

Spring 2014

# Understanding How Service-Learning Impacts the Dispositions of Teach for America Candidates and Their Students

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## Recommended Citation

D. Mitchell, S. Karlin, & T. Price. (2014). Understanding How Service-Learning Impacts the Dispositions of Teach for America Candidates and Their Students. *Journal of the National Association for Alternative Certification*, 9(1), 14-31. Available: <http://www.jnaac.com/index.php/test/article/view/123>

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# Understanding How Service-Learning Impacts the Dispositions of Teach for America Candidates and Their Students

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## *Abstract*

*This article is based on a study that assessed Teach for America (TFA) candidates' dispositions toward service-learning before and after they developed and implemented a service-learning project with their students. This article may be used to understand the significance of raising alternative certification teacher candidates' community awareness so that they may stay longer as teachers while also becoming more acculturated to their school and neighborhood surroundings. The authors assert that candidates will become more effective through carefully planned service-learning experiences with community partners and become better service and public education advocates.*

Keywords: *alternative certification, service-learning*

Please contact the first author for all correspondence regarding the content of this article.

For many years, K-12 schools have embraced the idea of requiring service-learning hours for graduation (Carter, Swedeen, & Moss, 2012; Malone, 2008). In recent years, higher education has institutionalized service-learning and community awareness into their strategic plans and mission statements (Hatcher & Erasmus, 2008; Taggart & Crisp, 2011; Truschel & Reedy, 2009). As a pedagogy, service-learning has been introduced into many teacher education programs as a means to motivate and involve K-12 students in their learning (Chambers & Lavery, 2012; Colby, Bercaw, Clark, & Galiardi, 2009; Stenhouse & Jarrett, 2012).

In 2007, faculty at the Chicago-area university in this study launched an initiative to incorporate service-learning pedagogy into the university's teacher education programs. The Secondary Education Program created a pilot for its Teach for America (TFA) Alternative Certification Program, which involved TFA candidates<sup>1</sup> developing and implementing a service-learning project with their students. TFA has a philosophy that, in order to affect education reform, it is necessary for high performing teachers to serve at schools in urban and impoverished rural areas (Higgins, Robison, Weiner, & Hess, 2011; Teach for America, 2008, 2009). Service-learning seems to be aligned with this part of the organization's mission.

The Secondary Education Program attempted to use service-learning as a bridge for sustaining TFA candidates' teaching residency in schools and neighborhoods that were often unlike the ones from which they originated. Since service-learning was based on community initiatives and partnerships that included contact and involvement with the surrounding community, it challenged TFA candidates to look beyond the violence and/or poverty to examine and explore creative and innovative ways through which they could connect not only themselves and their subject area, but also their students to the surrounding community.

As faculty associated with developing the pilot, the authors wanted to encourage TFA candidates to develop and implement worthwhile service-learning projects that would contribute significantly to improvements in their instructional practices, growth in their dispositional knowledge and learning of their students. Within the TFA seminar courses, service-learning pedagogy was promoted as: 1) meaningful experience, 2) learning-by-doing, and 3) social justice. The aim was for TFA candidates to improve their dispositions in utilizing service-learning pedagogy in their current and future middle and secondary classrooms. However, during the initial phase of this pilot, there was resistance by TFA candidates to adding a service-learning project to their seminar course curriculum.

When the service-learning project was piloted as a requirement of the TFA seminar course during the 2007-2008 academic year, it became evident that TFA candidates had an inaccurate understanding of what service-learning involved, the benefits of using service-learning projects in their classrooms, and the time constraints associated with implementing service-learning projects. This misunderstanding initially caused them to resist completing the project. Yet, by the end of the seminar course and pilot in 2008 and after completing a service-learning project, it appeared that many of the TFA candidates' attitudes toward the project changed for the better. The focus of this article is to share findings regarding TFA teacher candidates' beliefs concerning the value of service-learning in their classrooms.

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<sup>1</sup> These individuals were current TFA corps members, and candidates in the university's alternative certification program, thus referred to in this paper as candidates.

