analyses*

The analyses of the quantitative data used the Chi-square statistic. This statistic analyses the frequencies of nominal data (such as yes/no responses). It compares observed frequencies and expected frequencies. We used this approach because most of our data were nominal. We followed standard procedure to investigate significant results in a Chi-square. The standardised residuals in each cell were inspected to look for the greatest discrepancies between observed frequencies and expected frequencies. For example, with a yes/no response, the “expected” frequencies would be equal numbers of yes responses and no responses. This expected response is compared with “actual” responses where there may be more yes responses or more no responses. Some Chi squares were not computed because of small or no frequencies in some of the cells. The numbers in each analysis varied depending on the number of participants who responded to both questions.

We expected there would be fewer participants with carer responsibilities volunteering in Teach Outreach and we expected that participants who worried a lot about their living expenses would do less volunteering. We were interested to find out if participants who did not volunteer with Teach Outreach volunteered in other ways.

*Analysis of Open-ended Questions*

Qualitative data were gathered from open-ended responses to questions that were provided in the previous section. To enhance reliability, interpretations of responses were conducted independently by two people. Comments were coded by recurrent themes (using NVivo). These included the three factors initially suggested in the survey: time, transport, and diversity of volunteer opportunities. In addition, new themes emerged during analyses which are elaborated in the Results section.

**Results: Quantitative Data**

The seven questions we analysed were *carer responsibilities, full time or part time status, first in family, satisfaction with program, hours per week in paid employment, worry about living expenses, and worry about education expenses*. We conducted the Chi-squares using the following questions: *volunteering/not volunteering for Teach Outreach and volunteering/not volunteering in areas outside Teach Outreach*. The results are presented in Table 1.

The only statistically significant result was for the question “Are you a full time or part time student?” ( $X^2 = 4.20, p. <.05$ ). The standardised residual for the cell of part time students not participating in Teach Outreach (n=22) was -1.5 while the standardised residual for the cell of part time students participating in Teach Outreach (n=5) was 1.10. The residuals for the last two cells (full time students who participated in Teach Outreach [n=39] and full time students who did not participate in Teach Outreach [n=59]) were less than 1.0. The cell with the greatest discrepancy between the expected frequency and the actual frequency was part time students participating in Teach Outreach. That is, fewer part time students than full time students participated in Teach Outreach.

Item	Response categories (nr = no response)	Percentage in each category	Teach Outreach/no Teach Outreach	Volunteering/ no volunteering
			Chi-square X <sup>2</sup>	Chi-square X <sup>2</sup>
<b>Carer responsibilities</b>	Yes	37.6%	0.36	0.05
	No	57.4%	ns	ns
	nr	5.0%		
<b>First in Family</b>	Yes	48.2%	0.66	0.20
	No	48.2%	ns	ns
	nr	3.5%		
<b>Full time/Part time status</b>	Full time	76.6%	4.20	0.35
	Part time	20.6%	p.<.05	ns
	nr	2.8%		
<b>Satisfaction with</b>	Yes	80.9%	0.04	1.98



<b>program</b>	No	11.3%	ns	ns
	nr	7.8%		
<b>Hours in paid employment per week</b>	5 hours or fewer	42.6%	2.59	no Chi Square computed **
	6 to 34 hours	46.1%	ns	
	35 hours or more	7.8%		
	nr	3.5%		
<b>Worry about living expenses</b>	Rarely	18.4%	2.79	no Chi Square computed **
	Sometimes	30.5%	ns	
	Often	29.8%		
	Constantly	17.7%		
	nr	3.5%		
<b>Worry about education expenses</b>	Rarely	29.1%	3.56	No Chi Square computed **
	Sometimes	32.6%	ns	
	Often	19.1%		
	Constantly	16.3%		
	nr	2.8%		

\*\* Chi-square not computed because of small or no frequencies in some cells

**Table 1: Chi-square analyses by Teach Outreach and Volunteering outside Teach Outreach (ns = non significant result)**

To summarise the results, there was no difference between participants who volunteered for Teach Outreach and those who did not on six of the seven questions. The one significant finding was that there were fewer part time students than full time students volunteering for Teach Outreach. There was no difference between participants who reported volunteering outside Teach Outreach and those who did not on the four questions analysed.

