Exploring Black Student Teacher Motivation for Community Service Involvement

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Abstract
Research in South Africa has paid little attention to black student motivation for voluntary community-service engagement. Motivation for community service engagement is probably the most important factor for student teachers, for consistent, sustainable service to their communities. The focus of this study was to investigate the motives of black student teachers' continued voluntary engagement after being exposed to community service learning. Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with 4th year students to gather data. Inductive, content analysis was conducted to determine themes. We established that students are motivated by several factors that are self and externally directed — promoted by the availability of service opportunities in their environments. These motivational factors may also be individualistic and or collectivistic orientated. The factors that motivate students have implications for how institutions of higher learning develop their programmes for community service engagement for student teachers.

Keywords: community service in universities, exposure to community service, service learning, involvement for self-benefit, altruism

1. Introduction

While community service engagement provides opportunities for student teachers to understand and deal with social problems while sharpening their skills, lack of motivation may limit their participation in this nurturing activity which requires regular contact. Whereas several studies have been conducted on the benefits of students' participation in community service, existing research in South Africa has yet to consider adequately what motivates student teachers to work in a community setting out of personal choice. Soria and Thomas-Card (2014) and Bastien (2015) to mention but two focused on the potential for community service experiences in promoting students' interest in continuing with service post-graduation. Human-Vogela and Dippenaar (2013) dedicated their study to student teachers' commitment to compulsory service learning engagement. Therefore, a review of the literature indicates that few of them address black student teacher' motivation in such services. In this research we argue that it is voluntary engagement whilst still studying that has a potential to promote participation post-graduation.

The present study focused on determining the motives for community service engagement of black student teachers in a university in South Africa. We concentrated on 4th year Bachelor of Education (BEd) students who continued with community service engagement during their time of study, after being involved in community service learning in their 2nd year. Community Service Learning is module-based compulsory service to communities by students. The study was prompted by experiences with attitudes of students towards community service learning. One of

the authors (S) coordinated Community Service Learning for all 2nd-year student teachers in a BEd programme for the three years from 2011 to 2013. The question that came to mind was whether these students would be motivated to continue to serve communities voluntarily.

During the whole period the enthusiasm shown by white students and their knowledge and experience regarding community service was observed, on the one hand and a lack of interest in the whole process from the black students. This was unexpected given that in black cultures ubuntu is the most important value, and that children raised in such communities are exposed to acts of kindness as it cuts across centuries (Mkhize, 2008:36). We refer here to ubuntu as a philosophy that promotes the common good of society (Dolamo, 2014). The individual strives to help others and value the good of the community above self-interest (Venter, 2004). In fact, ubuntu promotes the spirit that one should leave for others (Munyaka & Motlhabi, 2009). Bonn (2007) conducted a study among South African Black children on children's understanding of ubuntu, in three geographical areas in Pretoria. This study refutes the argument that the values and principles of ubuntu dissapear with the changes taking place in societies and the rise of urbanisation. Instead, it revealed that with increasing age, children acquire a richer and more sophisticated idea of ubuntu. This can be attributed to the increasing capacity of older children to absorb more abstract concepts surrounding the notion of ubuntu (Bonn, 2007). Moreover, the values of ubuntu are acquired in communities and are transmitted from one generation to another by means of oral traditions. What we were asking ourselves was whether, the students from Black cultures in our institution had forgotten about these values, if not, what could have been the reasons why some potrayed negative attitudes towards community service engagement in their 2nd year.

We became interested in whether these students voluntarily continued with community service during the rest of their studies. Towards the end of the first semester, the 4th-year student teachers were asked about their experiences of engagement in community service learning and their motivation for continuing with community service on their own. We observed that, despite the experiences during community service learning, there were black student teachers who continued with the community service on their own. We therefore, investigated the motives of black student teachers who willingly continued with service engagement during their time of study.

