



THE GRACEFUL TEACHER: THE CHOICE OF VOLUNTEERING

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Abstract: During the 2022 and 2023 school year, a group of eight college professors, 67 university education students, 27 primary school teachers and principals, and 200 primary school students participated together in a project titled, The Caravan of Friendship and Games. During the year, students suggested that they should also work with the elderly. Consequently, the project team added visitation to facilities for the elderly which included 240 elderly people. From the analysis of the survey data, the professor team realized that volunteering was not only beneficial to young students and the elderly people, but the data also revealed that the volunteers (university professors, university students, primary school teachers and principals) benefited from their efforts in the project. Showing once again that when people volunteer, they enter into a reciprocal beneficiary relationship—that one might call the ultimate win-win situation.

Key words: volunteerism, benefits of being graceful, transcendence, co-curricular activities

1. Introduction

According to Gazibar and Giuglea (2018) education results in urban and rural areas show that rural areas continue to struggle and in some cases the gap between urban and rural schools are widening. In their report, *Inequalities in Romania Despite Recent Improvements in Romania. Poverty and Income Inequality Remain High, and Regional Disparities Are Deepening*, the report made the following recommendations connected to children and schools:

- Improve access to quality mainstream education, especially for Roma and children in rural areas.
- Increase the efficiency and effectiveness of social transfers, particularly for children, and continue social assistance reform.
- Ensure stronger commitment to cooperation and multi-stakeholder partnerships, especially at grassroots level.
- The "Leave no one behind" principle should identify and address the causes of vulnerabilities and inequalities and promote respect for human rights. (p. 4)

The report also indicated the following discrepancies between urban and rural schools:

- The difference between the results of the children from urban and rural at national tests is confirmed by the results on the national tests in 2017. 35, 3 % of the 8th grade pupils from rural areas obtained low results, compared to 14 % in urban schools. Only 68, 3% from pupils in rural areas passed the Baccalaureate exam, compared to 83, 5% in urban areas. (p. 10)

Students, parents, and teachers in rural areas need more help. If we are serious about reaching all children so they will be successful in school. If we maintain the status quo, then we will just continue the seemingly never-ending cycle of continues poverty for our rural children and their families.

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To attempt to do our part to help, our university participants developed two main purposes for our project. The first purpose was to form partnerships with schools in villages that had a significant number of students from underprivileged households. In these partnerships our goal was to give students opportunities to participate in co-curricular activities not usually accessible in their community schools. The second purpose was to engage our university students with teachers and students from these community schools in order to help our university students understand how rewarding working in smaller and lower socioeconomic communities can be. We believed that the interactions among teachers, principals, future teachers, and university professors would develop into professional connections that will last beyond this specific project.

The university professors and their students developed this project, The Caravan of Games and Joy, to offer fun and active co-curricular activities to motivate the young students to enjoy school even more than they normally do. The professors also wanted to dispel any apprehensions our future teachers might have when they anticipate their future careers, so they see working in these villages will be an exciting and fulfilling opportunity.

The activities in this project took place from 2020 to 2023 (and will continue into the 2023–2024 school year). University students were divided into teams to work together with their young students. The university students, with the assistance of the university professors, developed games and active fun activities for the students. The university students organized and developed lesson plans for each activity. Each university professor gave students feedback and suggestions in their areas of expertise (e.g., music, movement, literature, didactics). For each semester the university students and their professors met to develop the theme for the semester (e.g., courage, kindness, being grateful), and the university students developed their activities to connect with the chosen themes. The professors worked with the students to have their activities move beyond normal schoolwork to create co-curricular activities based first on action and fun and the theme of the term and second, on ideas connected to social and emotional learning.

As the project developed, university students suggested that it would be great for the group to also reach out to students who live in orphanages and to elderly people who live in institutions. After a group meeting, the participants decided to include the two new groups in the project. For the students who lived in an orphanage, the university students developed the same kinds of co-curricular activities as they did for the public-school students. For the elderly people, the students and their professors brought in gifts, visited, and socialized with their new friends. Just prior to the Christmas/winter break a group of students suggested singing Christmas carols, and a group of students and professors sang at a local cathedral, a local church, and the local prison.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Volunteerism

Volunteering means to do something that will benefit someone else for free. When people volunteer, they do so because there are important causes or people who need help. Volunteering can be an individual task, like helping your elderly neighbor by helping them rake their leaves or shovel their snow. Volunteering can be more official, and a person can volunteer for an organization like the Peace Corps. The big idea is that volunteers work to help someone else for the sole purpose of making that person's life better. When people volunteer there are usually social and emotional benefits for the receiver of the volunteering and for the volunteer (Laurian Fitzgerald & Fitzgerald, 2019). For the volunteer, their efforts can bring meaning and purpose to their life, while increasing self-esteem and wellbeing (Bochis, Barth & Florescu, 2022). Volunteering can also relieve stress, and alleviate symptoms of depression. As well as having a positive impact on your community, volunteering can improve your relationships (Health Direct, 2021).

