



# Face-to-face: Changing future teachers through direct service learning

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*Partnerships: A Journal of Service Learning & Civic Engagement.*  
*Vol. 2, No. 2, Fall 2011*

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## Abstract

**Teachers face growing challenges in teaching diverse students, while their backgrounds and culture limit their understanding of economically disadvantaged groups, like the homeless. This qualitative study analyzed the changes in social dispositions of pre-service teachers. These pre-service teachers tutored homeless children in an urban homeless shelter as part of a direct service learning project. There were 58 pre-service teachers and 65 homeless shelter students involved in the Teacher Training with a Mission Project over five semesters. Utilizing surveys at the beginning of the study and at the end, and reflective journals of participants, data was analyzed according to changes in the following dispositions: understanding students with social needs, anticipated changes in future teaching dispositions, and anticipated changes in pedagogical approaches. Findings support the need for imbedding direct service learning into teacher preparation programs.**

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## Introduction

Teacher preparation programs have long used service learning and real-life experiences in preparing future teachers for what they will encounter in classrooms. John Dewey advocated that experiential learning and learning through community service should be employed throughout education (Brown, 2005; Dewey, 1938; Dewey 1951). The Southern Regional Educational Board first used the term "service learning" in 1969 (Stanton, Giles, and Cruz, 1999).

Pre-service teachers are transitioning from the collegiate classroom to their teaching assignments. As a result, generally these future teachers need to convert their understanding

of theory into practical applications that will work in their future schools. In addition, the pre-service teacher needs experience interacting with diverse students that may reflect the communities where they will be called to teach. These pre-service teachers have formal experiences such as fieldwork and student teaching, but teacher preparation programs are finding it valuable to add other less-formal approaches, such as those involving service learning. This trend led to the emergence of service-learning opportunities in teacher education in recent years (Donahue, Bowyer, and Rosenberg, 2003; Freeman and King, 2001). Studies indicate that future teachers who engage in service-learning activities show gains in a variety of professional attitudes, including personal development and social responsibility (Anderson, 1998; Brown, 1998). Studies indicate that students who engaged in service learning felt empowered to contribute to their communities and felt an increased sense of empathy for others (Brown, 1998; Swick and Rowls, 2000).

In teacher education, various forms of service learning have been researched, including direct, indirect, and advocacy. Freeman and King (2001) define the types of service learning as direct, indirect, and advocacy. Direct service learning involves direct face-to-face contact with those who will benefit from the service. Indirect would be at-least one level removed from face-to-face contact. Advocacy focuses on civic action for change. Anderson (1998) recommends a combination of service and academic curriculum to raise awareness of community needs. Direct service learning provides opportunities for students to gain higher levels of understanding, help teachers to be agents of change, and make a difference in the lives of a community (Sileo, Prater, Luckner, Rhine, and Rude, 1998; Swick and Rowls, 2000). Eyer and Giles (1999) researched service learning among college students. They learned that the experience added value to academic learning and provided better understanding. Briody (2005) found that service learning specifically benefitted pre-service teachers by "... becoming more aware of situations that our future students (children) will encounter..." (p. 153). Briody (2005) also found that pre-service teachers became aware of the important links between students, family, and community.

Based on the field of research into service learning and teacher preparation programs, studies indicate that service learning is intended to add a level of sensitivity to the teacher candidate (Brown, 2005). Critical studies have found White pre-service teachers tend to hold a pedestrian view of the reasons for the dramatic growth of poverty and homelessness within the US (Marx, 2004; McIntyre, 1997; Sleeter, 1993). Also in education, a study investigated pre-service teachers who tutored homeless children, Caro, Porfilio, and Valeri, (2009) documented shifts in perspective for several participants. Several of the pre-service teachers gained a deeper understanding of the issues surrounding homelessness and the impact of homelessness on student learning. In addition, they developed an understanding of how student backgrounds can significantly impact their ability to learn. Furthermore, they gained a new awareness of their responsibilities, as educators, in mitigating some of the effects of social inequities. Alternatively, the study also revealed that over half of the participants remained unchanged in

deeply held perceptions about social inequality, homelessness, and teaching for social justice. Therefore, only a potential exists for a direct service learning experience to change deep-seeded beliefs about equity and social justice.

Additionally, one of the foci of research over the past two decades has been on the types of dispositions needed for success in teaching. One subset of these dispositions relate to social dispositions necessary for future teachers to possess. Charlotte Danielson has studied this field from the standpoint of an administrator and an educator. Her research led her to publish a framework that has been widely implemented for the training of pre-service and in-service teachers. Danielson (2007) includes several social dispositions in her framework. Furthermore, several of the national accrediting bodies have developed standards related to the social dispositions desired for pre-service and in-service teachers (INTASC, 1992; ISLLC, 1996; NCATE, 2008; TEAC, 2010). Table 1 shows the alignment of social dispositions described in these five contexts.