As used in the present study, the term motivation refers to "an individual's predisposition to respond to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions or organizations" (Perry & Wise, 1990: 368). This definition indicates an inner motive to help others. Predisposition to respond to other's needs could lead to stability in the service rendered. If community service is rendered because of external factors which include reward systems (O'Meara, 2008) it can be unstable as after sometime one would lose interest.

2. Literature review

Community service is an important component of student development but mostly ignored by universities. During community service engagement, students undergo a process of meaning making about them and their relationship with the community, thereby exposing them to real life problems and challenges while still studying. Community service is a voluntary activity conducted by individuals or an organization to benefit a community. Volunteers step outside their familiar environments with the aim of helping other people. McLellan and Youniss (2002) view community service as a practice that gives students an opportunity to see themselves as political

agents addressing social inequality. They see themselves as moral agents promoting action-based engagement to meet their personal needs and those of their community members. In that sense it is a key mechanism for building civic consciousness among students (Favish, 2015). This is particularly important for aspiring student teachers who might be providing service to the same communities. Moreover, according to Willcoxson (2011), student drop-out is caused by among others, lack of purpose in studies and lack of social integration. Social responsibility and social networking cannot be fostered without students' motivation in community service.

In addition to the importance of community service discussed above, motivation for continuity and consistency while still at university is crucial as first and foremost, students do not go to universities only to obtain degrees but also for experiences (Brewis et al., 2010:1). Continuous engagement in community service is therefore, a means for broadening and improving their experience. Second, Freire's (2002:16) argument adds the element of responsibility that cannot be acquired intellectually, but only through experience. One of the main aims of community engagement in higher institutions is the promotion of civic responsibility (Department of Education, 1997). This is particularly important for a student teacher whose future paramount responsibility will be to take care of others by not only imparting knowledge but also providing support. Furthermore, a social response is not a matter of the mind only but also of the heart.

The literature indicates different motives for community engagement, including: career enhancement; learning new skills; social interaction; escape from negative feelings; personal development; and expressing prosocial values (Berger & Milem, 2002; Marotta & Nashman, 1998; Youniss & Yates, 1997). It can happen that one can have multiple motives rather than just a single motive for volunteering.

3. Background

The majority of participants became part of a compulsory community engagement for the first time in their lives as community service involvement is not mandated in South African public schools. Reasons for student participation in community service engagement were first, to implement the policy on Community Engagement in Higher Institutions (South Africa, 1997) and second, as students were aspiring teachers, they needed exposure to social issues that are part of their learners' lives. Students could choose, from a list of community centres provided by the coordinator, where they wanted to serve, as long as they completed 20 hours of service in a community centre. The coordinators accessed the communities through service sector organisations, such as government or state departments, as well as non-governmental, community-based or faith-based organisations.

The duration of service involvement was three months, starting from March to May each second year of study. The community centres had to be alerted to the commencement of the service in January before students started their lectures in February. In the first and second week of February students were orientated to community-service learning, after which they made their choice of centres then the placement started. Students were aware that community service learning was an opportunity for them to help out and get marks in return. The participants were comfortable volunteering in organisations with culturally similar activities to their own way of life, such as homes for the destitute, centres for the disabled and the aged. The activities in the centres were a mixture of formal and informal, structured and unstructured. It was the

prerogative of the centre managers to decide on the activities for the service to be provided by the students. After this compulsory volunteering students were not under any obligation to volunteer.

4. Method

4.1 Design

Qualitative, explorative research method was used to gather data by means of individual interviews from participants.

4.2 Sample and Sampling

Participants were recruited randomly from all 370 4th-year students. In the first round of sampling I had 30 students who were willing to participate: 10 white students; 14 students who had not been involved in community service after their community service learning engagement in their 2nd-year; 2 black students who volunteered their services once since 2013; and 4 who had consistently rendered their service to their communities.