Most of us have heard people talk about the benefits of volunteering. Volunteers in a state prison facility have told us they feel like they get more out of volunteering than the inmates whom they are trying to help. As one person stated,

When I am doing work to help inmates, I get two benefits. First, I feel good about myself because I can see how my work is helping someone else. Second, I feel like I am giving back to the community, because when these prisoners go back into society, they will have more skills to live as positive citizens.

Thus, when people volunteer there is a perceived need that someone else has with which the volunteer might be able to help.

According to Health Direct Australia (2021), there are at least six important benefits for the people who volunteer: (a) give you a sense of achievement and purpose, (b) help you feel part of a community, (c) help you feel better about yourself by improving your self-esteem and confidence, (d) help you share your talents, learn new skills and create a better work-life balance, (e) help combat stress, loneliness, social isolation, and depression, and (f) help you meet new people, which can help you feel more connected and valued (para. 5). These feelings of helping other people are important for all people. Naturally, there are many ways to engage in meaningful forms of work or volunteering. For example, within a family, people must cooperate and help each other to make the family function well. Dividing up chores and jobs in the house or in the garden are forms of volunteering, and when done with a positive mindset, can give people the same benefits as volunteering outside of the home. When we ask our graduate students to discuss what they are most proud of, many students report they are most proud of their families. Thus, the work they do for their families gives these parents the same kinds of positive social and emotional feelings as does volunteering.

According to Western Connecticut State University (2022) there are at least four ways that engaging in community service is good for people. First, volunteering connects the volunteer to people, which gives people opportunities to make new friends and improve social skills. Second, volunteering is good for emotional and physical health. Volunteering increases one's self-confidence, reduces the risk of depression, and leads to a healthier lifestyle. Third, volunteering can help in one's career. Volunteers can gain work experience and new skills and be more prepared in their chosen career. Fourth, volunteering can bring fun and fulfillment into one's life.

2. 2. Human Needs

Glasser (1999) developed choice theory from his work as a psychiatrist, and he wrote that all people act to meet their physical and emotional needs. From his experiences, he developed choice theory, which states that all people behave to try to meet their needs. Thus, people who volunteer are doing so to meet one or more of their basic needs. According to Glasser there are five basic human needs: (a) survival, (b) love and belonging, (c) power, (d) freedom, and (e) fun. Fitzgerald and Laurian (2013) added to Glasser's ideas the need for meaning, or the existential need.

Maslow (1962) developed his hierarchy of needs, which originally included five needs: (a) physiological needs, (b) safety needs, (c) belonging and love needs, (d) esteem needs, and (e) self-actualization needs. As Maslow (1970a, 1970b) continued to work on his hierarchy, he added three ideas to his needs: (a) cognitive needs, (b) aesthetics needs, and (c) transcendence needs. The highest act of transcendence, according to Maslow, is to use our gifts and talents to go beyond ourselves and help other people.

In the present study, the university professors, the university students, and the primary school teachers and principals were looking to help the young people, who live in rural and mostly poor areas, and elderly people who were in institutions, where they had little contact with the outside world. The goal of all of the volunteers was to help someone else, not themselves. The volunteers wanted to see the smiles on the faces of the students and the elderly people. And, according to Fitzgerald and Laurian (2013), Glasser (1999), and Maslow (1970b), when a person helps someone else to smile, they also help themselves to smile.

Fitzgerald and Laurian (2013) have stated that the idea of needs is not to go outside of oneself and get their needs, the trick is to go inside of oneself and become the needs. By that we mean, I should be a survivor; I should be loving and caring; I should be strong and make a positive difference; I should be joyful; I should make positive decisions; and I should live a meaningful life. When we can do that, we set an environment where others can do the same.

Every person must be able to survive, physically and emotionally. Sousa (2020) has explained how the brain's first job is to help its owner survive. When a person is under attack, physically or emotionally, the brain goes into survival mode and creates the chemicals to help us survive. When people are under great stress on a regular basis, the chemicals the brain uses to save people can become overused and cause physical, emotional, and medical harm (Burke Harris, 2018).

