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Today, All Children: Can Teach for America Bridge the Achievement Gap?

Abstract

Since Teach for America's founding in 1989, it has weathered a number of criticisms: could young, well-intentioned corps members unknowingly harm children by virtue of a lack of experience in teaching and unfamiliarity with poverty-stricken, primarily Black and Latino communities? Would a two year time commitment destabilize the already unpredictable lives of poor children? Can a program recruit good teachers, even if it does not require rigorous training or experience with children? And will more educational advocates solve the seemingly intractable problems of low-income schools, if those that already exist have failed thus far? I aim to examine TFA's model in light of these critiques, using evidence from existing educational research to determine what effect, if any, TFA teachers have on their students. My focus will be on the children that TFA seeks to serve; if I were a student in an inner-city school, would I be better or worse off with a TFA teacher? If I sent my child to a poverty-stricken rural school, would I want a TFA corps member at the head of his/her classroom?

Keywords

Education, poverty, non-profit organizations

Subject Categories

Education Policy | Elementary and Middle and Secondary Education Administration | Policy Design, Analysis, and Evaluation | Social Policy | Teacher Education and Professional Development | Urban Education

Senior Honors Thesis

**Today, All Children:
Can Teach for America Bridge the
Achievement Gap?**

By Sonia Pascal

*Submitted to the Philosophy, Politics and Economics Program at the University of
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Thesis Advisor: Professor John DiIulio

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"A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops."—Henry Adams

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Finally, thank you to Mom, Dad, and Angela for your constant love and support.

Teach for America's mission is unassailable; they aim to ensure that "one day, all children in this nation will have the opportunity to attain an excellent education."¹ Few would deny that educational inequity plagues those on the wrong side of the socioeconomic and color lines, and fewer still could refrain from being disheartened by the limited life prospects available to those whose schools are substandard. National education statistics leave little doubt about the depth of the problem: poor children are twice as likely as non-poor children to have to repeat a grade, get expelled or suspended from school, and drop out of high school.² Differences in educational attainment by race persist as well: Blacks are nearly twice as likely as whites to drop out of high school; Hispanics, nearly four times as likely.³

TFA's goals may be admirable, but the methods by which they attempt to bridge the achievement gap are more controversial. College students from the country's most elite schools commit to spending two years teaching in low-income, rural or urban public schools. For their efforts, corps members reap the benefit of the vast TFA network, including partnerships with Harvard Law and Goldman Sachs. Whether the students they teach for those two years are ever able to become Harvard students or Goldman investment bankers, or go to college at all, however, remains an open question.

At base, TFA's model is predicated upon a two-part assumption. First, they posit that recent college graduates from selected schools can teach at least as well as teachers from traditional backgrounds, without prior teaching experience or in-depth

¹ "Teach for America Mission Statement." Available [online] <http://www.teachforamerica.org/mission/index.htm>.

² Brooks-Gunn, Jeanne and Greg J. Duncan. "The Effects of Poverty on Children." *The Future of Children*, Vol. 7, No. 2, Children and Poverty (Summer - Autumn, 1997), pp. 58. Published by the Brookings Institution.

³ "National Center for Education Statistics: 2005 Dropout Rate." Available [online] <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=16>.

understandings of educational theory. Secondly, and more significantly for the program, TFA asserts that the real value of its model is the creation of life-long educational advocates. The program recognizes that teachers alone cannot “compensate for all the weaknesses of the system. We believe our best hope for a lasting solution is to build a massive force of leaders inside and outside education who have the conviction and insight that come from teaching successfully in low-income communities.”⁴ A corps member’s two-year term, then, is a mere stepping stone to his/her greater potential as an advocate and leader. The second part of TFA’s dual mission—to create advocates—explains its focus on recruiting general campus leaders, rather than education majors, and its national scope, rather than a concentrated one.

Since TFA’s founding in 1989, it has weathered a number of criticisms: could young, well-intentioned corps members unknowingly harm children by virtue of a lack of experience in teaching and unfamiliarity with poverty-stricken, primarily Black and Latino communities? Would a two year time commitment destabilize the already unpredictable lives of poor children? Can a program recruit good teachers, even if it does not require rigorous training or experience with children? And will more educational advocates solve the seemingly intractable problems of low-income schools, if those that already exist have failed thus far?