We expected there might be more primary ITE students volunteering in Teach Outreach than high school ITE students because more Teach Outreach activities are situated in primary schools. To check this, we conducted a Chi-square comparing volunteering for “primary” participants (n=70) and “high school” (n=44) participants. There was no difference in the extent of volunteering between these two groups.

These results reported in Table 1 were somewhat unexpected. For example, we had expected that participants working in paid jobs for long hours would be less likely to volunteer for Teach Outreach. Similarly, students who were worried about living expenses might be expected to take on additional paid work rather than volunteer. These findings did not emerge. We then examined the open-ended responses in the survey to look for factors that may explain why some students volunteered for Teach Outreach while others do not.

### Results: Qualitative Data

During analysis of the qualitative data, the three factors initially suggested as ‘blockers’ to volunteering (time, transport, and diversity of volunteer opportunities) were extended to include another eight ‘blocker’ factors which are discussed below, as well as ‘boosters’ such as flexibility, opportunity to take the initiative, significant community connection, personal rewards, and shared stories. It was also important to clarify participants’ understanding of *mutual benefit volunteering* to ascertain their expectations of the program. Several themes emerged about participants’ perceptions of mutual benefit.

Some quotes from the surveys are included to give a sense of participants’ responses. The quotes are categorized three ways: whether the participant was a Teach Outreach

volunteer (T-O yes) or a Teach Outreach non-volunteer (T-O no), male or female, in a primary program or in a secondary program. Each quote comes from a separate participant, that is, no participant has more than one quote included in this article.

### Understanding Mutual Benefit Volunteering

Participants responded to the question: *What does mutual benefit volunteering mean to you?* There was an 85.6% response rate.

Participant comments reflected two broad categories of 'benefit,' the personal and the public. Public benefits included enhancing learning for students and providing teaching staff with support. Often these benefits were recognized simultaneously. A number of subcategories of personal benefits emerged: tangible benefits (for example, additions to one's CV and professional network connections), performance (for example, skills and knowledge), and affective benefits (for example, confidence and satisfaction). When asked the meaning of mutual benefit volunteering, participants explained the concept of giving (for example, time) to others in order to receive personal benefits. Participants valued the opportunity to relate their university studies to the real world, to put theory into practice. Some examples of responses are provided here.

*The student supplies their time and skills to those in need of them, at the same time growing in both mastery and confidence due to the practical application of both.* (T-O no, male, secondary)

Responses indicate that ITE teachers identify a variety of benefits from the program. Participants also referred to the acknowledgement of volunteering on their resume.

Pre-service teachers note that their services are valued by the community:

*Win- Win - Win. Schools benefit by extra hands on deck, students benefit by extra adults committed to their learning, volunteer benefits by exposure to more classroom experience, increase observational opportunities of cooperating teachers and recognition for contribution.* (T-O yes, female, secondary)

Participants hope to provide the community (often school children) with something of value to them, at the same time recognising that giving this activity was itself personally rewarding. This fits with the work on altruism (Piliavin et al., 1990).

*Giving something back to the community which helps not only them, but you feel a sense of satisfaction within yourself.* (T-O no, female, secondary)

More complex interpretations of the mutual benefit relationship were those citing various stakeholders, the form of benefit received by them, and the nature of volunteering itself. A Teach Outreach volunteer describes her experience:

*I am gaining the support and experience from the school to become a better teacher and help put the skills and knowledge learnt at uni into practice, and the school is gaining extra support to help children reach desired outcomes.* (T-O yes, female, primary)

A non-volunteer explains that:

*Mutual benefit volunteering would be the articulated measure of benefit acknowledged by both parties. The client or beneficiary receives time devoted by the volunteer to attend a task or activity that will assist the beneficiary and the volunteer learns valuable skills in empathy, communication, and furthermore learns the importance of non-judgemental support. It demonstrates that volunteering is not altruistic but a shared experience. (T-O no, female, secondary)*

Participants indicated that they valued the networks and connections. Organisations were benefiting from trialling a potential new employer, in one participant's words, "*a possible new employee.*" Participants showed that they understood that while they gained, they also were providing something to the community, for example, "*fresh ideas*" and "*enthusiasm*" and enabling cost-effective learning support.

