



The REALITY Israel Experience: An Impact Study

Executive Summary

November 2010



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About the REALITY Israel Experience

Sponsored by a partnership among the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation, the Samberg Family Foundation, Teach For America and the Center for Leadership Initiatives, the REALITY (Renewal, Education, Action, Leadership, and Inspiration) Israel Experience is a unique leadership development opportunity for selected Teach For America corps members. Corps members with interests in and affiliations with the Jewish community are selected for a 10-day, all-expense-paid trip to Israel, involving tourism, exploration of the Israeli education system, self-reflection, and learning. To date, two sets of corps members participated in the REALITY program – one in July 2009 and the other in July 2010. Participant characteristics for each cohort are detailed in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Information on REALITY Participants

Cohort	# of Participants			Age Range	# 1 st year corps members	# 2 nd year corps members	Prior Birthright Travel to Israel	
	Total	Female	Male				Yes	No
2009	40	25	15	22-25	22	18	20	20
2010	45	29	16	22-25	17	28	0	45

About the Evaluation

REALITY's sponsors commissioned an external formative evaluation in 2009 to enhance their understanding of the program's strengths, the challenges facing it, and the preliminary impact on the respondents of different aspects of the REALITY pilot –including the partnership between Jewish and secular organizations involved in planning and implementing the program. In 2010, the sponsors retained SuccessLinks, LLC to conduct a second study to (1) assess the longer-term impact of the trip on 2009 respondents and explore several questions on post-trip support for this group, and (2) to assess the short-term impact of the trip on 2010 respondents.

This evaluation used different methods to collect data from the two participant groups: telephone focus groups; one-on-one structured telephone interviews; and online surveys. The response rates were:

Table 2: Response Rates

2009		Response Rate	
Online survey	37/40	92.5%	
Telephone focus groups/telephone interviews ¹	26/40	65.0%	
2010		Response Rate	
Online survey	42/45	93.3%	
Telephone interviews	34/45	75.5%	

¹ Evaluators conducted two telephone focus groups comprised of a total of seven participants. Nineteen one-on-one interviews were also conducted. These numbers were combined to calculate the response rate.

With such high survey response rates, related findings are representative of the program’s respondents. Focus group and interview data offer additional depth and detail.

The Study’s Evaluation Questions

Six evaluation questions guided the study:

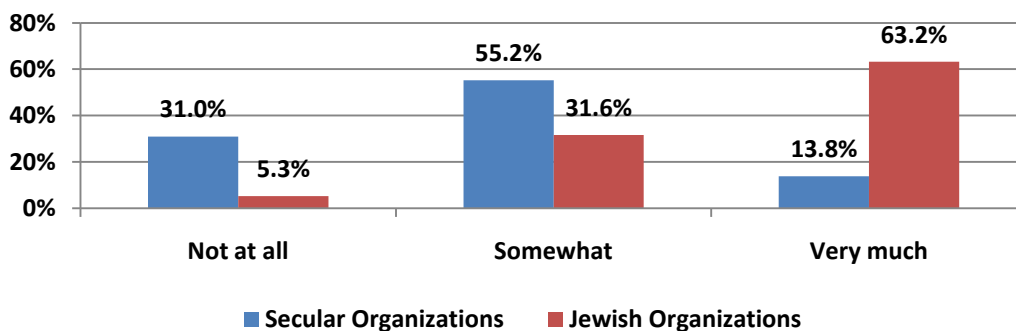
1. To what extent, if any, did REALITY strengthen the participants’ commitment to service?
2. To what extent, if any, did REALITY strengthen the participants’ connection with Israel?
3. To what extent, if any, did REALITY inform participants’ experience of the Jewish concept of *tikkun olam* (repairing the world) as a link between Jewish identity and service?
4. To what extent, if any, did REALITY enhance the participants’ Jewish identity?
5. To what extent, if any, did REALITY enhance the participants’ connection with the Jewish community?
6. To what extent, if any, did REALITY strengthen the participants’ commitment to Teach For America’s mission and its approach to eliminating educational inequity?