The discussion here will follow the three main threads of changes in understanding of students with social needs, changes in future teaching dispositions, and changes in pedagogical approaches.

## Teacher Training with a Mission

Teacher Training with a Mission (TTM) was conceived to give pre-service teachers an opportunity to experience first-hand the challenges that homeless children must face during their school years. The goal was to immerse these future teachers in an environment where they would teach the children of homeless families in their communities, giving them richer experiences to help shape their teaching. TTM involved pre-service teachers from a suburban regional teacher education preparation program in the United States and engaged them in a learning project with children living in poverty in a northeastern city. TTM, developed in conjunction with a regional college, partnered with a homeless shelter to provide after-school academic tutoring and support in the city. The children staying at the shelter were part of a family life center along with their mothers. The pre-service teachers volunteered to participate and often car-pooled to the shelter. The two hour tutoring sessions were from Monday through Thursday and the pre-service teachers selected the days they wanted to tutor. The tutoring sessions offered instruction from Pre-K to high school, including help to homeless mothers who were working on adult learning programs, such as GED or career skills development, researching employment opportunities and housing. The families were socially and ethnically diverse.

**Table 1: Social Dispositions Framework for Teaching Professionals**

Disposition: Understanding the diverse learner	Descriptors	Danielson Framework for Teaching Domains	INTASC Principles	ISLLC Standards	TEAC Principles & Standards	NCATE Standards
Understanding of students with social needs	*Change in perception of students  *Empathy for students  *Understanding external factors of student behavior	1b, 1c, 2d	3, 10	4	1.3, 1.4.2	3c, 4d
Changes in future teaching dispositions	*Know your students  *Unbiased, open mind for all students  *Student lack of academic resources	1b, 1c, 1d, 2a,	2, 3,	4	1.3, 1.4.2	1g, 3c, 4d
Changes in pedagogical approaches	*Utilize multiple teaching strategies  *Individual student attention  *Diagnosing student learning issues  *Hands-on learning	1b, 1c, 1e, 3c, 3e	3, 4, 8	2	1.2	1b, 1c, 1d, 3b, 4a, 4d

## Data Collection

TTM began in the fall 2006 semester and has continued through the spring 2012. In fall 2006, six white pre-service teachers were selected for this study. They completed surveys and submitted reflections of their experiences. Each was given alias names to protect their anonymity.

Participants completed a pre-survey documenting their views on how they believe tutoring homeless children might affect them as future teachers. During tutoring, participants kept reflective journals documenting their experiences and perceived changes in their perspectives as teachers. Finally, participants completed a post-survey identical to the first except that the questions were rewritten in the past tense. The authors chose to report their responses through a series of narratives, providing in-depth views into the experience of each of the participants.

## Data Analysis

The survey data and reflections were collaboratively hand-coded according to changes in three categories within the Social Dispositions Framework (SDF). The data was analyzed according to whether the participants showed any changes with respect to:

1. Understanding of students with social needs.
2. Future teaching dispositions.
3. Future pedagogical approaches.

Narratives for each participant were developed according to these three areas. Then all the participant narratives were reviewed for emerging themes based on the SDF. From the themes conclusions were drawn.

## Results

In the constructivist qualitative research tradition, the focus on writing results is in presenting data in its rich context allowing the reader the opportunity to draw conclusions. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that credibility is the qualitative research similar to internal validity in traditional research approaches, transferability is similar to external validity, dependability is similar reliability, and confirmability is similar to objectivity. This approach (Glesne, 1999) allows for naturalistic documentation of changes. In this tradition, the report is centered on rich descriptions of changes in specific participants within a specific context rather than hypotheses about general phenomena through large data sets.

In keeping with this approach, the narrative descriptions of each the participant experiences in the Teacher Training with a Mission program is included below. These narratives are intended to be rich descriptions of these field experiences. At the end of each participant narrative a summary of the experiences pertaining to three categories of the SDF are given. Finally, the findings pull together common emerging themes found by the various participants in TTM.

### Lisa

Lisa is a white post baccalaureate student in her late 20's. She has a B.A. in literature and is pursuing a secondary certification with English as a second language (ESL) endorsement. Lisa reports that she identifies, "with the struggle as I struggled in my own life." She believes in universal and equal public education, and is concerned with the lack of equity in education in our society. She is seeking opportunities, "where I can have the most impact."

Lisa anticipated that the service learning project would help her "stop and think about where my students could be potentially be coming" before holding them to certain standards. She was concerned that this experience would make her "more disenchanting" with society. Prior to TTM, she believed that the student needs would be more non-academic. She expressed that she was there to teach and not be a social worker or a psychologist. Lisa felt it was essential for teachers to instill a sense of pride in themselves and their work. She also hoped to gain new insights into a variety of students. Lisa thought she could be a positive role model for these students. She indicates that "even the toughest kids are just kids and I care about all my kids."