During the 2008-2009 academic year, the authors decided to develop a service-learning study. The purpose of this study was to assess TFA candidates' dispositions or attitudes toward service-learning before and after they developed and implemented a service-learning project with their students. A pre- and post-survey instrument was used to evaluate shifts in TFA candidates' understanding and dispositions regarding service-learning. The researchers also utilized other tools such as video narratives/testimonials, TFA candidates' service-learning project presentations, and reflections written by the TFA candidates' middle and high school students to measure dispositional shifts in TFA candidates regarding service-learning. All of these tools were used to gather data concerning the impact of service-learning on the dispositions of TFA candidates and their students.

### **Review of Literature**

The authors examined literature concerning TFA in relation to its prospective candidates' and/or current corps members' dispositions. The literature revealed some information concerning teacher effectiveness but very little evidence regarding TFA candidates' dispositions on service-learning.

Heilig and Jez (2010) examined several peer reviewed studies regarding the effectiveness of TFA candidates compared to traditional teacher candidates. The results, as shown across the spectrum of case studies they examined, were inconclusive at best. From at least one case study, teacher experience is considered to be the key factor to improving student gains regardless of whether the teacher was TFA educated or traditionally educated by a school of education. Indeed, in one instance, taken from a case study in Houston, TFA candidates are found to have performed less effectively than traditionally educated teachers (Heilig & Jez, 2010).

Other studies noted, however, that TFA candidates compared favorably with traditionally educated teachers in regard to raising K-12 students' mathematics scores (Decker, Mayer, & Glazerman, 2004). Retention has consistently been found to be the biggest problem in TFA (at least from the perspective of cost and from placing teachers for long term appointments). In a New York case study, "only 15% of the TFA teachers remained, while 67% of the college educated teachers stayed" (Heilig & Jez, 2010, p. 7). However, Higgins et al. (2011) found that "the degree to which TFA has succeeded in producing dynamic, impassioned, and entrepreneurial education leaders" (p. 19), suggests that, although many TFA candidates leave the classroom after two years, several are making "outsized" impact as educational entrepreneurs or entrepreneurial leaders in educational organizations (p. 25). However, these educational entrepreneurs or leaders often advocate for the privatization of public education which is based on the business/marketing concept (Johnson, 2012).

The philosophical orientation of TFA needs to be considered because the organization does not ask its teacher candidates to commit to more than two years, and the turnover rate is expected to be high, even by its own advocates (Heilig & Jez, 2010). Most relevant to this study is the "social justice" claim of the organization. This claim assumes that TFA corps and/or cohorts, teachers, and alumni will ultimately benefit society as a whole because they are highly qualified, and they will contribute greatly to the educational improvement of urban and rural children

through their temporary yet productive teaching experience (Higgins et al., 2011; Teach for America, 2008, 2009).

Yet, while TFA's mission is service-oriented, "it does not appear to result in higher levels of civic activity for TFA alumni than otherwise observed in like-minded individuals" (Helieg & Jez, p. 10). Hopkins (2008) suggested that the TFA program could be improved through a more focused residency. Although TFA is diligent in recruiting corps members who already have a strong background in community service, McAdam and Brandt (2009) found that "on all seven dimensions of civic life, service, civic activity, institutional politics, social movements, voting, charitable giving and pro-social employment, the graduates lag significantly behind one or both comparison groups" (p. 954-55).

One of the main focuses of the secondary TFA Alternative Certification Program in this study is to use service-learning experiences in order to bridge the gap between academic theory and practice in the field. The service-learning projects help to develop TFA candidates' disposition toward making a difference in the community, becoming aware of the needs of the community, and engaging in community-based initiatives, which will, in turn, help them better serve their students.

A purpose of this article is to contribute to understanding the significance of raising the community awareness of alternative certification teacher candidates so that they will stay longer in their original school placements so as to acquire more teaching experience while becoming more acculturated to their school and neighborhood surroundings. Based on the results of this study, the authors believe that TFA candidates, as well as teacher candidates involved in other alternative certification programs, can become more effective through carefully planned service-learning experiences with community partners that encourage them to develop culturally relevant pedagogies, and perhaps become the service and public education advocates they are supposed to be.