Findings

1. To what extent, if any, does REALITY strengthen the participants’ commitment to service?

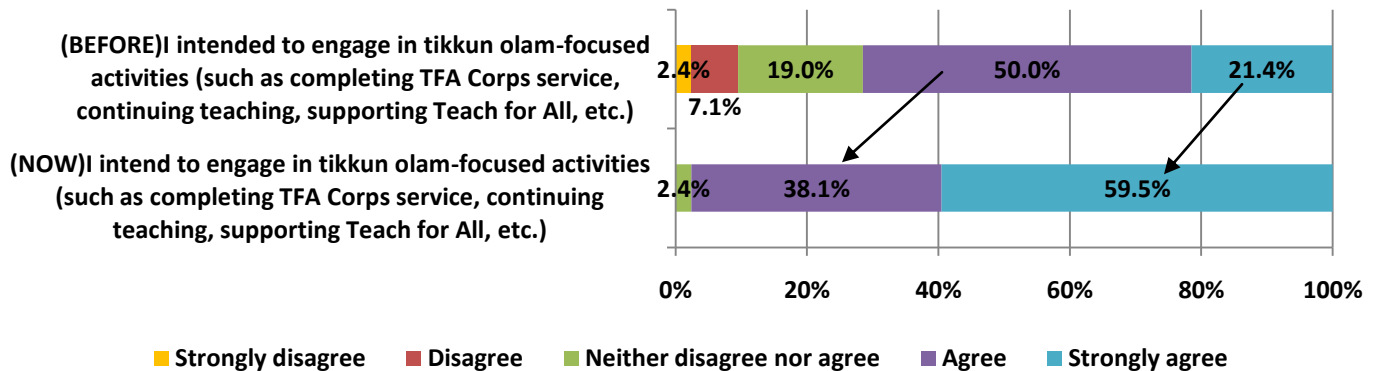
REALITY slightly strengthens respondents’ commitment to service, from a level of commitment that is already very high for both groups, who comprise highly service oriented individuals. The best demonstration of their level of commitment is their affiliation with Teach For America Corps. REALITY also opens the door to service through Jewish organizations (as volunteers or staff members) and rejuvenates respondents as they continue to be engaged in service (see Charts 1 and 2).

Chart 1: (2009 Respondents) Do you believe REALITY influenced your decisions regarding volunteering? (N=29 for Secular Organizations and N=19 for Jewish Organizations)



A larger percentage of 2009 respondents that volunteered with Jewish organizations indicated that REALITY very much influenced their decisions to do so as opposed to those who volunteered with secular organizations.

Chart 2: 2010 Respondents Changed Intentions to Engage in Activities That Focus on *Tikkun Olam* for (N=42)