At the end of the program, Lisa felt more apt to consider a student's external influence on their performance, which was important because, during the term, she found out that she was hired to teach in an urban district. She found that the needs varied greatly based on the student's ability to cope and adapt to difficulties. Lisa found that students appreciated assignments that produced a sense of accomplishment and wanted to work with a sense of community. She found the greatest weaknesses were reading and writing. She found the individualized attention was "highly motivational" for these students, in that they were "determined to please us."

Lisa observed that students in the TTM Project seemed to flourish at school. She indicated that her fieldwork was in the same district, so she saw TTM students perform at school. She noticed that their behavior improved during the semester. They were involved in fewer fights and were more attentive. They also seemed to keep up better with classroom assignments and homework. In fact, Lisa's presence at school seemed to make a difference and the administration actually called her in to help handle a situation with one of the TTM students.

She realized the need to diversify her teaching for those who may be raised in a harsher home environment. These additional topics include life skills, individual responsibility, ownership, etc.

Lisa found that the TTM experience produced in her more compassion and understanding, especially when disciplining a student. She learned to empathize with her students, but not pity them. She felt they wanted to be accountable, respected, and disciplined. Lisa also realized that she must always be “ready to learn from them.” She continued to be convinced that they needed some modeling of what is expected of them.

Lisa recalls helping a student one-on-one who was severely lacking in writing skills so that she could be more on par with her classmates. She states,

Over the course of three months I observed her change from an angry student picking fights in the halls to a confident student who could meet your eyes, not in anger or challenge, but in interest and earnest. She has gone on after graduation and is doing well in culinary school.

Lisa received practical insights into learning styles, having come in contact with a student who was more of a visual and kinesthetic learner. Lisa saw how she could use her understanding of learning styles to scaffold for stronger learning.

In more subtle ways, Lisa found ways to relate to high school students. She was counseling a student who was angry at how a disciplinary action was handled. Lisa carefully listened to the student’s side of the story and gave her advice on how to relate to authority figures. She was able to teach how this is an important skill with which the student will have to deal with all her life.

Lisa concluded with a connection of her experiences in TTM and learning theories.

I am a big believer in social constructivist theory and progressive educational philosophies. I think people construct their realities through experience and also through their social interactions. Taking this into consideration, I believe every single experience I have at TTM will result in a change in my perception in multiple facets of my constructed reality. For example ... I have not only read about the social inconsistencies that lead to the perpetual cycle of the disadvantaged, I am standing right in the middle of it. The reality is here. In turn, my perception of teaching is changed; it has actually solidified the resolve that my duty as a teacher is not just to stand in a classroom and lecture, plot, theme, protagonist, antagonist. My role is larger – to prepare students to make the transition to adulthood, to repair society from a grassroots level, to produce critical-thinking adults who will eventually participate in this world and this democracy.

### Summary for Lisa

**Understanding students with social needs** – Lisa found that students varied in their ability to cope and adapt to difficult circumstances. She found that students appreciated the sense of

accomplishment and working in a community. They were motivated by individual attention. She noted progress over the year with students less likely to get into fights and more attentive, more confident, and more sincere. She noted that many students had weaknesses in reading and writing, but also noted academic improvement during the year.

**Anticipated changes in future teaching dispositions** – Lisa found herself more apt to consider external factors on learning and saw this insight transferring to her future classroom experience. She also found herself ready to learn from these students and desiring to express empathy and respect while holding students accountable in disciplinary actions. Lisa found herself teaching a high school student various techniques for coping with authority figures in her life.

**Anticipated changes in pedagogical approaches** – Lisa found a new reality in her social constructivist approach to teaching and that is her role is to help students transition these students into adulthood through critical thinking and social consciousness. As Lisa considered the challenges facing these students, she felt a duty to teach students about individual responsibility, life skills, and ownership of their learning. Finally, Lisa gained valuable experiences with different learning styles and utilized this understanding to build scaffolding to help her students learn.

## Jason

Jason is a white male in his early 20's. He is a junior with a major in history. He anticipates getting his secondary teacher certification in history. As a result of his TTM experience, he may opt to also get his elementary certification. Jason joined TTM because he firmly believes, "...regardless of when people say 'one person can't make a difference' they couldn't be more wrong."

In joining TTM, Jason believed he would "gain a better understanding of the various different backgrounds and stories kids can come from." Before starting TTM Jason listed a number of discrete outcomes he felt he would learn from participating in TTM such as "Setting a positive example...doing homework before play, and teaching kids that it's...better to get help to learn something than it is to give up or not try." Jason also believed these children will need academic and non-academic support. Academically, "These kids need positive feedback to keep their focus and interest in school." He anticipated that the children would begin to take more pride in their school work and grades. Non-academically, Jason believed the kids' self-esteem would rise as a result of working with the tutors.