Academic service-learning is a powerful tool, yet frequently misunderstood. According to Callahan, Diez, and Ryan (2001), "P-16 faculty [and teacher candidates] unfamiliar with service-learning often consider it synonymous with community service and think of it as a 'feel good' add-on that supports the development of P-16 students' positive dispositions toward the community" (p. 63). Service-learning is a means to educate teacher candidates and K-12 students on how to be engaged members of a democratic society. Through service-learning, "education [becomes] relevant in the classroom and in the larger community. Math, science, social studies, languages, literature, the arts—all are applied, used, and placed in contexts where they really matter" (Kaye, 2004, p. 2). As a result, according to Dowell (2008), pre-service [and in-service] teachers' dispositions and appreciation of diversity and culturally responsive approaches to teaching should increase.

Renner, Price, Keen, and Little (2004) stated that one of the problems associated with teacher education curricula is that teachers "who will be expected to create and supervise service-learning projects remain largely unprepared to do so because they have not been exposed to service-learning in teacher education" (p.139). They also said, "many teachers 'trained' in our universities seem ill-equipped to deal with issues of social difference in classrooms..." (p. 139).

Stoddard, Braun, Dukes, and Koorland (2007) affirmed that teacher candidates should possess the dispositions considered necessary for entering the field of education. However, measuring these dispositions are not as straightforward as measuring pedagogy and content knowledge. Teacher preparation programs must influence professional behavior by planned experiences in alternative certification programs as well (p. 29).

Teacher candidates in the TFA program in this study are required to integrate service-learning into their curriculum in the 6th through 12th grade classrooms in which they are placed. In the secondary education curricula for the Chicago Public School District, community service is a critical component and requirement for adolescents. However, by using service-learning pedagogy, TFA candidates become knowledgeable and trained:

- in taking the notion of community service to a higher and more meaningful experience for urban youth;
- in implementing and requiring service-learning projects from their students;
- as agents for change in traditionally underserved school settings; and
- in understanding how service-learning projects develop a better understanding of cross curricular connections and greater empathy for the inner city youth that they encounter in their classrooms.

During their year-long seminar course, TFA candidates learn firsthand the power of what service-learning can do for inner city youth.

Singh and Stoloff (2008) said, “According to NCATE (2006), *dispositions* are values, commitments, and professional ethics that influence a *teacher's* behavior toward his/her students, families, colleagues, and communities,” (p. 1169); and dispositions also affect students’ learning, motivation, and development. Service-learning projects have become a crucial component of the commitment to social justice and urban schooling in the secondary alternative certification program in this study. Through these projects, TFA candidates learn how to provide their students with the opportunity to voice their ideas regarding issues in their communities. TFA candidates are able to build self-esteem and self-awareness for their own students through service-learning projects as depicted in their students’ reflections on their experiences with their service-learning project. At the end of the academic year, TFA candidates have the opportunity to present to their peers and school community in a university-wide symposium what they developed, implemented, and learned through their service-learning experiences.

## Methodology

The authors are teacher educators who have conducted research using anecdotal service-learning tools to survey the dispositions of TFA candidates who are already placed in high-need schools in a major urban, inner-city school district. The authors gained insight in doing this type of study from literature on “mixed methods” research. The particular methodology used included a survey design with a survey instrument that was provided by the university’s *Service-Learning Faculty Manual* (Lukenchuk, Jagla, & Eigel, 2008) as well as interviews and written reflections. Information regarding the reliability and validity for this survey tool was not provided. However, the questions from the tool were used to gather information about the TFA candidates’ attitudes toward service-learning. This article documents the analysis of the data that were collected and



aggregated from administering an initial and final service-learning survey instrument for the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 academic years.