In reviewing the needs, it becomes obvious that people are herd animals. For much, if not most, of our lives we spend our time interacting with other people. Glasser (1999) has stated that most of our problems are relationships problems. We people attempt to force others to do or be something they do not want, then problems arise. When people are loving, caring, helpful trustworthy, and supportive of each other, we live more balanced and happy lives (Fitzgerald & Laurian, 2013). When people volunteer to help others, we engage in the kinds of thinking and actions that lead us to positive mindsets.

3. Method

3.1. Participants and Setting

The participants in this study included eight college professors, 67 university students, 27 primary school teachers and principals, 83 orphanage students, 200 primary school students, and 270 elderly people. The student participants were from 35 primary schools, with each school containing a significant population of at-risk students. The students who live in an orphanage were from five institutions. The elderly participants lived in eight facilities.

The study was centered around a city in Romania of approximately 285 000 people. The city is a growing community and is considered to be a positive place to live according to reports about cities in Romania. As in any city there are places which have a population of lower socioeconomic people. Surrounding the city are many villages of different sizes and socioeconomic status. The project was devoted to work with teachers and principals and their students who are deemed as at-risk students. At the request of the university students, the project added two groups to the activities: students who live in an orphanage and elderly people who live in an institution. Student participants in this study who live in an orphanage are obviously also considered to be at-risk students. And the elderly participants are generally considered to be abandoned or without families to help them.

3.2. Data Collection

For the purposes of the present study, the professors wanted to assess whether and how the volunteer program affected the primary school teachers and principals and the university students. The authors developed two surveys to assess the question: What impact did the study have on the experiences and attitudes of the teacher and university student participants. The hypothesis was that the study would have a positive effect on both primary teachers and our university students.

As displayed in Table 1, the authors developed 20 Likert scale statements, scored on a scale of 1–5 from Totally Disagree to Totally Agree. There were also three open ended questions included:

1. What are the most important reasons/advantages for which you chose to participate in this project?
2. What were the biggest challenges you faced during the preparation/implementation of the project?

Teachers of the young students in the project were also invited to complete a survey. Their 15 five-point Likert scale prompts are displayed in Table 2. Teachers were also asked to respond to three open ended prompts:

3. What are the most important reasons/advantages for which you chose to participate in this project?
4. What were the biggest challenges you faced during the development/implementation of the project?

5. What suggestions/advice/observations would you bring for the future development of this project?
6. What suggestions/advice/observations would you bring for the future development of this project.

Table 1. *University student survey*

Item	Questions
1	I volunteered for our project because I wanted to give students from disadvantaged communities the opportunity to experience the joy of success at school.
2	In this project I learned how valuable teamwork is.
3	I volunteered for this project because I believe I will become a better teacher.
4	The students in the communities I worked in while participating in this project inspired me.
5	Participating in the activities of the Caravan helped me to improve my perception of rural schools/kindergartens.
6	I volunteered for this project because I want to show other fellow students what I gained from these educational experiences.
7	I volunteered for this project because other university teachers have volunteered in the past to help my students or fellow students.
8	I volunteered for this project because when I help someone else, I feel like I become a better person.
9	Within this project, I believe that I have developed professionally as a future teacher.
10	I think I have become a better person because of this project.
11	I want to be a teacher because I want to positively influence the lives of my future students, and this project helped me start doing that.
12	The Caravan experience helped me understand that teaching at a rural school is an option that should not scare me away from tenure.
13	This project helped me realize how much I still have to improve in my own professional training.
14	I volunteered for this project because the professors at the university motivated me to want to help.
15	This project gave me confidence in my effort to become a good teacher.
16	This project gave me hope to believe that I will be able to positively mark the lives of my future students.
17	Participating in the activities of the Caravan gave me the opportunity to get to know better the way of working with children from the countryside.
18	The students in the communities where I worked impressed me positively with their attitude towards the proposed activities.
19	This project showed me how beneficial it is to meet and work with new colleagues, even from different majors/years of study.
20	I want to be a teacher because I want to positively influence the lives of my students, and this project helped me start doing that.