After being involved in TTM, Jason gained an understanding that teaching children sometimes involves understanding the personal backgrounds of children. He also articulated his "tremendous feeling of satisfaction" in helping children learn and grow. In joining TTM, Jason



gained an empathic and caring attitude towards children. He explains, "...I want to be the kind of teacher who has a positive influence on a kid's life. I have seen how big of a difference it makes." Academically, Jason felt the children needed someone to guide them and be there to review their mistakes and keep them motivated. Non-academically, Jason felt that the children had an opportunity to talk and play with someone who cared. "The kids got to feel like they mattered and were listened to."

Jason was surprised to find out how amicable and ready to learn the children were at the shelter. "I had been there many times and always found it amazing how positive these kids were and how well they got along..." He found the children to need someone to talk to and listen to their stories. Ultimately, Jason found all the children capable of learning. His preconceived notions that the children would not be interested in learning changed.

This experience helped me in that I now know that most, if not all kids, have the ability to learn and the ability to excel at certain things, you just have to capture their interest so they can be passionate.

Jason's empathy and caring for children was mirrored in his self initiated donation drive of school supplies and toys he created on his own time in order to give the children at the shelter the materials they needed. By joining TTM, Jason felt he learned firsthand how children develop. He also learned the importance of knowing your students. In the following example, Jason was tutoring a young girl and he explains the importance of teachers understanding and caring for their students.

She told me how much she liked cheerleading every week. One week, I sat down with her. Upon discussing academics with her, she seemed depressed....she told me she had to quit the cheerleading squad because she couldn't raise the \$20 fee for her uniform. She was so distraught. Had I been her teacher...I would have helped her....I want to be the kind of teacher who can prevent a kid from feeling that kind of pain....

Before starting TTM, Jason believed the children at the shelter would be angry, bitter, and not want to learn. After joining TTM, Jason found that the children cared about learning and could show pride for their learning as in the following example.

...I was reviewing some study information with a student. The next time I came in the child ran up to me with a big smile on his face and a paper with an A on it....it made me realize that no matter what a kid says or portrays, is important to take an active approach in educating them.

In addition to understanding the importance of motivation in learning, Jason also learned the importance of teachers being able to multitask. In the following example Jason found himself along with another tutor outnumbered five to two.

There were only two of us face with the responsibility to handle 5 kids with homework. I think that helping these kids and being forced to be in a position requiring multitasking will definitely benefit us during our teaching careers.

Jason's reflections revealed many of the realities that these children experienced. His rich accounts of their stories gave him a lens on teaching that he would not have received through his academic work in college. The impact of these stories will help him to be sensitive and understanding to children who find themselves in similar situations and how it affects their learning in school. In the following example, Jason explains a story from a child that depicts the harsh realities for some of the children he tutored in the shelter.

The girl I was working with, Shakia, a 12 year old brought up a casual topic of her favorite numbers during her math homework. She told me her favorite number was 3. She said she always wore number 3 whenever she played sports as a tribute to her twin brother, who was murdered by her father at 3 months old. Amid all of the optimism through what we do there, it's easy to forget the negative reality that these kids are faced to overcome every day.

As part of TTM, Jason developed skills in teaching children of diverse backgrounds. These characteristics are needed as he enters the field of education. He comments, "Teacher Training project (TTM) helped me immensely....I was able to see how children develop. I also benefited by learning how to control a group dynamic of children."

### Summary for Jason

**Understanding students with social needs** – Jason's preconceived notions that the children would be angry, bitter, and unmotivated to learn changed. In the midst of the many obstacles these students lived with each day, Jason found the students to be ready and motivated to learn. Jason felt that these students needed individual attention i.e. someone to talk to and listen to them. Finally, Jason found that capturing student's attention in learning can motivate students to learn.

**Anticipated changes in future teaching dispositions** – Jason learned the importance of understanding and being sensitive to the personal backgrounds of students. He found key attributes such as empathy, understanding, and caring are important in being a teacher. He also found the importance in understanding underlying issues causing student behavior. Finally, Jason is confident that he will attain academic resources for any of his future students that are in need.

**Anticipated changes in pedagogical approaches** – Jason found that individual student attention is an important strategy for helping students succeed. He also found that multitasking is important skill to have in teaching.

## Jenna

Jenna is a white senior in her late 20's. She is a psychology and elementary education major. She mentioned that she opted to participate in TTM because, "All too often families in need are overlooked." She reported that she hoped the work would be a learning experience for her as well as the children.

Jenna anticipated that the service learning project would help her understand "how life experiences can affect student's learning." She anticipated having limited resources and having to adapt teaching styles to accommodate a variety of students. At the end of the program, she reported that she learned to, "keep an open mind about the influence that home-life and community have on a child's performance in school." Jenna also saw how parents "are and are not able to help their children with homework."