The criterion was to select students who were continuing with community service to solicit information regarding what motivated them to keep on serving their communities voluntarily. Only four of the students met our criterion: three students were females and one a male. Students came from different areas: the male student's home was about 30 kilometres away from the university in the Free State province; two female students were from Gauteng and the other from Mpumalanga. One strength of this study was the diverse range of participants in terms of gender, socio-economic group and location, thus the range and diversity of experience, beliefs, and opinions was captured. Although saturation could not be reached in sampling, the goal of achieving theoretical saturation by providing as much detail as possible by selecting information-rich cases that can ensure all aspects of the phenomenon under investigation was achieved.

4.3 Data gathering, analysis and interpretation

Two sets of data were collected: first, the biographical data and then data about their motives for engagement. The biographical chronology was regarded as an effective way of contextualising specific experiences' (Perks & Thomson, 1998: 102). Moreover, Rice and Ezzy (1999: 126) indicate that the theoretical underpinning of narrative inquiry is the belief that 'telling a story about oneself involves telling a story about choice and action, which have integrally moral and ethical dimensions'. Participants are less directed by the interviewer and more empowered in the interview (Harding, 2006). The appeal of biographical research is that it is exploring, in diverse methodological and interpretive ways, how individual accounts of life experience can be understood within the contemporary cultural and structural settings and is thereby helping to chart the major societal changes that are underway, but not merely at some broad social level (Roberts, 2002, 5). Participants were asked about parents and family life, schooling and life at present. The interview schedule composed of the following four key questions: Did you participate in community service learning in your 2nd year? What was your experience? After the community service learning did you do any community service on your own? What motivated you?

In analysing the data, we initially identified codes across all the stories told and put them in a table with three columns: the first column having reflective notes, the second with excerpts from the transcripts and the thirds with codes extracted from the excerpts. These codes were grouped to form categories and the latter clustered to form themes. The final analysis

methodology was centred on Rosenthal and Fischer -Rosenthal's (2004) analysis of narrative data. Rosenthal and Fisher-Rosenthal (2004) distinguish between actual events and narratives, contending that narratives must be based on some form of perception or observation of real events. We adhered to their six stage process of analysis which includes an analysis of biographical data, thematic analysis, re-construction of the case history or life as it was lived, an analysis of individual texts, a process of comparison between a narrative and life as lived, and the formation of different types of narratives. We analysed the data focusing on biographical details and explanatory factors such as the family and societal context, relationships with family, socio-economic status of the family, gender of the participant, interests and so on. We then conducted a thematic analysis of the data, coding by significant sentences and words. This was inductive analysis, themes emerged from the data.

4.4 Ethical Considerations

It was necessary to deal with the hierarchical risk posed by the fact that I (S) had lectured these students for two years, in their 1st-year and even in their 4th-year. The distance and separateness between the participants and me as a researcher had to be minimised. Brayton (1997) emphasises the importance of removing the power imbalance between the researcher and the participant; a welcoming non-threatening environment has to be created and, according to Karnieli-Miller, Strier and Pessach (2009:280), a feeling of intimacy is fuelled by, amongst other things anti-authoritative and non-hierarchical atmosphere.

During the participant recruitment stage I (S) introduced the assistant researcher to the students. The co-author was a newly appointed lecturer who resumed her duties in January 2015 and who was responsible for recruiting students and gathering data. Although the co-author (M) was also a lecturer, she met the participants for the first time when she introduced herself and the research so the students did not regard her as a lecturer as she was not offering any module with them. A rapport-building tactic that the co-author used to increase participation was that of "faking friendship" as suggested by Duncombe and Jessop (2002:107). The main reason for involving a research assistant at this stage was to avoid a situation where participants feel obliged to participate because the researcher is their lecturer.

5. Results

The results are presented in three categories: self-benefit, interest outside self and motivation triggered by availability of resources, under each of these categories sub-themes emerge. A brief introduction of each participant is presented first then themes that emerged from the responses are indicated.