Table 2. *Primary teacher survey*

Item	Prompts
1	I volunteered for our project because I wanted to give students in the communities where I teach the opportunity to succeed in school.
2	I volunteered for this project to develop myself professionally
3	I volunteered for this project because I was motivated to want to help families in the community of the school where I teach.
4	I volunteered for this project because I believe I will become a better teacher.
5	I volunteered for this project because I want to give back to the community where I teach some of what I have gained in my professional experience.
6	I volunteered in this project because I wanted to help students - future teachers.
7	The students participating in this project inspired me during the course of the activities.
8	I wanted to be a teacher because I want to positively influence the lives of my students, and this project helped me start doing that.
9	I volunteered for this project because when I help someone else, I feel like I become a better person.
10	Within this project, I think I have developed professionally.
11	I think I have become a better person because of this project.

12	This project showed me how much more work there is as a teacher to help students succeed in school.
13	This project gave me confidence in my effort to become a good teacher.
14	I am grateful that I could participate in this project.
15	This project gave me hope to believe that I will be able to positively mark the lives of my students.

4. Results

4.1. University Student Survey

The results of the university student survey revealed overwhelming positive feelings about volunteering in this project. In 13 of the 20 prompts 100% of the students Agreed or Totally Agreed with the following prompts:

1. I volunteered for our project because I wanted to give students from disadvantaged communities the opportunity to experience the joy of success at school.
2. In this project I learned how valuable teamwork is.
3. I volunteered for this project because I believe I will become a better teacher.
8. I volunteered for this project because when I help someone else, I feel like I become a better person.
9. Within this project, I believe that I have developed professionally as a future teacher.
11. I want to be a teacher because I want to positively influence the lives of my future students, and this project helped me start doing that.
12. The Caravan experience helped me understand that teaching at a rural school is an option that should not scare me away from tenure.
13. This project helped me realize how much I still have to improve in my own professional training.
15. This project gave me confidence in my effort to become a good teacher.
16. This project gave me hope to believe that I will be able to positively mark the lives of my future students.
18. The students in the communities where I worked impressed me positively with their attitude towards the proposed activities.
19. This project showed me how beneficial it is to meet and work with new colleagues, even from different majors/years of study.
20. I want to be a teacher because I want to positively influence the lives of my students, and this project helped me start doing that.

For the following five prompts, more than 90% of the university students Agreed or Totally Agreed with the statements:

4. The students in the communities I worked in while participating in this project inspired me.
5. Participating in the activities of the Caravan helped me to improve my perception of rural schools/kindergartens.
10. I think I have become a better person because of this project.
14. I volunteered for this project because the professors at the university motivated me to want to help.
17. Participating in the activities of the Caravan gave me the opportunity to get to know better the way of working with children from the countryside.

Prompt 6 (I volunteered for this project because I want to show other fellow students what I gained from these educational experiences) had 87.8% of its responses as Agree or Totally Agree. Prompt 7 (I volunteered for this project because other university teachers have volunteered in the past to help my students or fellow students) had 72.7% of the students who agreed or Totally Agreed with the statement. Prompt 7 had one student who disagreed with the prompt (the only disagree in the survey).

These student results indicate some very promising traits for our future teachers (see Table 3). First, the students agreed to the notion that they should be helping every student to succeed. They also indicated that they volunteered to help the students with whom they worked. These university students agreed that becoming the best teacher they can be is important. Students also realized the benefits of working in collaboration with their colleagues and with more experienced teachers. These future teachers also indicated that they were inspired by their young students. The university student participants in this project indicated they want to learn more about teaching, and they want to learn

more about the diversity of students they may teach. An extremely important result from the project is that the university students realized that they do not need to be fearful of working in a village or an area of poverty. These young adults have learned an important lesson about how to work effectively with different people. It is especially important that our university realized that teachers need each other to be successful in reaching all of their their students. The authors believe it is very noteworthy that 90.9% of the university students totally agreed with the following prompt: The students in the communities where I worked impressed me positively with their attitude towards the proposed activities. That is important because our future teachers must know that all students can be motivated to want to learn. The results of this study indicate that all students can learn and all students can be motivated to want to learn.