I aim to examine TFA’s model in light of these critiques, using evidence from existing educational research to determine what effect, if any, TFA teachers have on their students. My focus will be on the children that TFA seeks to serve; if I were a student in an inner-city school, would I be better or worse off with a TFA teacher? If I sent my

⁴ “Teach for America: Our Mission and Approach.” Available [online] http://www.teachforamerica.org/mission/mission_and_approach.htm.

child to a poverty-stricken rural school, would I want a TFA corps member at the head of his/her classroom?

In order to answer these questions, I will explore whether TFA's mission makes sense relative to the real problems in America's schools, and consider how well TFA's model fits with its stated goals. I will explain how TFA fits into the broader schema of educational training and alternative certification programs, for TFA is far from the only organization purporting to benefit low-income schoolchildren. Taken together, these other programs may provide potential ways to improve TFA, and thus better the educational prospects of low-income children. I will also assess TFA's model, from recruitment to training to on-going support, asking at each step how TFA accords with best practices in education. My research suggests that TFA's model falters in several crucial places. Moreover, five research studies have examined TFA's effect on student test scores, and I will attempt to decipher the results in order to determine whether TFA promotes or retards student learning. Although the studies have contradictory results in terms of short-term test score gains, their results point to a lack of sustained successes, particularly compared to other programmatic alternatives. Ultimately, based on these inquiries, I will make recommendations to improve TFA, using statistical and observational evidence to suggest ways that TFA could better serve students. If Teach for America is ever able to fulfill its promise to enable "all children in this nation" to "have the opportunity to attain an excellent education," it must strengthen its program, making sure that the fundamental change it seeks benefits children first and foremost.

Earn While You Learn: Alternative Certification Programs

Teach for America may be the best known alternative certification program, but it is far from the only organization placing teachers in low-income schools.⁵ There is a great deal of variation in the definition of alternative certification, as Darling-Hammond (1990) suggests:

The concept of “alternatives” to traditional state certification leaves a great deal of room for varied meaning. It can mean alternative ways to meet teacher certification requirements—such as a graduate level masters’ degree program rather than an undergraduate teacher education program. It can mean alternative standards for certification which allows for truncated or reduced training—or for training completed during the course of a teaching career rather than prior to its initiation. Or it can mean alternatives to state certification itself, as where a state allows local employers to train and certify their own candidates.⁶

In the traditional pathway to becoming a teacher, interested individuals receive Bachelor’s degrees in education or in a specific specialty area, complete preparation programs, which usually include student teaching experiences and coursework in pedagogy and child development, and finally obtain certification to teach in a district (See Table 1). Because this process requires a significant time commitment on the part of individuals, traditional methods are not equipped to handle spot shortages in teaching positions, whether in subject areas like math or science, or in particular areas, like inner-cities. Alternative programs have thus been created to fill the gaps.

⁵ See McKibbin, Michael D. “One size does not fit all: Reflections on alternative routes to teacher preparation in California.” *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 2001, 28(1), p. 134. By defining alternative certification programs as involving “coursework or equivalent experiences in professional education studies while teaching,” he points out that TFA should be considered a recruitment program rather than a true alternative certification program. Nonetheless, in this paper, I will consider TFA as an alternative certification program for the purposes of examining other potential models.

⁶ Darling-Hammond, L. (1990). “Teaching and knowledge: Policy issues posed by alternate certification for teachers.” *Peabody Journal of Education*, 67(3), 123-154, as quoted in Zeichner and Schulte (2001), p. 266.

Table 1: Traditional Teacher Pathway

1. Receive bachelor's degree from accredited institution, either in English or in specific subject
2. Complete post-baccalaureate teacher education program, as required by state; usually 1-2 years
3. Complete state test or PRAXIS exam
4. Finish certification requirements, including student teaching, subject area tests, and certification tests
5. Receive state certification
6. Search for teaching position

Alternative certification programs can circumvent any or all of the steps involved in the traditional route, either by recruiting non-traditional candidates, compressing educational training into a shorter time period, or enabling non-certified individuals to teach in schools (See Table 2 for a description of select alternative certification models). TFA, for example, primarily selects students without backgrounds in education, prepares them with a much reduced training, and places them in schools without prior certification. According to the National Center for Alternative Certification, there are 130 alternate routes to certification, with 485 different alternate route programs available. They estimate that 59,000 individuals received teaching certificates through alternate routes in 2005, or approximately one-third of all new teachers.⁷ These data represents a sharp and recent increase; in 2000, only 20,000 new teachers received alternative certification.⁸ Still, alternatively certified teachers represent a mere fraction of

⁷ "Alternative Teacher Certification: A State by State Analysis." Available [online] <http://www.teach-now.org/intro.cfm>.