She assumed that these students would need someone to listen, help, and support them both "academically and non-academically," as well as needing a positive role model. She hoped that she would be able to further their content knowledge, as well as improve their social skills and self confidence. Jenna hoped to gain insight and experience when dealing with a wide range of students.

Jenna found that students were "falling through the cracks" academically. She was surprised to find a girl who could not read and she was also surprised to find that her teacher read everything to her. In addition to academic support in reading, Jenna found that the richest benefit for children in the program was the companionship provided and the individualized instruction.

Jenna indicated that the, "TTM Project opened her eyes to the different social backgrounds of families." She also realized that every child "brings a part of their home-life into the classroom." Jenna also realized how so many of the problems these children face are interconnected. For example, she was helping a first grader in science and then realized that the child did not know how to read. She realized that her job was to provide the scaffolding of reading so that the student could begin to learn the science content from her book. An easy way out could have been to simply help the student answer the questions, but Jenna realized that the scaffolding was essential to the child's long-term learning. She reflects, "I have come to recognize some of the signs of struggling readers and how to help them do their work instead of doing it for them."

Jenna learned effective question and answer techniques to help students reason through comprehension type questions. Jenna also learned how to "reword" questions when students were struggling with open-ended questions. Finally, she learned about healthy limits on homework, "By observing the child's side of the homework scene, my beliefs were reinforced

that a student should be assigned homework that should not exceed 30 minutes per subject ...”

Jenna states, “... I set aside my pre-disposition that homeless individuals have nothing. While the families do not have the luxury of their own home, they do have support, friends, and community.” This sense of community was experienced by Jenna and others in TTM. While helping a student learn computer skills, Jenna and another pre-service teacher helped a student to decorate a bulletin board in the shelter for Halloween. In doing this interactive project, Jenna got to see how the project was being created through the child’s eyes instead of having a child follow a set of instructions. She reflects, “... I will keep in mind that students should be allowed the freedom to create based on their terms...”

### Summary for Jenna

**Understanding students with social needs** – Jenna found that without intervention, homeless students will “fall through the cracks.” Jenna noted students with reading difficulties and some students that were unable to read. The TTM experience sensitized Jenna and “opened her eyes” to diverse student populations and the interconnected issues often accompanying children living in a homeless shelter. Jenna found that students enter classrooms with home experiences that affect their learning.

**Anticipated changes in future teaching dispositions** – Jenna found that she will be more sensitive to the effects a student’s home life and community have on learning. She also found that these students needed companionship. Furthermore she learned that parents sometimes are unable to help their children complete homework. Also, Jenna found that homework should have a time limit equal to 30 minutes per subject.

**Anticipated changes in pedagogical approaches** – Jenna learned that these students needed individualized instruction and found many of the children lacked reading skills. She learned how to recognize the signs of a student struggling to read. Jenna found that when helping students it is important to use effective question and answer techniques, in some cases rewording the questions, in order to prompt students to reason through questions. Finally, Jenna learned the importance of allowing students to use their creativity during interactive projects.

### Jane

Jane is a white female in her early 20’s. She is a senior with a major in political science. She is currently working on attaining her undergraduate degree and elementary certification in teaching. Jane reported that she joined TTM because it would be “...a great way to serve my

community." She believed that her TTM experience would give her "insights" on what her future students may be experiencing.

Before participating in TTM, Jane felt that the experience would help her gain insights on the plight of some of her future students. In particular, "If a child is constantly sleepy, unmotivated, or continuously has incomplete homework I may, now, look into the reasons why this is the case instead of assuming lack of interest." She also felt her instructional strategies would change as a result of her TTM experience. She believed that the children would need individual instruction and positive relationships.

At the end of the program, Jane reported that the TTM experience prepared her to work with disruptive and unmotivated behavior with an unassuming lens and the motivation to mine down into a child's underperformance instead of assuming they are "lazy or unmotivated." Furthermore, in dealing with future students who engage in disruptive behavior, Jane will consider alternate reasons for disruptive behavior. She states, "I learned to not pass judgment when I am a teacher. I will now, hopefully, always consider a student's situation before I label them as the 'disruptive' kid in the class." Jane also found that TTM made her more sensitive and aware of students that may have obstacles to learning. She states, "...when I am creating lesson plans...I will make modifications for time to work with them individually."

As with Jason, Jane had preconceived notions that the children at the shelter would be bitter and angry towards them. She found the opposite to be true. She stated, "Generally, these children are just like those living in 'regular' conditions, but there is a difference. I've noticed that these children seem to be more grateful for our help and protective of each other." Jane also reported that she had become aware of individual differences.

Jane's experience in TTM has given her some insights on the caring and empathy that all teachers need to be successful. Her experiences have given her the impetus to always consider each child as an individual, especially when they are not performing in class. She also found that it is important to be sensitive to children who come from less than traditional homes.