Table 3. *University student survey results*

Prompt	Totally Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Totally Disagree
1. I volunteered for our project because I wanted to give students from disadvantaged communities the opportunity to experience the joy of success at school.	97% (32)	3% (1)	0	0	0
2. In this project I learned how valuable teamwork is.	81.8% (27)	18.2% (6)	0	0	0
3. I volunteered for this project because I believe I will become a better teacher.	90.9% (30)	9.1% (3)	0	0	0
4. The students in the communities I worked in while participating in this project inspired me.	81.8% (27)	15.2% (5)	3% (1)	0	0
5. Participating in the activities of the Caravan helped me to improve my perception of rural schools/kindergartens.	81.8% (27)	15.2% (5)	3% (1)	0	0
6. I volunteered for this project because I want to show other fellow students what I gained from these educational experiences.	63.6% (21)	24.2% (8)	12.1% (4)	0	0
7. I volunteered for this project because other university teachers have volunteered in the past to help my students or fellow students.	33.3% (11)	39.4% (13)	24.2% (8)	3% (1)	0
8. I volunteered for this project because when I help someone else, I feel like I become a better person.	87.9% (29)	12.1% (4)	0	0	0
9. Within this project, I believe that I have developed professionally as a future teacher.	81.8% (27)	18.2% (6)	0	0	0
10. I think I have become a better person because of this project.	60.6% (20)	33.3% (11)	6.1% (2)	0	0
11. I want to be a teacher because I want to positively influence the lives of my future students, and this project helped me start doing that.	81.8% (27)	18.2% (6)	0	0	0
12. The Caravan experience helped me understand that teaching at a rural school is an option that should not scare me away from tenure.	87.9% (29)	12.1% (4)	0	0	0
13. This project helped me realize how much I still have to improve in my own professional training.	78.8% (26)	21.2% (7)	0	0	0
14. I volunteered for this project because the professors at the university motivated me to want to help.	63.6% (21)	30.3% (10)	6.1% (2)	0	0
15. This project gave me confidence in my effort to become a good teacher.	78.8% (26)	21.2% (7)	0	0	0
16. This project gave me hope to believe that I will be able to positively mark the lives of my future students.	81.8% (27)	18.2% (6)	0	0	0
17. Participating in the activities of the Caravan gave me the opportunity to get to know better the way of working with children from the countryside.	66.7% (22)	30.3% (10)	3% (1)	0	0
18. The students in the communities where I worked impressed me positively with their attitude towards the	90.9% (30)	9.1% (3)	0	0	0

proposed activities.					
19. This project showed me how beneficial it is to meet and work with new colleagues, even from different majors/years of study.	66.7% (22)	33.3% (11)	0	0	0
20. I want to be a teacher because I want to positively influence the lives of my students, and this project helped me start doing that.	84.8% (28)	15.2% (5)	0	0	0

4. 2. University Student Open Ended Responses

In addition to the survey results, the authors analyzed the data from our open response questions to the university students. All of the open responses were positive and triangulated the results from the university student surveys. The university student survey included three open ended questions:

1. What are the most important reasons/advantages for which you chose to participate in this project?
2. What were the biggest challenges you faced during the preparation/implementation of the project?
3. What suggestions/advice/observations would you bring for the future development of this project?

4.2.1. Open ended question 1. What are the most important reasons/advantages for which you chose to participate in this project?

For the question, “What are the most important reasons/advantages for which you chose to participate in this project,” four themes emerged from the data: 1. The ability to work with and enhance the learning and lives of children who are underprivileged in some way, 2. The joy of volunteering and helping people, 3. The opportunity to develop professionally, and 4. To learn about how to teach in a rural area.”

For the first theme (The ability to work with and enhance the learning and lives of children who are underprivileged in some way), one university student wrote, “To help others, to develop myself emotionally, to do something good for those who don't have the opportunity every day.” Another student put it this way, “To bring joy around me and offer hope, because “they are flowers that break the asphalt”. A third university student wrote, “I had the opportunity to offer something to children from disadvantaged backgrounds.” A fourth university student wrote, “The main reasons that made me participate in this project are the desire to see the joy on children's faces and to make their day more beautiful. Their smiles and hugs made me wish for future participations.”

In line with the second theme, (The joy of volunteering and helping people), a university student wrote, “I like to bring smiles to people's faces, I want to learn as much as possible about children, I want to help and experience different environments where children learn.” Another student wrote, “I would learn something new thanks to the Caravan. The joy of children is indescribable.” A third person said it this way:

I chose to participate in this wonderful project from the first moment I heard about its existence, I thought it was a wonderful opportunity to work with children and learn about the challenges of the rural school, I really liked the way that the teacher talked about the Caravan, the emotions and joy could be read on her face and last but not least, I think that all children deserve a chance at a wonderful school day, as many of them described the activity that we carried out in their school.