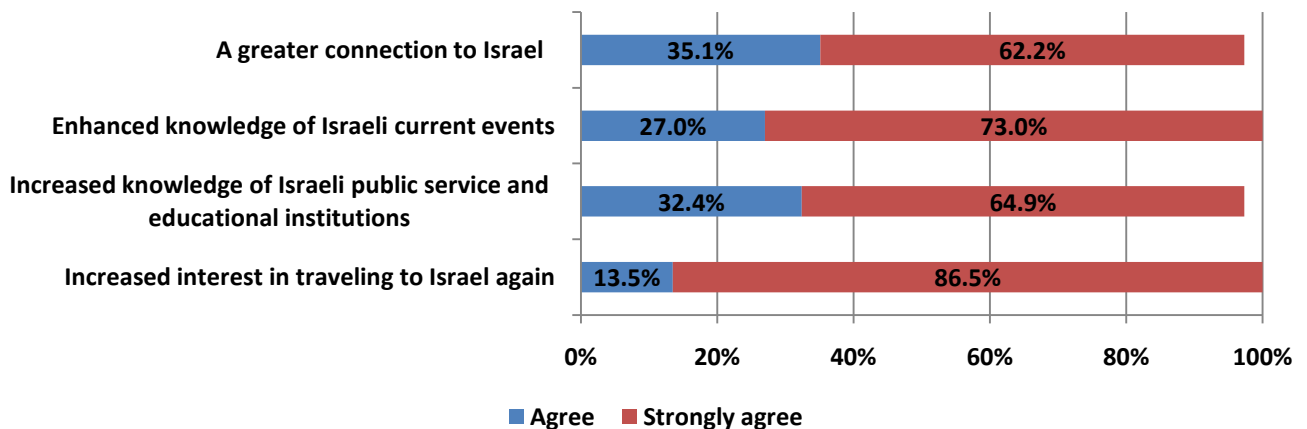


- Thirty (71.4%) respondents agree or strongly agree that they intended to engage in *tikkun olam*--focused activities before the trip. All but one of the 12 respondents who said they did not agree or were neutral before the trip moved toward agreement after the trip.
- Forty-one (97.6%) respondents now agree or strongly agree that they intend to engage in *tikkun olam*--focused activities.

2. To what extent, if any, does REALITY strengthen the participants’ connection with Israel?

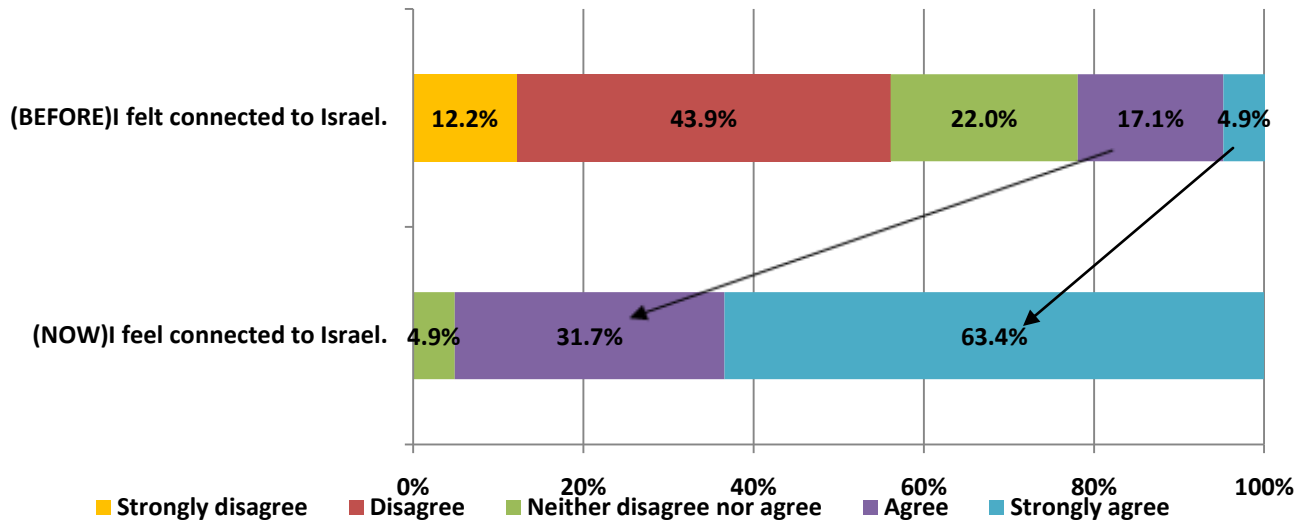
REALITY greatly strengthens respondents’ connection with Israel. This is true for respondents who had been to Israel prior to REALITY and for those who had not. Respondents from both years said they experienced vast changes in their feelings toward Israel while on the REALITY trip. Many respondents expressed a desire to return to Israel either for pleasure or for another service opportunity (see charts 3 and 4).

Chart 3: 2009 Respondents’ Degree of Agreement with Statements about REALITY Trip’s Influence Regarding Israel (N=37)



All 37 2009 REALITY respondents agree or strongly agree that the REALITY trip increased their interest in traveling to Israel again and enhanced their knowledge of Israeli current events.