### *Methods*

The anecdotal research tools used were particularly helpful for gathering, studying, and disseminating the findings of what educational researchers Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) call “teacher knowledge,” or that critical knowledge which is generated as a result of thinking about the knowledge *of* teacher practice. The researchers believed that TFA candidates came into their secondary alternative program with dispositions that were developed through their process of acceptance into the program. Therefore, a unique opportunity and responsibility existed to make transparent and to critically reflect on those dispositions as they related to service-learning in the inner-city schools where the TFA candidates were completing their residency. Mixed methods research provided the most appropriate means to gauge dispositional shifts because “the combination of qualitative and quantitative data provide[d] a more complete picture by noting trends and generalizations as well as in-depth knowledge of participants’ perspectives” (Creswell & Clark, 2007, p. 29).

Unlike teacher candidates in the traditional certification program who attend a seminar course for only one term, TFA candidates are enrolled in a seminar course that spans three terms or one academic year. TFA candidates are responsible for developing and implementing a service-learning project with their students in an urban school setting during their year-long seminar course. A major part of this experience is to develop TFA candidates’ ability to reflect on the impact of their service-learning project. Jagla and Karlin (2010) found that “reflection is a major element of service-learning, which helps distinguish it from community service” (p. 7).

Additionally, Jagla and Karlin (2010) found that the TFA candidates perceived their service-learning experience as largely successful. Reflections from these teacher candidates highlight:

- excitement and motivation for wanting to do the project again the following year;
- recommendations for completing the service-learning project in a more efficient manner by considering and allowing more planning time;
- steps for learning the pedagogy and process for implementing service-learning;
- reciprocal benefits to their students and community organizations;
- integration of the curriculum across various subject areas; and
- greater and more direct involvement of their students in the project (Jagla & Karlin, 2010).

In the TFA seminar course, teacher candidates learned about developing and implementing a service-learning project in the four stages (i.e., preparation, action, reflection, and demonstration) based on six essential elements: integrated learning, meeting genuine needs, youth voice and choice, collaborative efforts, reciprocity, and civic responsibility (Kaye, 2004). Various templates were available for them throughout this process as tools to implementing the four stages and targeting the six essential elements. TFA candidates were responsible for selecting one of the secondary classes they taught in order to develop and implement a service-learning project with the students. The researchers stressed the need for youth voice and participation at all stages of the service-learning project. Some of the projects that TFA candidates and their students developed included examining the quality of water in Lake Michigan to provide information to the city’s water department, developing a community garden in partnership with a

food bank, and conducting research in order to provide recommendations to the administration for improving the nutritional value of the food offered in a school's cafeteria. Each month, TFA candidates reported back and received feedback from their peers and seminar course instructor on the progression of their project. TFA candidates understood that they had to illustrate how the project supported their students' learning of and engagement with the subject area(s).

### *Survey Instrument*

The university's service-learning team developed a faculty manual that encouraged the integration of service-learning pedagogy into curricula as a means to strengthen teacher candidates' preparation for the teaching field. The service-learning faculty manual included a pre-and post- service-learning survey (Lukenchuk, Jagla, & Eigel, 2008) which was used as a source for questions to determine dispositional shifts in TFA candidates.

A major portion of time was devoted in the TFA seminar course to understanding service-learning pedagogy as well as to developing and implementing a service-learning project which had to be completed with one of the TFA candidate's middle or high school classes. Data on shifts in TFA candidates' dispositions were collected during the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 academic years. An initial and final service-learning survey was administered to determine changes in TFA candidates' attitudes before and after completing a service-learning project with their students. The initial survey consisted of 19 items whereas the final survey consisted of 26 items. The first 19 items were similar on both the initial and final survey instrument. The additional seven items on the final survey instrument focused on TFA candidates' overall satisfaction regarding the service-learning project. Each item on the survey was rated based on the Likert Scale: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree.