In connection with the third theme (The opportunity to develop professionally), one university student stated, “I chose to participate in this project to develop myself as a person and as a future teacher.” A second student put it this way, “I chose to join this project with the aim of perfecting myself as a future teacher.” Another student wrote, “In order to help children. To become an exemplary teacher.” Finally, a student wrote, “Another key aspect was the experience we gained from this activity. He not only trained us, but also prepared us for the future job.”

Some students put the three themes together in one response. One university student wrote: “I chose to participate in this project because I primarily wanted to bring a smile to the children's faces.”

In alignment with the fourth theme, a student wrote,

The most important advantages consist in getting to know a new environment, in addition to the city one that we live in during the practical classes, and the integration in the different mentality offered by the rural environment compared to the urban one.

A second student stated,

Of course, this way I learned a lot of professional things: how to behave with children from the countryside, how to approach them, what is different from the urban environment, I met wonderful teachers and last but not least, I practiced this wonderful mission, to sit in front of the children and to work with them, but also to have fun with them.

A third student simply stated, "The desire to see what kindergartens and schools look like in a rural environment."

4.2.2. Open ended question 2. What were the biggest challenges you faced during the preparation/implementation of the project?

For the second open ended question (What were the biggest challenges you faced during the preparation/implementation of the project?), three themes emerged from the data: 1. Time management, 2. Complexity of working in teams, and 3. Would the students who live in an underprivileged environment like what we do with them? Time management, of course, is always an issue when groups of people are trying to coordinate their efforts and are working under time constraints. Thus, it was not surprising to find how important time management was during this project. The other two themes that emerged were also not surprising but they are interesting. It appears that at least one aspect of the themes, complexity of working in teams and working in underprivileged areas, was inexperience. Our university students indicated they were not used to the coordination skills required to develop, organize, coordinate, and negotiate their efforts. Many of our students indicated that they had no experience of working in underprivileged areas or schools, and their lack of knowledge was uncomfortable for some of them.

Time, in one form or another, was a common theme for our students. In reference to the second theme (Complexity of working in teams) two students put it simply, "Complexity of working in teams," and "Synchronization with the team." One issue was the complexity of needing to work with their group members all together. One student wrote, "Time, as we had to set up the meetings in such a way that every member could attend, that was also a bit difficult." A student put it this way, "The most important challenges were: time management, multitasking, creating activities." Another university student wrote, "The time allocated was quite a challenge to face the work in teams." Another aspect of time complexity was the real lives students face, as one student stated, "Due to the fact that I am also a mother of three girls, the biggest challenge for me was time."

Connected to the second theme (complexity of working in teams), one student indicated, "Challenges were related to organization and allocating convenient preparation time for all team members." Another student added, "Division of tasks in the team, a little disorganization." A part of the organizational complexity for this project was that students were from different majors and from different years within the university. One student addressed that issue as they wrote, "The biggest challenge was managing to coordinate the team made up of colleagues from different years of study." A third university student wrote, "The biggest challenges we encountered during the preparation of the project were: time, the fact that we were from different specializations, different years, we had different timetables." Two other students listed, "Effective teamwork and synchronization with the team" as hurdles to climb over.

The third theme that emerged from the data analysis was working in an underprivileged environment. One student wrote, "The question that bothered me, considering that it was my first participation, was, will they like the activities?" A sort of fear of the unknown was echoed by other students, as a second student wrote, "The biggest challenge was that they would be captivated by what I did." A third student wrote, ". . . the biggest challenge was always the fact that we thought that maybe the children wouldn't like it or we wouldn't be able to do so we finished everything we set out to do." A fourth student wrote, "The type of activities, fear of children's feedback."

4.2.3. Open ended Question 3. What suggestions/advice/observations would you bring for the future development of this project?

The theme that emerged from university student recommendations was to continue and even expand the project. One student wrote:

I wish from the bottom of my heart that this project continues, I think it is one of the few projects that help you develop and overcome emotional barriers, you are left with unforgettable memories and the joy of the children motivates you to want to do more for them.

Another student shared the previous sentiment as they wrote, “I recommend participating in the activities of the Caravan because it gives us a different perspective to approach things, the opportunity to do something meaningful in people's lives and the opportunity to develop our teaching ability.”

The rest of the recommendations were single ideas that we loosely interpreted as ideas to help organize the work of the project or project teams, or to help try to ensure that teams are put together thoughtfully. Some ideas were given from opposite sides of a coin. For example, one recommendation was to just have university students who are education majors, while another student suggested opening up the process to gather a more majors into the population of the project's students. The vast majority of the university student participants felt that what they did was worthwhile for the young students and beneficial to the university students. And, as one student wrote, “Any problems we faced were negotiated and fixed, so that we could be ready for the children when we met with them.”