Mpho's story

Mpho was raised by a single parent who is unemployed. His mother had a boyfriend who sometimes stays with them. The boyfriend had children of his own with another girlfriend. The first born was almost the same age as Mpho. Mpho did well in Matric passing most of his subjects above 60% and Mathematics and Science at 68% and 70% respectively. He managed to get a Fundza-Lushaka bursary which is awarded to best performing students from disadvantaged communities who take teaching as a career. He did odd jobs to get money to travel to the University for Lectures. Mpho started volunteering his services to the community in his first year of university. He helped in high schools in his area with teaching Grades 11 and 12 Mathematics and Science in extra classes during holidays.

Mpumalanga's story

Mpumalanga was a female who grew up in Mpumalanga. She stayed in a township with both her parents. She was a NSFS bursary holder which is awarded to students who perform well but cannot afford university fees because of their economic conditions. Mpumalanga is referred to as MP henceforth. MP's first experience with community service was in her 2nd-year when she was involved in community service learning. During holidays in June when she was at home, she heard an announcement over a community radio. A manager of an Old Age Home calling for help from community members to assist with cleaning and taking care of the aged at the center. She decided to volunteer. Afterwards she continued few more times and stopped in the same year.

Bhele's story

Bhele was raised by a single parent who was a qualified nursing sister in charge of a clinic in the township although they stayed in a suburb. Bhele was the first born out of wedlock with three siblings younger than her. She cried when she talked about her mother, they did not have a good relationship. The problem started when Bhele started at the university, she could not wait to complete in order for her to start her own life "somewhere far away from her". Bhele started volunteering after being involved in community-service learning.

Tshidi's story

Tshidi was also raised by a single parent, her father passed on when she was in primary school. She had two elder brothers who had been taking care of her and her mother. Both her older brothers are married, Tshidi thought this was the reason they were not helping them much except to cover the basics. She remembered the time when her father was still alive, he was working and things were fine then, they were a "happy family". She started attending church after her father's death. She was a counsellor at church. Tshidi was the only black girl who chose to do community service at a centre that trained dogs for therapy for the aged and children with severe cognitive disability during Community Service Learning. Her reason was that she "wants to do something different from what I have been doing". This "new experience" was a challenge she was willing to take. It was not for the first time that she offered her services for free. She had done this for as long as she can remember, at church and in her community.

Interviews centred on the issues of motivation and the perspectives of participants regarding their experiences of community service learning. Three main categories were identified as motivating the participants to continue their engagement in community service: (a) self-benefit (stress reliever, enhancing self-worth and egoistic reasons) (b) interest outside self (collectivism and altruism) (c) motivation triggered by exposure to community service (Community Service Learning, being a member of a religious group). With each of these categories, the participation in community service could be positively or negatively affected.

Involvement for Self-benefit

Involvement for self-benefit can be viewed as the gain to participants identified as their reward for participating in community service. This compensation was in the form of self-healing as their engagement was triggered by such factors as relieving themselves from social ills.

Escaping problems and challenges as a motive was prompted in Mpho by the challenges of not having financial support from parents and the situation at home because of his mother not working. Mpho, Bhele and Tshidi gave the following reasons, respectively:

> "*I do not have time to sit and stress*"; "*I was bored. Even when my siblings are at home, it doesn't make much of a difference, they are too young*"; "*my mother always talks about how better life was before my father died. I do not know what to say to her when she starts, it is better when I am at the university or doing community service*".

All three participants preferred to be away from home as a way of escaping stress and boredom. Their involvement in community service is motivated by avoidance of distresses at their homes. The community service created an opportunity for them to forget about their own troubles and focus on other people's difficulties. This was an outlet allowing them to step out of themselves and enter a world of others. This is how the three participants started their volunteer service by helping others through self-healing.

Enhancement of self-worth was the second reason for their motivation given by Mpho, Tshidi and Bhele:

> "*I want to show them that I know Maths and Science, even teachers at the school know I can teach and I know my subjects*"; "*I am the youngest in a group of women who visit the homes of the poor in the church. I want to show them that I am as caring as them*"; "*she doesn't think I am capable of doing good*".