### *Samples*

All of the data collected for this study focused on TFA secondary corps members, one cohort from 2008-2009 and another cohort from 2009-2010. In the TFA cohort for the 2008-2009 academic year, there were 80 teacher candidates who started the seminar course of which 28 were males and 52 were females. The racial/ethnic breakdown of these 80 TFA candidates was: 66 White, three African American, four Asian, four Latin/Hispanic, and three non-declared. The academic subject area background of this cohort was 30 Biology, 25 English, 13 Mathematics, six Physical Science (all six Chemistry), and six Foreign Language. Out of 80 candidates, 75 TFA candidates from this cohort successfully completed the requirements for the secondary alternative certification program.

In the TFA cohort for the 2009-2010 academic year, there were 57 teacher candidates who started the seminar course of which 25 were males and 32 were females. Of these 57 candidates the racial/ethnic breakdown was as follows: 41 White, two African American, 11 Asian, two Latin/Hispanic and one non-declared. The academic subject area background of this cohort was 26 Biology, 10 English, 12 Mathematics, nine Physical Science (one Environmental Science, six Chemistry, and two Physics). Out of 57 candidates, 50 TFA candidates from this cohort successfully completed the requirements for the secondary alternative certification program.

The initial survey was administered to both TFA cohorts who were required to complete it during the first class meeting of the TFA seminar course. However, due to candidates dropping



out of the program and a few others failing to complete the final survey, there were smaller numbers of TFA candidates completing the final survey. Additionally, some of the data in the findings represented in Tables 1 through 12 may not add to 100 percent due to rounding error.

### Findings

Out of the 19 and 26 items on the initial and final survey, respectively, the authors selected the 12 items that specifically targeted TFA candidates' dispositions (i.e., attitudes and feelings) toward service-learning. The data for these 12 items are represented in Tables 1 through 12.

Table 1 illustrates the overall disposition of TFA candidates towards service-learning which was the primary focus of piloting the service-learning project in the TFA seminar course. The data in this table are based on the following statement: "I would have learned more from the course if more time was spent in the classroom instead of doing service-learning." For each of the two academic years, there was an increase from the initial to the final survey in the percentages of TFA candidates who disagreed with this survey item. In other words, by the end of each academic year, there was a positive shift in TFA candidates' dispositions towards doing service-learning in their classrooms.

Table 1

*I Would Have Learned More from the Course If More Time Was Spent in the Classroom Instead of Doing Service-Learning*

Ratings	<u>2008-2009</u>		<u>2009-2010</u>	
	Initial	Final	Initial	Final
Strongly Agree	4%	7%	13%	7%
Agree	17%	10%	34%	24%
Neutral	48%	24%	43%	30%
Disagree	27%	46%	9%	33%
Strongly Disagree	6%	12%	0%	4%

Another example of how the disposition of TFA candidates changed is represented in Table 2. The data in this table is based on the following statement: "I feel I have a responsibility to serve in my community." Before TFA candidates implemented their service-learning project, 12 percent and 21 percent were neutral about their feelings to serve in the community during the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 academic years, respectively. After completing their service-learning project, most of the TFA teacher candidates strongly agreed or agreed that they have a responsibility to serve the community.

The data in Table 2 are promising considering that a goal of the service-learning project is to help TFA candidates realize that they have a responsibility to serve in their students' community. Overall, the total percentages on the initial and final survey for both academic years show a positive dispositional shift which may reflect the impact of the service-learning pedagogy on helping TFA candidates rethink their attitudes about serving in the community.

Table 2  
*I Feel I Have a Responsibility to Serve in My Community*

Ratings	<u>2008-2009</u>		<u>2009-2010</u>	
	Initial	Final	Initial	Final
Strongly Agree	29%	67%	25%	57%
Agree	57%	30%	49%	43%
Neutral	12%	1%	21%	0%
Disagree	3%	1%	4%	0%
Strongly Disagree	0%	0%	0%	0%

Table 3 represents how TFA candidates felt working in the community defined their personal strengths and weaknesses. The data in this table are based on the following statement: “Working in the community helped me define my personal strengths and weaknesses.” The data for both academic years indicated that there is a positive shift as more than half of the candidates realized that they possess certain strengths or limitations as a result of implementing a service-learning project.