In working with...children, I know that as a teacher I will want to find out my students' living situations as soon as possible. By doing this, I will be able to have a perspective on their learning and try to instill background knowledge that they may not have because I will not know if they are receiving attention at home.

Jane supplements her desire to be more aware of her future students with the knowledge that she will not assume that her future students will have similar backgrounds. She states,

I feel that these sessions are helping me with my understanding of people. Especially now that I am in my introductory semester of the education program, I no longer assume that everyone comes from a similar situation to mine. I look at each student as

individuals instead of a group of children. I feel this lesson is most important as a future teacher.

Jane also learned that teachers need to be sensitive to workload and give homework that is relevant and value added. For example, Jane explains, "In working with this child, I noticed that teachers assign work that is completely too time consuming. Her homework seemed like it was more busy work than actually helpful to her learning."

### Summary for Jane

**Understanding students with social needs** – Jane also had learned that these students were not bitter or angry for being in the homeless shelter as she anticipated they would be. Her experience sensitized her to the obstacles to learning her future students will come to class with.

**Anticipated changes in future teaching dispositions** – Jane found the importance of understanding the background of students and the reality that students do not come into class with the same home environment and experiences. She found that it is important to provide more caring and empathy for students that are disruptive or unmotivated to learn and to look for alternative reasons for students behavior.

**Anticipated changes in pedagogical approaches** – Jane found the importance of individual instruction in helping students learn. She learned the importance of modifying instruction to accommodate students with social needs. Finally, she learned to be sensitive to the amount of homework a teacher assigns in addition to whether the homework is value added or busy work.

### Sarah

Sarah is a white senior sociology and anthropology major along with elementary education and Spanish. Sarah is in her early 20's. Sarah indicated that she had wanted to tutor for a while and was happy when this opportunity presented itself. She reports, "I will be honored to be able to help these children." She felt the experience would give her perspective, indicating, "Students like these could be in my classroom someday."

At the outset, Sarah believed that this experience would help her learn to "teach different types of students." Regarding needs, she felt that they would have a need to know someone "cares enough to take the time to help them." Sarah hoped that, in addition to learning more content, she hoped students would grow in their confidence and self esteem.

At the end of her semester in TTM, Sarah still listed, "learning to deal with students that have different backgrounds," as a benefit and added, "not assuming that a child has a certain

background or home life." She reports that she will be "more receptive to diversity." She notes that the students appreciated the companionship while they were doing their homework. Sarah found that the parents did not understand their children's homework. She felt that made her a great resource for these students. In particular she found these students needed help with their computer projects.

Sarah noticed that one little girl who always dressed very nicely as did her mother. The girl seemed to attend parochial school and seemed quite capable. She didn't need as much tutoring, but enjoyed the companionship of Sarah. When Sarah first saw the mother, she concluded that she must be a worker at the shelter because of her dress and demeanor. Seeing how "together" this child and mother were gave Sarah a whole new perspective on homelessness. She recalled, "Knowing that this girl who was so smart and well put together and homeless, totally changed my stereotyped perspective of someone who is homeless."

As mentioned previously, Sarah observed that often times students didn't look homeless. This had an impact on her as she plans to teach. In her words, "I realize that as a teacher, you never really know what a child's life is like, so you should not assume you do."

Sarah also noticed that there were times that students were required to do a computer project for their class. She realized that without her help, there was no way this child could have done this project. She connects this to teaching.

I think some teachers these days might assume that everyone has a computer at home and can easily complete electronic assignments. To a teacher, it may look like the student just didn't do the assignment when really they couldn't do it because they didn't have the resources. Now as a teacher I will be more understanding of students in different situations.

Sarah's experience in TTM has grounded her understanding of the importance of using technology in teaching. Sarah explains:

One of the mothers, who is working on getting her GED was asking us for help finding Language Arts practice online for her GED test as well. The computers are definitely making a difference in these people's lives. Honestly, I don't know what we would do if it weren't for them. The children and their mothers are getting such a great education from having access to them. I've seen progress in some of the children already; I can't wait to see how much there will be in the weeks to come!

She gained a whole new awareness of diversity that goes beyond external characteristics. Sarah reflected,

I always thought that I would be able to tell if a child was homeless, but after last week, I realize that is not true. Most of the children I saw were actually dressed very nicely; nicer than other children I teach who I know are not in the same situation. Knowing that, I cannot tell by a child's outside appearance what kind of life they have...I will never make assumptions about a child's home life.

Sarah was also thankful for the diversity of learners in TTM, "I feel like I'm becoming more diversified and learning to teach to different levels and personalities." The experience gave her an opportunity to practice the craft of teaching.