4.3. Teacher Survey Results

The data from the primary school teacher survey (see Table 4) revealed that the teachers had very positive professional reasons and feelings about participating in the project. In six of the prompts for the survey, more than 90% of the teachers Agreed or Totally Agreed with the following prompt: 1. I volunteered for our project because I wanted to give students in the communities where I teach the opportunity to succeed in school. 2. I volunteered for this project to develop myself professionally. 4. I volunteered for this project because I believe I will become a better teacher. 5. I volunteered for this project because I want to give back to the community where I teach some of what I have gained in my professional experience. 14. I am grateful that I could participate in this project.

Additionally, 80% or more of the teachers Agreed or Totally Agreed with eight of the survey prompts: 3. I volunteered for this project because I was motivated to help families in the community of the school where I teach. 7. The students participating in this project inspired me during the course of the activities. 8. I wanted to be a teacher because I want to positively influence the lives of my students, and this project helped me start doing that. 9. I volunteered for this project because when I help someone else, I feel like I have become a better person. 10. Within this project, I think I have developed professionally. 11. I think I have become a better person because of this project. 13. This project gave me confidence in my effort to become a good teacher. 15. This project gave me hope to believe that I will be able to positively mark the lives of my students.

For item 12. This project showed me how much more work there is as a teacher to help students succeed in school, 72% of the teacher participants Agreed or Totally Agreed with the statement. These results indicate that the project was very successful in the goals of helping students and teachers in their work within at-risk populations. In our experiences it is ironic that the schools and students who need the most attention and co-curricular opportunities are often the schools (and communities) that are ignored the most.

Table 4. *Teacher survey results*

Prompt	Totally Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Totally Disagree
1. I volunteered for our project because I wanted to give students in the communities where I teach the opportunity to succeed in school.	80.8% (21)	11.5% (3)	7.7% (2)	0	0

2. I volunteered for this project to develop myself professionally	69.2% (18)	23.1% (6)	7.7% (2)	0	0
3. I volunteered for this project because I was motivated to want to help families in the community of the school where I teach.	73.1% (19)	15.4% (4)	11.5% (3)	0	0
4. I volunteered for this project because I believe I will become a better teacher.	69.2% (18)	23.1% (6)	7.7% (2)	0	0
5. I volunteered for this project because I want to give back to the community where I teach some of what I have gained in my professional experience.	76.9% (20)	15.4% (4)	7.7% (2)	0	0
6. I volunteered in this project because I wanted to help students - future teachers.	80.8% (21)	11.5% (3)	7.7% (2)	0	0
7. The students participating in this project inspired me during the course of the activities.	57.7% (15)	30.8% (8)	11.5% (3)	0	0
8. I wanted to be a teacher because I want to positively influence the lives of my students, and this project helped me start doing that.	65.4% (17)	23.1% (6)	7.7% (2)	3.8% (1)	0
9. I volunteered for this project because when I help someone else, I feel like I become a better person.	68% (17)	16% (4)	12% (3)	4% (1)	0
10. Within this project, I think I have developed professionally.	52% (13)	28% (7)	20% (5)	0	0
11. I think I have become a better person because of this project.	56% (14)	24% (6)	16% (4)	4% (1)	0
12. This project showed me how much more work there is as a teacher to help students succeed in school.	40% (10)	32% (8)	24% (6)	4% (1)	0
13. This project gave me confidence in my effort to become a good teacher.	46.2% (12)	34.6% (9)	15.4% (4)	3.8% (1)	0
14. I am grateful that I could participate in this project.	65.4% (17)	26.9% (7)	7.7% (2)	0	0
15. This project gave me hope to believe that I will be able to positively mark the lives of my students.	64% (16)	20% (5)	16% (4)	0	0

4.4. Teacher Open Response Results

In addition to the Likert scale responses, we asked the teachers to respond to three Likert-scale questions. These questions included:

1. What are the most important reasons/advantages for which you chose to participate in this project?
2. What were the biggest challenges you faced during the development/implementation of the project?
3. What suggestions/advice/observations would you bring for the future development of this project?

As with the university students, the open-ended responses triangulated the positive results of the teacher survey. Teachers were pleased with their participation in the project because they believed that their students benefitted from the project, and teachers were pleased with their professional development.