Table 3  
*Working in the Community Helped Me Define my Personal Strengths and Weaknesses*

Ratings	<u>2008-2009</u>		<u>2009-2010</u>	
	Initial	Final	Initial	Final
Strongly Agree	9%	9%	4%	20%
Agree	38%	42%	42%	43%
Neutral	39%	39%	43%	24%
Disagree	13%	7%	9%	13%
Strongly Disagree	1%	1%	2%	0%

In Table 4 an interesting shift is highlighted in TFA candidates’ dispositions. The data in this table are based on the following statement: “I became more aware of the needs of my community through the service-learning work involved in the course.” TFA candidates’ awareness of the needs in the community shows a drop in the strongly agree category, which might account for TFA candidates lack of not understanding the needs of the community from the time they started the project to its completion. In addition, since service-learning projects tend to be specific in their focus, TFA candidates’ understanding of the needs of the community would have been limited to only a small part of the community rather than the community as a whole.

Table 4

*I Became More Aware of the Needs of my Community through Service-Learning Work*

Ratings	<u>2008-2009</u>		<u>2009-2010</u>	
	Initial	Final	Initial	Final
Strongly Agree	49%	18%	37%	9%
Agree	39%	58%	51%	63%
Neutral	9%	19%	11%	22%
Disagree	1%	9%	0%	7%
Strongly Disagree	1%	0%	0%	0%

The data in Table 5 show little change in TFA candidates' dispositions from the initial to the final survey. Both tables focus on TFA candidates' involvement in the community. In Table 5, over 80 percent of TFA candidates strongly agree or agree in the final survey for both academic years that the TFA seminar course showed them how service-learning projects could be used to participate more in the community. The data in this table are based on the following statement: "Service-learning in this course showed me how I can become more involved in my community."

Table 5

*Service-Learning Showed How I Can Become More Involved in my Community*

Ratings	<u>2008-2009</u>		<u>2009-2010</u>	
	Initial	Final	Initial	Final
Strongly Agree	38%	24%	37%	17%
Agree	53%	57%	43%	70%
Neutral	6%	16%	17%	11%
Disagree	3%	3%	2%	0%
Strongly Disagree	0%	0%	0%	2%

The data in Table 6 for both academic years reflect that, by the final survey, nearly all TFA candidates felt that they can make a difference in the community. The data in this table are based on the following statement: "Most people can make a difference in their community." Although these data do not show *how* TFA candidates feel that service-learning projects help them with their involvement in the community, Tables 5 and 6 signify changes in the feelings of TFA candidates in becoming more involved and making a difference in the community as a result of this project.

Table 6  
*Most People Can Make a Difference in Their Community*

Ratings	<u>2008-2009</u>		<u>2009-2010</u>	
	Initial	Final	Initial	Final
Strongly Agree	26%	79%	60%	50%
Agree	57%	18%	30%	50%
Neutral	14%	1%	8%	0%
Disagree	1%	1%	2%	0%
Strongly Disagree	1%	0%	0%	0%

Interestingly, the data in Table 7 indicate that TFA candidates feel that the service-learning project does not help them recognize their own biases and prejudices. The data in this table are based on the following statement: “Service-learning made me aware of some of my own biases and prejudices.” One way to interpret these data is that TFA candidates may have already had a predisposition regarding their biases and prejudices. In other words, TFA candidates are probably initially aware of their biases and prejudices and, therefore, do not experience a shift in their awareness as a result of completing a service-learning project. Another way to interpret these data is that TFA candidates may have felt that they had no biases or prejudices before or after conducting a service-learning project.

Table 7  
*Service-Learning Made Me Aware of Some of my Own Biases and Prejudices*

Ratings	<u>2008-2009</u>		<u>2009-2010</u>	
	Initial	Final	Initial	Final
Strongly Agree	26%	7%	9%	11%
Agree	57%	25%	66%	30%
Neutral	14%	31%	21%	33%
Disagree	1%	36%	4%	22%
Strongly Disagree	1%	0%	0%	4%

The overall data from the final survey in Table 8 show that 97% of TFA candidates from the 2008-2009 academic year and 100% of TFA candidates from the 2009-2010 academic year are comfortable working with cultures other than their own. The data in this table are based on the following statement: “I am comfortable working with cultures other than my own.”