In sum, the concept of mutual benefit volunteering is understood by most participants, although there was a minority for whom the concept was confusing. Pre-service teachers do not need to take part in Teach Outreach to understand the potential benefits of volunteering. An awareness of the ways the program may make them feel rewarded (make a contribution, enhance theory-practice understanding, gain confidence, make connections with potential employers, and boost CVs) does not appear to be the catalyst for participation in Teach Outreach. The next section clarifies participants' perceptions about what reduces voluntary participation.

### **Blockers to Participation**

Participants responded to the question: "What factors prevent or limit your participation in Teach Outreach?" That was a 78.0% response rate.

We collated 11 types of blockers and allocated them to themes: *limitations*; *expectations*; and *other*. The majority of blockers could be described as a perceived insufficiency, deficit, or lack of some kind. Blockers included the following: lack of free time; lack of online access to course material/lectures; insufficient high school/early childhood opportunities; and problems with transport availability or cost. Participants also noted unmet expectations, for example, expectations about the convenience of the opportunity's location, duration, or timing. Participants considered the impact of volunteering on their employment. They prioritized study, work, or family commitments. They considered potential problems with short term or one-off opportunities. They did not want to go through the administrative procedures to arrange a Teach Outreach placement. They expected financial benefits from participating and they expected formal (degree) credit.

There were also participants who described personal stress or unique circumstances (the "other" category). Time constraints are a major obstacle. Finding the right match in a volunteering opportunity also appears to be crucial, both in terms of location and focus.

Whether participants volunteered for Teach Outreach or not, the most prevalent blockers were on-going commitments: responsibilities as a carer and other family commitments, study, and work commitments. These were usually cited as a deficit in time. Transport limitations were often cited, particularly the lack of convenient or direct public transport. The main blockers were study and work commitments.

In other cases, the blocker may not be overwhelming, but the potential volunteer has an expectation about what involvement ought to bring him or her. The blocker works in conjunction with a sense of entitlement to a benefit (such as credit within the ITE program). Participants' major blockers are day-to-day pressures:

*When School is on, Uni is on. There is not much you can do when you have compulsory lectures and tutorials to attend which clash with the times offered through Teach Outreach. I have to work when I'm not at uni or doing assignments. (T-O no, female, primary)*

*I'm so flat out trying to complete my studies. I barely get time to get changed out of my pajamas some days! After my thesis is submitted though, I will consider doing some volunteering, as I will have a lot more spare time on my hands. (T-O no, female, secondary)*

*Transport and university hours. I have not been able to limit my hours down to allow for more volunteering. (T-O yes, female, primary)*

*I have little free time, what free time I have is allocated to caring and what other time I have I am pressured to work for a living. Under severe financial pressure to support myself without government benefits and with life commitments which require greater time, I'm unable to justify spending my time in this way at this time. I feel concerned that I've had to develop this mindset, and I am a bit embarrassed to say that I don't really want to work for free. I guess, the benefits I most need from situations are financial and allow me greater freedom. The idea that I could use it to develop skills and strategies hasn't really been at the forefront of my mind. (T-O no, female, secondary)*

Whether they volunteered or no, participants pointed to the juggling act among studying, working, and family. They were concerned about burning out, feeling they were over-assessed in courses, concerns about cost of living, and about the risks of letting down a community partner when the strain becomes too much to continue. There was frustration that these and related circumstances, such as university timetabling, prevent involvement in Teach Outreach. In the following example, there also is guilt about not volunteering:

*Teach Outreach volunteering, although a positive system, actually added to the pressure of university for me. Because I wasn't volunteering due to other commitments and juggling work and study, I felt guilty about not volunteering - and I had a weekly email to remind me just how incompetent I was (because I was not pushing myself to volunteer in my already full schedule). Just like the modern 'super mom' I felt the pressure to be a 'super student teacher' because of the ever-present existence of Teach Outreach. ... [It would help] If courses were designed to fall on two days only (long days are preferred to four or five days of spread out courses)... [and if] hours of volunteering fall in the afternoon/evening. (T-O no, female, secondary)*

These responses are insights into the pressures on pre-service teachers. There is frustration about feeling overloaded but this does not diminish their recognition that volunteering is worthwhile.

### **Boosters to Volunteer Participation**

In this section, we examined participants' responses to two questions: *What factors might enable you to participate more in volunteer opportunities? What factors would help*

*you to maintain a longer term commitment to volunteering whilst you are a student at university?* The response rate for the first question was 78.7% and for the second question was 67.4%. The lower response rate for the second question probably could be attributed to similarity between the two questions.

Factors such as improved employment prospects, the enjoyment and challenge of hands-on experience, and flexible, convenient arrangements boosted participation in Teach Outreach. Volunteers and non-volunteers wrote about the way they expect it to help them to “understand the inner workings of a school” and “better prepare myself for my practicals.” Those who had volunteered wrote about their contribution to the community, to their own learning, and pleasure in becoming a teacher.

*There are many Teach Outreach opportunities for a variety of volunteering experiences and for varying lengths of time and often with flexibility. It is fantastic not being compulsory as you can do it when it suits you, and those of us who were planning on volunteering before we found out about it get a bit of a "reward" with the certificate at the end, as opposed to people doing it and getting recognition for something they wouldn't enjoy doing... I have done a variety of things such as reading groups, individual reading and learning to read with intellectual disabilities, lunch time duty, cooking with intellectual disabilities and there are other experiences lined up for this semester including swimming. (T-O yes, female, primary)*

Some volunteers felt they had become a significant part of the community.

*I have already made a commitment to one school for two years now. I was invited to take part in the school photographs this year. I have become known in the school community to staff, students and parents... Volunteering is part of our Australian culture. It is nice to know that there are some things that cannot be measured in dollar terms. It has been beneficial to me as I had my first experience in a classroom while on Teach Outreach. It would be nice if this experience can be recognised more than just a certificate issued by the University. (T-O yes, male, primary)<sup>1</sup>*

Participants were asked what might increase rates of volunteering in Teach Outreach. Some wanted to hear more personal stories of volunteering, suggesting that this would “*make it real.*” Others indicated that longer days at university would free up other days for volunteering. Others wanted financial incentives such as greater resources allocated to Teach Outreach for use by volunteers. A few suggested granting credit for particular components of ITE programs. Similarly, others suggested it should be a compulsory part of the program.

In sum, participants indicated there should be more material incentives to mitigate the burdens of volunteering or there should be changes to the structure of ITE programs. On the other hand, some participants wrote that there was a special commitment required for volunteering, that making Teach Outreach a compulsory component of the degree “*would attract the wrong crowd.*” This indicates the perception that those who take up volunteering are more motivated and more dedicated to teaching than other students. However, our data show that there are pre-service teachers who describe themselves as dedicated and hard-working but unable to volunteer despite a strong desire to do so.

Further research using interviews could explore in more detail individual differences in choices, goals, circumstances, and motivation to take up voluntary professional experiences.

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<sup>1</sup> Authors' Note: Teach Outreach participants receive an annual certificate and formal recognition of involvement on their AHEGS (Australian Higher Education Graduate Statement) on graduation, and a single student may also be nominated annually to receive the University's Margaret Jurd Award for exceptional Community Service.