Chart 4: 2010 Respondents' Connection to Israel (N=41)



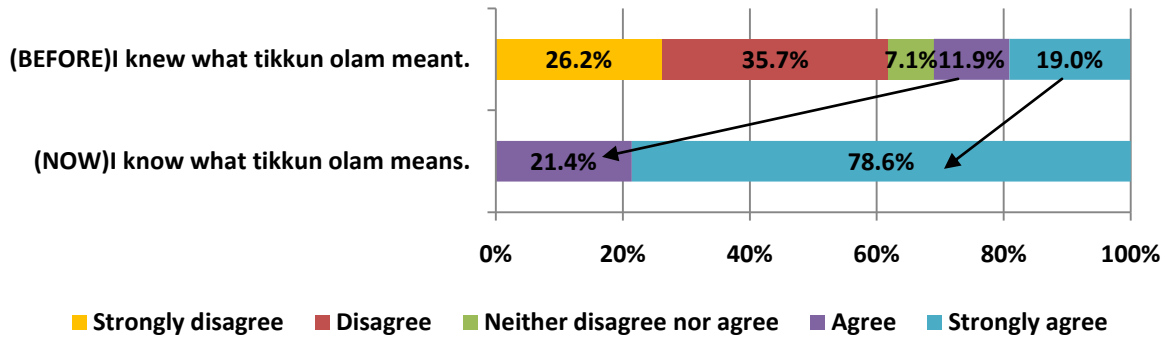
- Nine (22.0%) respondents agree or strongly agree that they felt connected to Israel before the trip.
- Thirty-nine (95.1%) respondents agree or strongly agree that they feel connected to Israel now.

3. To what extent, if any, does the REALITY inform participants' experience of tikkun olam as a link between Jewish identity and service?

Tikkun olam is a major focus of REALITY. One alumnus described *tikkun olam* in a way that many other respondents echoed: *Tikkun Olam or repairing the world is something I think about each day. When I changed jobs I really wanted to make sure that I would be addressing issues of tikkun olam. This was important to me in that I wanted everything I would be doing to address service, being Jewish, and build upon what I learned through Teach For America.* Many REALITY respondents who self-identified as Jewish described how they never connected their Jewish identity with their passion for service and civic engagement. REALITY connected the two for them, which in turn reinforced the importance of both within their lives.

Thirty (80.0%) 2009 respondents agree or strongly agree that they improved their understanding of *tikkun olam* as a result of REALITY. Chart 5 illustrates a similar concept for 2010 respondents.

Chart 5: 2010 Respondents' Knowledge of *Tikkun Olam* (N=42)



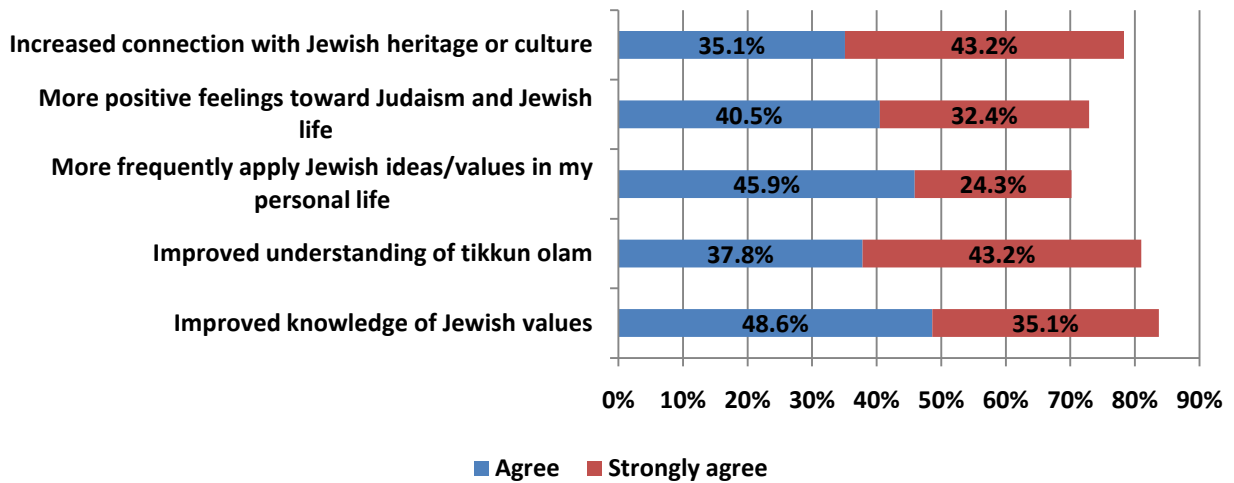
- Thirteen (30.9%) respondents agree or strongly agree that they knew what *tikkun olam* was before the trip.
- All 42 respondents now agree or strongly agree that they know what *tikkun olam* is.