4.3.1. Teacher open ended question 1

A review of the data for the first open ended question (What are the most important reasons/advantages for which you chose to participate in this project?) revealed two themes from the teachers: 1. A wish to help students. 2. A wish to develop professionally. In relation to helping students, a teacher wrote, "I chose to participate in this project to cultivate in my students the feeling of trust, cooperation and friendship." A second teacher wrote, "I wanted to support the students in the community for a better social integration." And another added, "Development of students' social and communication skills." A fourth teacher responded, "To help where I am needed." Teachers who work in communities that are considered underprivileged understand the issues their students and their

families face, and most of these teachers work very hard to help their students to reach their potential. This project gave teachers another way to make education more equitable for their students.

For theme 2, professional development, six teachers simply wrote, "Professional development." One teacher wrote, "Exchange of experience, satisfaction, improvement of the quality of education." A teacher wrote, "My professional development and to help others." One other teacher stated, "Increasing professional experience." And, still another teacher stated, "Exchange of experience, satisfaction, improvement of the quality of education."

From the analysis of the data, it was clear that most of the teacher participants in this project are motivated to gain as much knowledge as possible, so they grow in their ability to help their students and their families. As one teacher wrote, they are very interested in "continuous improvement" for the sake of their students.

4.3.2. Teacher open ended question 2

The second open ended question for teachers was: What were the biggest challenges you faced during the development/implementation of the project? The teachers listed some issues, but they all appeared to be individual issues rather than systemic issues. One person wrote, "Some students were absent." And two teachers wrote, "Teaming up with a (university) student." The largest group of comments were positive comments. One teacher wrote, "The students' involvement in the project, but they turned out to be very excited." A second teacher wrote, "An immense joy from the children to participate in these activities." A third teacher wrote, "The students were receptive, we didn't face any challenges." Finally, a teacher wrote, "The activities inspired me to complete such activities as well. The students were wonderful, my students were delighted and eager to continue the activities. Thank you all!"

As in any complex endeavor, there were some issues that teachers, university professors, and university students had to deal with to make this process effective for everyone involved. In general, it looked like the logistics that caused some stresses were dealt with in positive and effective ways. That does not mean there were no issues. Of course, there were issues, the key to leaving people happy that they were involved in this process is not the avoidance of issues, but, rather, that the issues were dealt with in positive ways, and most comments indicate that the processes worked well.

4.3.2. Teacher open ended question 3

The third open-ended question for the teachers was: What suggestions/advice/observations would you bring for the future development of this project? In reviewing the data, we found that 10 of the 18 recommendations specifically stated that the teachers want this project to continue. Three teachers wrote that they had no need to make any recommendations. The other recommendations dealt with the idea of more meetings, more teaching materials, adding to the activities, like going into nature or the mountains, and ensuring all participants follow through with the assignments. As with the teacher survey, these recommendations were mostly positive, and indicated the teachers were pleased to be an important part of the process.

3. Conclusion

The Caravan project, according to the data we analyzed, was a huge success. Veteran teachers learned from future teachers, future teachers learned from veteran teachers, and university teachers shared and received ideas from both university students and public-school teachers. University students asked to expand the project to include students who live in an orphanage and elderly people who live in an institution. A group of students and the university music teacher also organized a Christmas caroling activity to a church, a cathedral, and a prison. These additions added to the climate of openness and inclusivity for the project. In this project each group of participants (university professors, university students, and public-school teachers) had an important voice in the process. This created a sense of empowerment for most, if not all, participants. The main message from the project was that all people

are important, and that message permeated the activities with the young students, the orphans, and the elderly who were involved in the project. It is no wonder why most people want the project or a similar project to continue. According to interaction theory (Popa, 2010; Johnson & Johnson, 2009) and according to human needs theory (Fitzgerald and Laurian, 2013; Glasser, 1999; Maslow, 1970a; 1970b; Muntean, 2022), when people are encouraged to be whom they are and are supported to develop their voices, skills, and talents, and are treated with care, love, and respect, people tend to be in proper balance, believe in themselves, believe others care about them, and reciprocate by also being caring, loving, and cooperative. Consequently, as multiple wrote in their responses, “when we had issues, we dealt with them in positive ways.” Thus, during the course of the project each participant was supported in developing the negotiation and caring skills necessary for people to function as cooperative colleagues, and each person was welcomed to participate in something bigger than oneself. As Maslow (1970b) pointed out, participants were engaged in a transcendent process of becoming who they are meant to be.

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