Volunteering may have helped Mpho to affirm his position in the community and Tshidi in her church. Mpho got his secondary education in the schools he was helping. Most of the students knew him and where he stayed. Bhele wanted to catch the attention of her mother. The motives of these students seemed to be egoistic. The outcome was purely intended to be self-directed. It can however, be argued that getting attention from a parent and church members and fixing a relationship can happen at any time. The question is if it happens sooner will these participants continue with their service? If so would motivators other than boosting of self-worth propel students to keep on rendering their services?

Three participants had non-tangible self-benefit as their first and second reasons for motivation to continue with community service. Unintentionally, the communities provided a space for them to deal with the challenges they were faced with, in return for which they provided service that was of great benefit to their neighbourhoods. This builds on Batson and Ahmad's (2002:433) idea that people value their own welfare and are motivated to increase it when opportunities to do so arise.

It is interesting that as much as two of the students came from poor communities with unemployed parents, were not concerned about tangible benefits such as getting at least a stipend.

There is an element of consistency in their service as all of them had been persistent ever since they started. Although the literature indicates that these types of motivations are not stable the communities benefited.

Interest outside self

We categorised the activities motivated by interest outside self as relating to having an authentic caring nature that focuses on helping others as part of that particular group and as empathetic towards others.

Being part of the Collective was identified as a positive influence and a motive. The participant who wanted to make a difference in his community, continued to offer his services without pay for years. For example, Mpho stated:

"I have to help them to get good marks. I was born and raised here, I know Maths and Science, I have to share this knowledge with them. I want them to pass and further their studies. I feel satisfied and fulfilled when I hear about their good results".

Similarly, another key to being part of a collective was the implication that Mpho authentically cared for the students he was helping. Mpho spoke to his sense of caring the students he taught and the collective social contexts that often deny them opportunities to learn and excel academically. Their success was important to him. Authentic caring can be viewed as actions that are genuine, voluntary, people focused and benefitting students themselves. Being part of the collective was not only a motive but also a goal which may have led to consistency and emergence of commitment to the service.

However, two of the participants were motivated by empathy evoked by others and coming from within. The motive of feeling empathy for others also encouraged participants to render their services selflessly.

Empathy was also recognised as a positive motivator. Because of a plea for help by an old age home manager a positive outcome came about — community service was initiated. MP indicated that because of the plea:

"I felt that I should help......poor old folks.

It seems that the outcome of empathy was evoked by how the request was made:

"let us join hands in helping our parents and grandparents we cannot leave them to die alone".

This motive was based on emotions, her feelings at that particular time, aroused empathy in MP and prompted her to join others who took up the challenge. With Mbele the outcome came differently. Although she also felt compassion for the severely disabled children she was helping with in the afternoons, her responsiveness was encouraged after being involved in taking care of them.

"I cannot stay away from them, I miss them a lot when the university is open, I feel responsible".

It is this feeling of kind-heartedness that kept her motivated. However, MP continued volunteering her services at the centre for another year and then stopped. When asked about the reason why she stopped, she first laughed and then said, *"I don't have time"*. It was unfortunate that MP no longer had time while there was no change in her schedule during holidays.

The literature indicates that being motivated by empathy diminishes over time. When a person no longer feels obligated to help his or her feelings of compassion will stop. Feelings are a state of mind — they come and go depending on the situation at hand. Thus, being motivated by compassion could be short-term.

Our study found that Mpho and Mbele perceived themselves as having a stake in the educational success of others in their communities, and in fact believed in treating the children they volunteered to assist as members of their own families.

Motivation triggered by exposure to community needs

In this category exposure to community service and being around people who do community service generated interest in volunteer services for communities among three participating students.

Community service learning MP and Tshidi mentioned that it was easy for them to volunteer because of having exposed to community service in their 2nd year. They both enjoyed themselves:

> "*I knew what to expect*" She indicated how she felt the first time she provided her service at the university, "*Although there was orientation, I was worried, I did not know what I was going to do in the centre, the treatment, what if I do something wrong, how would the manager react? But at the end I am glad I had the opportunity*"; "*I enjoyed the community service learning, I was not expecting it but it was a wonderful experience. It was my first time doing community service. I think I was able to continue because of this experience*".