## Conclusion

The Teach Outreach concept hinges on the idea of individual choice. There are many factors that prevent volunteering. This study explored the nature of blockers and boosters to volunteering. The expected differences between volunteers and non-volunteers did not emerge in the quantitative analyses: survey participants who did not volunteer did not have greater carer responsibilities; they were not first in family to go to university (a quasi-measure of SES); they were not financially insecure in terms of living expenses or educational expenses (quasi-measures of SES); they were not working long hours in paid employment; and they were not dissatisfied with their ITE program. One significant finding was that part-time students were less likely to volunteer for Teach Outreach than full-time students.

The qualitative analyses pointed to factors that affect volunteering. The main reason for not volunteering was lack of time because of university, work, or family commitments. This finding supports previous research (Mitchell, 2006). However, many participants who did not volunteer for Teach Outreach indicated that they did volunteer in other ways. There were only 24 participants out of a total of 141 who indicated that they did no form of volunteering. As such, we cannot conclude that university students are not altruistic. Individual differences in personal dispositions, social networks, interests, or family history of volunteering are factors that warrant further investigation in our understanding of who volunteers and who does not.

Of the 44 participants who volunteered for Teach Outreach, 30 of them (68%) also indicated that they volunteered outside Teach Outreach. This is a notable percentage. These participants appear predisposed to volunteering even with demanding lives that one might expect would act as a barrier to volunteering. Perhaps they grew up in households where volunteering was the norm. Perhaps they are well organised people who accomplish a lot in a day. Future studies should examine the behaviour and attitudes of students who volunteer even though they have complex, demanding lives. The role altruism plays in voluntary behaviour cannot be underestimated (Piliavin & Charng, 1990).

The concept of reciprocal benefit used in Teach Outreach assumes an economic investment model. Participants are expected to gain skills and training which enhance their human capital (Hustnix et al., 2010). Benefits include greater confidence, practice with teaching skills, and access to new networks. Professional experience is seen as a way to address the theory-practice divide (Southgate et al., 2014). Participants who had volunteered with Teach Outreach indicated that they benefited from their experience.

Whilst there is no financial remuneration for volunteers, or cost for registering a request for volunteers, Teach Outreach is not a zero cost program even if it is inexpensive. The University shoulders the costs of brokering the partnerships. This includes costs of program evaluation, consultation, risk management, administration, promotion, recruitment, and the provision of materials such as a virtual environment providing spaces to link community partners with potential volunteers. Low levels of volunteering in Teach Outreach initially prompted our investigation. One of the University's goals is a high level of community engagement and it wants to generate local goodwill with the success of Teach Outreach. The desire to be seen as good community members impels similar ventures by other Australian universities.

Our study considered the multiple meanings and value of a type of voluntary professional experience based in the idea of reciprocal benefit. This type of volunteering challenges the notion of giving without expecting something in return, an attitude traditionally valued in volunteering. We found that participants understood the potential benefits of Teach Outreach, but the majority wanted material benefits to mitigate what they

saw as the cost to their time and effort. Of those who volunteer with Teach Outreach, once commitments are formed between volunteer and community, most volunteers are proud of their contribution and are keen to sustain participation over time.

In our view, the goal of teacher education should not be to create 'carbon copies' of best practice (Mockler, 2013, p.45). Rather, teacher education should help pre-service teachers to contribute intelligently to what it means to be a good teacher in particular contexts and for particular students (Connell, 2009). Students in ITE programs can be part of engagement activities that universities offer to their communities (Bernado et al., 2012). Improving student participation in community volunteer experiences is important because universities have untapped volunteering potential (Esmond, 2000).

A well-structured volunteer program can make a difference to local communities and to students' own learning (Williams Howe, 2014). Some discourses position pre-service teachers in unexpected ways, for example, as a means to enhance the reputation of the university as a responsible member of the community. A small number of pre-service teachers volunteer in Teach Outreach in spite of already complex and busy lives. Many others do not volunteer even though they have a commitment to teaching and a belief in the value of the Teach Outreach program.

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