4. To what extent, if any, does REALITY enhance the participants' Jewish identity?

Since the REALITY trip, a majority of respondents who self-identify as Jewish have a deeper understanding of themselves and what it means to be Jewish. REALITY did not however, significantly affect the sense of identity of the few respondents who did not self-identify as Jewish (all from 2010).² In fact, those respondents said they did not expect REALITY to affect them in the same way it affected the respondents who self-identified as Jewish. One said that, before REALITY, he/she already felt grounded in his/her own religion and was therefore not looking to understand what it means to be Jewish. REALITY increased all of its respondents' knowledge of Judaism, but those respondents who do not self-identify as Jewish did not benefit from the program's exploration of Jewish identity (see charts 6 and 7).

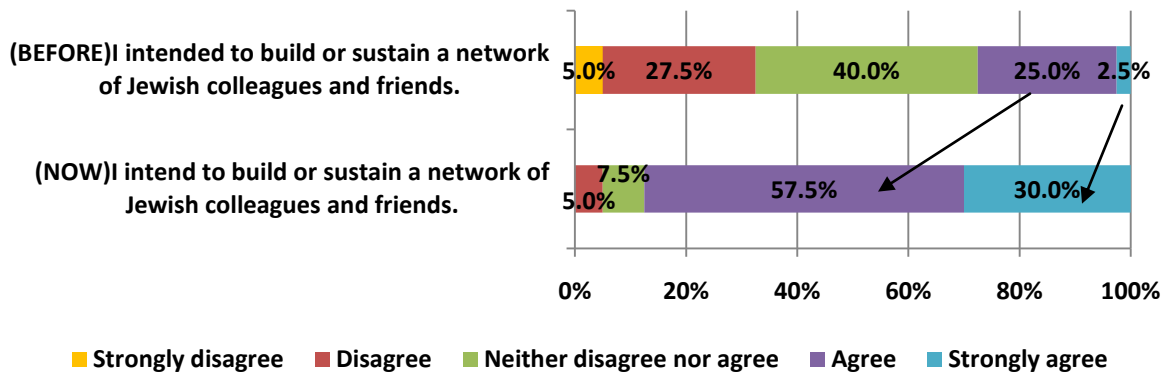
² This study did not ask respondents to self-identify as Jewish or non-Jewish; however during the interviews and focus groups, respondents offered this information.

Chart 6: 2009 Respondents Degree of Agreement with Statements about REALITY Trip’s Influence Regarding Judaism (N=37)



Over 70.0% of 2009 respondents agree or strongly agree that REALITY improved their knowledge of Jewish values, increased their connection with Jewish heritage or culture, and caused them to have more positive feelings towards Judaism and Jewish life.

Chart 7: 2010 Respondents Belief that Building or Sustaining a Network of Jewish Colleagues Is Important (N=40)



- Eleven (27.5%) respondents agree or strongly agree that, before the trip, they intended to build/sustain a network of Jewish colleagues and friends.