Table 8

*I am Comfortable Working with Cultures Other than My Own*

Ratings	<u>2008-2009</u>		<u>2009-2010</u>	
	Initial	Final	Initial	Final
Strongly Agree	26%	69%	53%	59%
Agree	57%	28%	43%	41%
Neutral	14%	3%	4%	0%
Disagree	1%	0%	0%	0%
Strongly Disagree	1%	0%	0%	0%

The last four items on the final survey focus on TFA candidates' overall satisfaction with various aspects of the service-learning project with their own students. Since these items are included only on the final survey, they are not used to examine shifts in TFA candidates' attitudes but to illustrate their overall dispositions regarding these four items. The four additional final survey items target TFA candidates: a) new knowledge and skills, b) community partnership and management, and c) overall satisfaction.

In Table 9, the data indicate that over 60% of TFA candidates from the 2008-2009 academic year and over 50% of TFA candidates from the 2009-2010 academic year strongly agree or agree that they are excited about the new knowledge and skills they developed as a result of implementing a service-learning project. The data in this table are based on the following statement: "I found developing new knowledge and skills through the service-learning in this class to be exciting."

Table 9

*I Found Developing New Knowledge and Skills through Service-Learning to be Exciting*

Ratings	<u>2008-2009</u>		<u>2009-2010</u>	
	Initial	Final	Initial	Final
Strongly Agree	N/A	4%	N/A	13%
Agree	N/A	61%	N/A	43%
Neutral	N/A	27%	N/A	35%
Disagree	N/A	7%	N/A	9%
Strongly Disagree	N/A	0%	N/A	0%

Tables 10 and 11 show positive results regarding TFA candidates' feelings about community participation and working with community partners. In Table 10, the data are based on the following statement: "The community participation aspect of this course was well-managed by the community partner." Over 50% of TFA candidates from the 2008-2009 academic year and over 60% of TFA candidates from the 2009-2010 academic year indicate that they developed a positive relationship with a community partner during their service-learning project. These feelings are further supported by the data in Table 11 in which over 50% of TFA candidates from both academic years highlight that they would work with their community partner again. The data in this table are based on the following statement: "I would recommend working with this community partner again."

Table 10

*The Community Participation Aspect was Well-Managed by Community Partner*

Ratings	<u>2008-2009</u>		<u>2009-2010</u>	
	Initial	Final	Initial	Final
Strongly Agree	N/A	16%	N/A	15%
Agree	N/A	43%	N/A	52%
Neutral	N/A	30%	N/A	30%
Disagree	N/A	4%	N/A	2%
Strongly Disagree	N/A	1%	N/A	0%

Table 11

*I Would Recommend Working with this Community Partner*

Ratings	<u>2008-2009</u>		<u>2009-2010</u>	
	Initial	Final	Initial	Final
Strongly Agree	N/A	21%	N/A	11%
Agree	N/A	36%	N/A	41%
Neutral	N/A	31%	N/A	48%
Disagree	N/A	3%	N/A	0%
Strongly Disagree	N/A	0%	N/A	0%

Finally, in Table 12, there is a strong indication that the service-learning project is a great addition to the TFA seminar course. The data in this table are based on the following statement: "Overall, I would rate this part of the course as excellent." Over 60% and 50% of TFA candidates in the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 academic years, respectively, strongly agree or agree with this statement.