I also practiced explaining the concepts in a student's homework to her, which is, obviously, a big part of being a teacher. Sometimes people (the teachers) understand the material, but the hard part is explaining it to the child (student). I think that's something you cannot always learn in a (education) classroom, but need to experience firsthand and practice with children.

### Summary for Sarah

**Understanding students with social needs** – Sarah found it important as a future teacher not to stereotype homeless students based on how they dress and their academic abilities. In particular, she found many of the students to dress quite well and some did not need academic tutoring. This was counter to Sarah's original belief. She felt that it is important to not stereotype students and to not make assumptions about the backgrounds of students.

**Anticipated changes in future teaching dispositions** – Sarah acknowledged the importance of learning how to deal with students with social needs. She also learned that the reason for some student's not completing their homework could be as a result of their parent's inability to help their child complete it. She found herself to be more receptive to diversity. She learned that teachers should never make assumptions or stereotype students. She found she will not assume students have access to computers and other resources at home and will be more understanding to students without these resources.

**Anticipated changes in pedagogical approaches** – Sarah found her work in helping parents and students use the computers solidified her belief of the importance in using technology in learning. Sarah found her experience to make her more prepared to teach to a diversity of learners and felt her experience really helped her bridge the theory to practice of teaching and learning. Finally, she found the practice of explaining concepts to students to be valuable.

### Julie

Julie is a white female in her early 20's. She is majoring in mathematics and is looking forward to attaining her elementary certification. Prior to starting TTM, Julie, as with the other five



tutors, reported that she wanted to make a difference in the lives of these children. She wanted to "...guide them in the right direction and realize that education can be fun, as well as very important to their future." She hoped that by joining TTM she could "...change and help at least one of the kids....In return, I will learn how to deal with children in these horrible circumstances...."

Julie joined TTM in order to become more aware and understanding of kids that may have very disruptive home lives. She states, "I think it will reflect my teaching in the future because I will be more aware that some kids come from really bad situations...." Julie anticipates that her experience will sensitize her to the reasons that cause learning problems and behavioral problems.

At the end of the program, Julie did not find the children to be disruptive as she believed they would be prior to joining TTM. She realized that some of these children did not want to do their homework because it was too hard, not because of their home environment. She found that with patience and entertaining activities she was able to help them learn. She reported that the children had obstacles in completing their homework as they did not have access to needed resources.

Julie also shared her reaction to one of several stories told by the young homeless mothers residing at the shelter and how it has changed her perception of teaching:

Another shocking incident was a young woman telling me a story how she got stabbed by her boyfriend because she told him that she was pregnant. That made me really think that you don't know what kind of situations that these homeless kids have been in. and there is a reason that they may have problems. As a teacher you need to be patient and understanding because they may let out some of their anger in different ways....A teachers job doesn't end when school gets out, you need to be willing to go the extra mile in order to better educate the future.

As a future teacher, Julie revealed she has become more aware that not all students that show up for class will come from a stable home life. She states, "It (TTM) has helped me to open my eyes and see that when I become a teacher I have to realize that not every student has a great home life...." Furthermore, Julie found that it is important to get to know your students in order to help them when they are having trouble learning. She states,

As a teacher it is very important to get to know your students and pick up on any problems that you may see. Whether it be their learning style, or a problem with reading or math. The quicker you pick up on it, the quicker you can help.

Julie's experience within TTM has significantly impacted her views on teaching. She has become aware of the effects a child's home life can have on their learning.

In the following example, Julie explains the complex process of correctly diagnosing a problem in learning:

One time I was tutoring a 1<sup>st</sup> grade girl, Victoria, and she was having a real problem with reading. At first I thought that she was memorizing words because when I would ask her to read a sentence for me a few minutes later, she was mixing them up. After a few more sessions, I realized that she struggles, but it isn't memorization, she just needs to put more time into sounding out words...We took it word by word until I knew she was ok with that exercise.

Julie also reported the importance of having multiple teaching strategies as a teacher. She comments:

To be able to change your style of teaching according to their needs is another thing that I have learned. Some of the girls understood me right away, and some didn't so I needed to approach the subject differently until they were able to understand.

### Summary for Julie

**Understanding of students with social needs** – Julie found these students were not disruptive and unmotivated to learn as she previously believed. Some of these students did not do their homework because it was too difficult and not as a result of their home life. Julie found it important to understand that students can come from very non-traditional homes and bring with them very non-traditional experiences and stories. Julie found that she will be more understanding and spend more time with students with social needs.

**Changes in future teaching dispositions** – Julie found it important to understand and get to know your students. She learned that a child's home life and lack of resources does affect their ability to learn.

**Changes in pedagogical approaches** – Julie found the early diagnosis of learning problems is very important in helping students learn. She also learned the importance of having multiple teaching strategies in helping students learn.