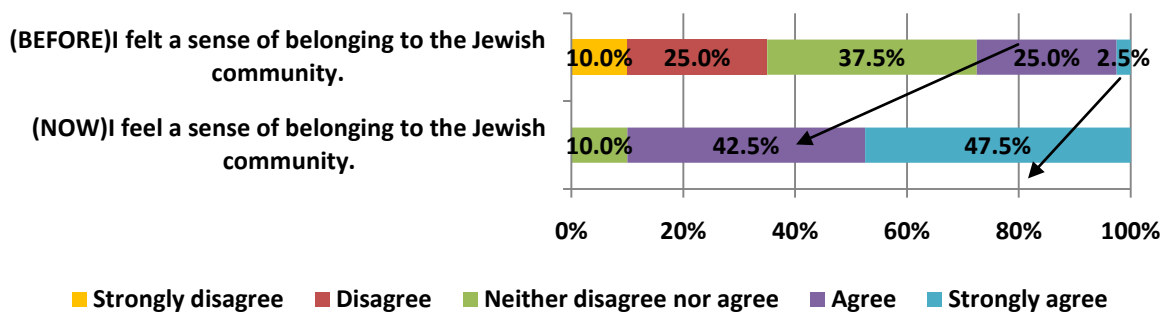
- Twenty-five (87.5%) respondents agree or strongly agree that they intend to build/sustain a network of Jewish colleagues and friends.

Five (12.5%) of 2010 respondents also agree or strongly agree that, before the trip, they planned to be involved in Jewish activities or events; whereas 30 (75.0%) respondents now agree or strongly agree that they plan to be involved in Jewish activities or events.

5. To what extent, if any, does REALITY enhance the participants' connection with the Jewish community?

Respondents from both years [both those who self-identify as Jewish and those who do not] described their connections with the Jewish community. Respondents who self-identify as Jewish, in particular, reported feeling a bond with Jews across the world because of the commonality they share and Judaism's deep-seated traditions. Also, many respondents from both years said they wanted to participate more in Jewish rituals or practice, such as Shabbat dinners; attend high-holiday services; or even just set aside time on Shabbat for reflection and relaxation. For respondents who do not self-identify as Jewish, feeling a greater connection meant having a better understanding of Judaism and what it means for people to be Jewish. Chart 8 illustrates these findings for 2010 respondents. The similar indicator for 2009 respondents is shown in chart 6 on page 8.

Chart 8: 2010 Respondents Feeling of Sense of Belonging to the Jewish Community (N=40)



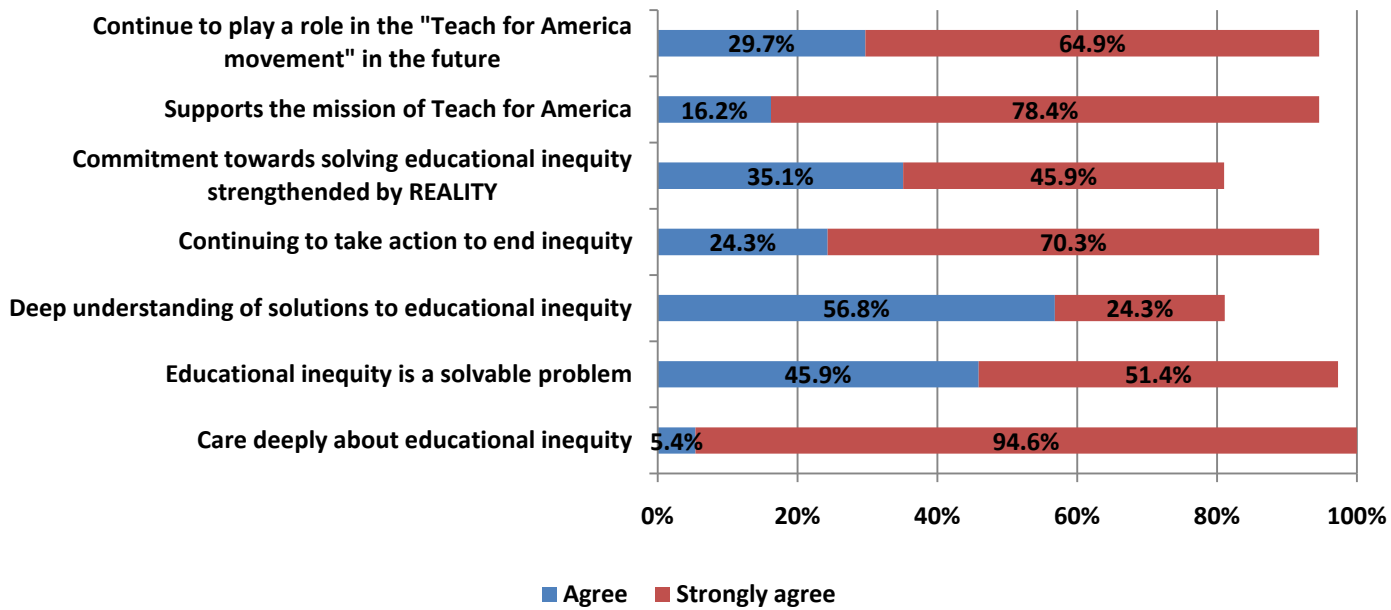
- Eleven (27.5%) respondents agree or strongly agree that they felt a sense of belonging to the Jewish community before the trip.
- Thirty-six (90.0%) respondents now agree or strongly agree that they feel a sense of belonging to the Jewish community.