Table 12

*I would Rate this part of the Course as Excellent*

Ratings	<u>2008-2009</u>		<u>2009-2010</u>	
	Initial	Final	Initial	Final
Strongly Agree	N/A	13%	N/A	13%
Agree	N/A	48%	N/A	41%
Neutral	N/A	28%	N/A	33%
Disagree	N/A	9%	N/A	13%
Strongly Disagree	N/A	1%	N/A	0%

### Conclusions

The authors conclude that service-learning projects do indeed make a difference in the dispositions of TFA candidates in using service-learning in their classroom. The data in Tables 1 through 12 regarding dispositional shifts in TFA candidates show encouraging results. According to Renner et al. (2004),



...the type of multicultural education we seek in our schools/colleges of education (and substantially in our local classrooms) [should involve] a critical project that examines and eventually undermines current power differentials toward the promotion of a more equitable, just, and caring society. (p. 146)

Since TFA candidates in the secondary alternative certification program were with the same team of instructors, the researchers were able to monitor the progression of their service-learning projects. These projects demonstrate how service-learning can be used in different urban school settings to support middle and high school students' learning and academic engagement in various subject areas as well as promote and sustain students' community awareness.

Ponder, Veldt, and Lewis-Ferrell (2011) asserted,

If school is where children are going to acquire the required skills for life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, then it is crucial for teacher educators to help classroom teachers become knowledgeable citizens who are capable of implementing a curriculum that will prepare students to be civic-minded, global, creative, and critical thinkers. (p. 46)

Service-learning pedagogy encourages teacher candidates and their students to engage in and advocate not only for their communities, but also for their educational learning and growth. This correlates with TFA's mission regarding advocacy for education reform in urban communities (Higgins et al., 2011; Teach for America, 2008, 2009). Yet, the data in Table 5 indicate that TFA candidates' perception of their own self-awareness of the community's needs dropped significantly. This may be a result of TFA candidates' over-estimation of their awareness of the community's needs. So when they were confronted with actual evidence of the community's needs through their service-learning experience, they were forced to re-evaluate their disposition concerning community awareness.

Nevertheless, TFA candidates' overall satisfaction with working with community partners and conducting a service-learning project was positive. With the success of this project as a model and catalyst for teacher candidates in alternative programs and their students to advocate for as well as contribute to the public good, the authors continue to explore ways of utilizing service-learning pedagogy in the education, training, and preparation of teacher candidates in different certification program routes.

Although developing and implementing service-learning projects can be challenging, TFA teacher candidates are acquiring a wealth of experience and will leave their program with a good conception of what these projects entail. They experience firsthand the integrative properties of service-learning pedagogy and are prepared to fine tune such ideas in their future classrooms. The extensive involvement required by the TFA candidates, through their work in their classrooms with their students, and their presentation to their colleagues and the wider community to relay the particulars of their projects, provides them with valuable knowledge and experience with service-learning as a pedagogical tool. This knowledge and experience will lead to an increase in the use of service-learning pedagogy in more classrooms which will allow more middle and high school students, along with their communities, to benefit from such civic and academically engaged learning.

## Implications for Further Research

This study has implications not only for service-learning pedagogy, but also for alternative routes to teacher certification. The findings indicate that the service-learning project as a course requirement can indeed be used to positively affect the dispositions of alternatively certified candidates. This suggests continuing to use service-learning pedagogy in teacher education courses as a whole. However, there are some questions that remain. For instance:

- Do service-learning projects increase the retention rate of TFA teacher candidates?
- Are there any differences between alternative certification and traditional certification programs in dispositional shifts based on service-learning projects/initiatives?
- Are TFA teachers still using service-learning pedagogy in their classes after their first year and to what effect?

Research addressing these questions would provide much needed literature on the impact of service-learning pedagogy on developing and sustaining high quality teachers via alternative certification programs who possess a level of community awareness and advocacy that could be revolutionary for promoting student learning and advocacy, transforming the teaching profession, and redefining public education. It is apparent that there is much more research to be done regarding the effectiveness of alternative certification programs especially considering that alternative education organizations like TFA are now able to train their own teacher candidates for certification (Foderaro, 2010). In the meantime, we expect to continue to work with TFA candidates in developing and implementing service-learning projects as an avenue for increasing their own and their students' community awareness and participation. Adding service-learning initiatives to agile alternative certification programs such as TFA could be the element to create the teachers needed for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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