### Findings

The authors gathered together the common threads from the narratives for the various participants. These were organized into the findings for this study. These themes followed

three distinct trends: understanding students with special needs, anticipated changes in future dispositions, and anticipated changes in pedagogical approaches.

### Understanding students with social needs

Common themes emerged. Several participants indicated that their students needed individual attention. They suggested that the need for this attention went beyond academic needs, but extended to a personal need for connection. Participants also suggested that the students seemed remarkably motivated to learn. This surprised some participants because they presumed deficits for these students. Presumed deficits included beliefs that these students would be academically unmotivated, emotionally troubled, poorly dressed, and negative in attitude. Participants noted that they became sensitized to student obstacles to learning and the social needs of students. They also became more aware of how difficult it must be to keep academically focused while living at a homeless shelter. They learned to not make too many assumptions about the backgrounds of their students.

### Anticipated changes in future teaching dispositions

Understanding your students and the external factors that affect student learning and behavior were two of the common themes that emerged. Participants learned that their stereotypes of students (e.g. dress, academic ability, behavior) inhibited their initial capability to connect with these students. Over time they became relatively sensitized to what these children needed as students. They came to understand the rich diversity of personal histories among their students. They also suggested the importance of showing empathy, caring, and respect to students with behavioral issues and to research underlying reasons for student misbehavior. Participants also noted they became more receptive to and understanding of diversity. They became more aware that parents were not always capable to help their children with homework. Their students were lacking many of the academic assets that participants initially took for granted.

### Anticipated changes in pedagogical approaches

Participants realized how important early interventions are to overcoming learning difficulties. For example, a number of these students struggled in reading, which resulted in many academic challenges. By reading with them and teaching them reading, they found dramatic improvements in all areas of academic performance. They also learned the importance of utilizing multiple strategies for communicating content. These strategies included: individual instruction, questioning and answering, utilizing technology, and constructing creative, interactive, and hands-on learning projects. Some participants learned the value of modifying instruction to accommodate students with special needs. One participant validated her belief that personal accountability was critical to student success.

## Conclusions

The findings of this study echoed other research in the field. For example, Brown (2005) investigated the effect of service learning on graduate alternate-route teacher training. She learned that service learning with a site-based approach aided teachers interactions with culturally-diverse administrators, teachers, and students. Participants experienced growth in multicultural perceptions, cross-cultural communication skills, and social justice cognizance. These future teachers advanced in their interactive proficiency over a year-long, site-based, service-learning project. The TTM study validated this need for extended direct contact to affect change in perceptions. With TTM, students seemed to need more than a semester to significantly change their understanding of these diverse students and the obstacles to their learning.

Bollin (2007) found that a largely homogeneous group of future teachers (95% white and largely female) benefited from direct experience with a service-learning project involving Hispanic students. Specifically, participants found that "real experiences teach you the most" and "real-life situations are where you learn" (p. 186). Bollin (2007) also found that the experience caused participants to learn new ways of thinking about their students and how to teach these students. Participants found themselves "...confronting their own biases, looking at a situation from the perspective of the 'other' party...." (p. 186). These findings were confirmed in the TTM study. These students, placed into a culturally-diverse environment, were compelled to confront their own biases and the need for having deeper understanding as future teachers.

Briody (2005) found similar results to the TTM study. In fact, her study group also worked in a service-learning project with a homeless shelter. This experience seemed to be designed to expose future teachers to individuals living in homelessness. It did sensitize these participants.

Descriptions of homeless individuals included comments like "crazy, dirty, and lazy." A new understanding of homeless individuals changed descriptions to "clean, dressed, and grateful." One participant reflected, "Homeless people are just like other people; there is no reason for us to look down on them or be afraid of them." One student wrote that while waiting for the shelter to open, she began a conversation with the woman next to her who looked just like herself. She was later surprised to learn that this woman was a client, not a volunteer. Many participants commented about their shock at the number of individuals, especially mothers and children in the shelter. In fact, many families owned cars, but were still homeless. (p. 153)

While TTM noted these kinds of changes, the TTM program went further, giving participants opportunities to become actively involved in educating children who were homeless.

While TTM confirm the findings in the field of service learning, there continues to be a need to provide rich experiences with various socio-economic and culturally-diverse groups for future teachers. Garcia (2002) reported that many states are lagging behind in requiring these kinds of experiences for their teacher-preparation programs. This study confirms the need for states and schools of education to develop genuine service-learning experiences that give future teachers opportunities to work with and learn from diverse populations.

As a result, the research presented with TTM is unique, in that the future teachers who participated in the study actually became engaged in teaching children who were homeless. This represents the ultimate experience in direct service learning for future teachers. This experience not only exposes future teachers to the conditions of those living in homelessness, but valuable teaching time with them. This suggests a pathway to programs that have promise for the training of future teachers. Schools of education should be encouraged to search for opportunities that place their students into direct-service learning programs with diverse populations.

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