6. To what extent, if any, does REALITY strengthen the participants' connections to Teach For America's mission and its approach?

REALITY made a minimal contribution to strengthening respondents' commitment to eliminate educational inequity because the commitment level is so high to begin with. However, REALITY did strengthen both groups' connection with Teach For America and their intention to continue to be engaged in the movement through Teach For America (see charts 9 and 10)³.

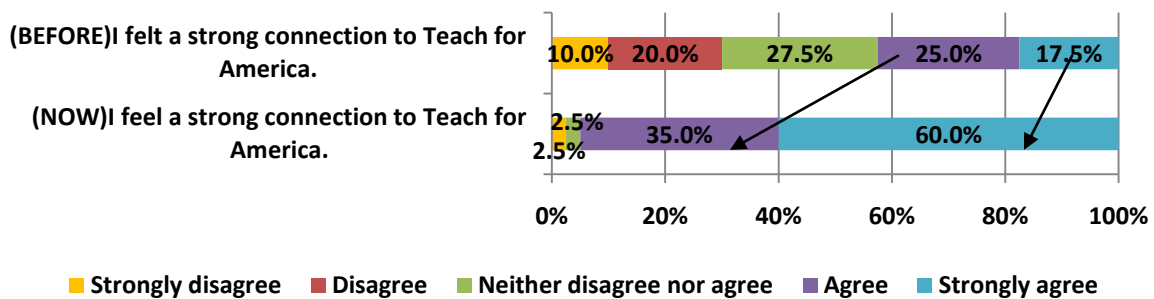
³ As seen in some charts, not all items specifically ask participants to attribute their responses to REALITY; however during conversations with respondents, all questions and answers were phrased in terms of REALITY's influence on participants.

Chart 9: 2009 Respondents' Degree of Agreement with Statements Regarding Teach For America (N=37)



- All 37 respondents agree or strongly agree that they care deeply about educational inequity.
- Thirty-six (97.3%) respondents agree or strongly agree that educational inequity is a solvable problem.
- Thirty six (97.3%) respondents agree or strongly agree that they have a deep understanding of the causes of inequity.

Chart 10: 2010 Respondents Strong Connection to Teach For America (N=40)



- Seventeen (42.5%) respondents agree or strongly agree that they felt a strong connection to Teach For America before the trip.
- Thirty-eight (95.0%) respondents now agree or strongly agree that they feel a strong connection to Teach For America.

Conclusion

This study shows that respondents from 2010 increased their knowledge in various areas and shared their plans to engage in new activities in the future. They also shared new ideas and thoughts they have. At the same time, 2009 respondents, since participating in REALITY, have engaged in new activities over the past year and have used the knowledge they gained in their personal lives and in their jobs, especially those that continue to teach. REALITY is a strong program with realistic activities and expectations for participants. The data gathered in this study demonstrate this strength as well as REALITY's success in achieving many of its intended outcomes.

The program's partners are planning the way forward with the REALITY Israel Experience, to offer Teach For America corps members a powerful leadership development opportunity to explore the values that drive their commitment to service and social justice.