Having gone through this experience, MP was more confident that nothing wrong was going to happen and that she was going to enjoy herself as before. It seems that positive experiences triggered MP's response to the center manager's plea. The interview gave MP an opportunity to reflect on community service learning she was involved in more than a year ago. Bringle and Hatcher (1995:112) state that students should reflect on their service activity to gain an enhanced sense of personal values and social responsibility.

She also understood how volunteering worked. The opportunity availed itself and the center was accessible as it was in her backyard. The center manager helped her by going around asking for help, it seems she was not going to approach the center manager. The literature indicates that availability of opportunities and resources may enhance motivation for volunteering.

Exposure to experience associated with religion

As indicated in the introduction, Tshidi started volunteering in church, it is this exposure to community service and the experience she has that made her to continue, "*I had been involved in community service ever since I started attending church*".

Being affiliated to a church offered Tshidi an opportunity for a direct contact with the needy people in her community. Moreover, being part of a group of women afforded her with support and guidance. This was more of a group or group orientation to civic activity. Moreover, Tshidi's church encourages and shapes the direction church members take in playing their civic role.

6. Discussion

Through the examination of perspectives of black student teachers, the present study findings revealed insights into the critical role motivation plays in community service engagement. The main finding of this research is that black student teachers' motivation for continuing voluntary service encompassed: intrinsic, extrinsic factors and availability of opportunities. We therefore discuss implications for practice and future research.

The facets of motivation for community service comprised in the literature include egoism, altruism, obligatory (Berger & Milem, 2002; Marotta & Nashman, 1998), personal satisfaction, development of sense of self, social responsibility (Serow, 1991), personal and collective identity (Youniss & Yates, 1997). Past research has confirmed the centrality of these facets to motivating students for participation in community services.

The involvement for self-benefit that emerged in the present study as influencing participants in continuing with their service reflected features of egoism. A need to escape from self-sufferings and having a desire to lift self-worth was also a facet of egoism. Egoism

encompasses self centredness, selfishness, self-healing and self-satisfaction. Involvement for self-gain may be the most critical facet of egoism. However, the students' reward was non-tangible even though they came from poor communities and were struggling financially at the university. For student teachers this facet of motivation might have taken particular importance in that they initiated their services driven by this cause. Our finding suggests that escaping from adversity may trigger students from poor communities to voluntarily engage in social service.

Altruism was revealed as a motive of three participants in this research. The facets of altruism in this research included feelings of being part of a collective and induced empathy. Empathy is important to community service as it includes compassion and understanding. It is the heart that feels sympathy for the next person. Commitment towards the enhancement and promotion of the common good of the community is one of the principles of ubuntu. Volunteering without expecting compensation involves the heart, maybe more than the mind.

Another finding was that of a group as a motivator for community service. Eckstein (2001: 829) defines it as a collectivistic-based volunteerism which involves acts of generosity that groups rather than individuals initiate, inspire, and oversee. Individuals participate because of their group ties. The church group members in Tshidi's case acted as nurturers of commitment to civic service. They provided a conducive environment for her to showcase her ability to give.

Our findings suggest that knowledge of student teacher motivation, or at least a desire to learn about a particular motive, is an important aspect of affecting continuity of community service among black students. The participants came from communities where community service is not formalised but less prescriptive, but people are expected to do it, and from the goodness of their hearts they help others in the way they see fit.

7. Conclusion

Black student teachers that participated in this research identified aspects that motivated them to continue rendering voluntary service to their communities. These factors included individualistic and collectivistic grounded motives. Black students in this research continued with their civic engagement despite O'Grady's (2000) postulation that community service is frequently the activity of the white middle-class students. An understanding of the motives behind continuing with community service will help universities to motivate black student teachers to take part in community engagement.

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