⁸ Ibid.

total teachers: only 200,000, or 6% of the 3.1 million teachers currently in schools, emerged from alternate pathways.⁹

Table 2: Alternative Certification Models

Program Type	Description	Example
Apprenticeship Model	Participants teach/work in classroom under guidance of certified teacher while earning certification	National Teacher Corps
Subject-specific Model	Experts in particular fields (e.g. math or science) receive education-specific degrees while teaching	New York City Teaching Fellows; Teaching Opportunity Program
Student-Teaching Model	Traditional school track, coupled with intensive student teaching experience	Bank Street College
Mentor Model	Participants are provided with teacher mentors; can be in conjunction with other educational requirements	New Jersey's Provisional Teacher Program
University Model	Participants teach concurrent with enrollment in a Master's level education program	University of Texas-Pan American; Project ACT

The first program designed to place non-traditional teachers in low-income schools, and a direct precursor to TFA,¹⁰ was the National Teachers Corps. Established under Title V of the Higher Education Act of 1965 as part of the “War on Poverty,” Lyndon Johnson declared, “this legislation... will swing open a new door for the young people of America. For them—and for this entire land of ours—it is the most important door that will ever open—the door to education... And this act makes major new thrusts in a good many... directions: [including] in establishing a new national Teacher Corps to help our local

⁹ “Alternate Routes to Teacher Certification: An Overview.” Available [online] <http://www.teach-now.org/overview.html>.

¹⁰ See Kopp, p. 22.

communities receive extra help in the training of our neglected children, whom our teachers have been unable to reach.”¹¹ As Senator Gaylord Nelson devised the program, college graduates would teach part-time and undergo educational training part-time, “under the guidance of an experienced teacher and in cooperation with an institution of higher learning.”¹² The benefits of the Teacher Corps were mutual: corps members would work toward an advanced degree, and schools that served lower-income children would be assured a steady supply of quality teachers. The federal Teacher Corps existed until 1981, when the government under Ronald Reagan incorporated the program into a larger educational block grant. During the program’s history, nearly 4,000 teacher interns served in urban and rural low-income schools; remarkably, 80% of corps members in one study remained in public education 15 years after graduation.¹³

After the Teaching Corps ended, members of Congress perennially attempted to reauthorize the program, but to no avail; TFA is the only national teaching corps currently in existence.¹⁴ However, a number of states and localities have initiated programs of their own, many of which were modeled after the federal corps. Virginia became the first state to host a statewide alternative certification program in 1982, joined the following year by California, and Texas and New Jersey in 1984.¹⁵ Today, nearly every state offers a program whereby qualified individuals can bypass traditional licensure requirements for teachers,

¹¹ “President’s Talk in Texas on Higher Education Act.” *New York Times*. November 9, 1965.

¹² “National Teacher Corps Urged To Aid Children in Poor Areas.” *New York Times*. June 12, 1965.

¹³ Meyers, H. W. and Sherwood Smith. “Coming Home-Mentoring New Teachers: A School-University Partnership to Support the Development of Teachers From Diverse Ethnic Backgrounds.” *Peabody Journal of Education*, 1999, 74(2), p. 76.

¹⁴ Other teaching organizations are national, including the New Teacher Project. However, TFA is the only national teaching corps; NTP, for example, operates as a consultancy for local corps programs.

¹⁵ Zeichner and Schulte (2001), p. 280.

although the definition of “qualified” and the mechanism through which corps members enter the classroom differ greatly.¹⁶

New Jersey’s Provisional Teacher Program (PTP), introduced by the New Jersey Board of Education in 1984, is one of the most celebrated of the state programs. As part of PTP, all novice teachers, including those who come from traditional and alternative routes, “are supported and supervised by experienced professionals in their schools while working under provisional certificates. After completion of the program, a teacher may be recommended for a standard certificate.”¹⁷ In addition to support in the classroom, teachers from alternative routes are provided with 20 days of pre-service training/support and at least 200 hours of formal instruction. In his analysis of the program, Klagholz (2000) finds that the program “markedly expanded the quality, diversity, and size of New Jersey’s teacher candidate pool... Applicants had higher scores on teacher licensing tests than traditionally prepared teachers, and attrition rates for alternatively certified teachers were lower than those of their traditionally certified counterparts. The Provisional Teacher Program also became the dominant source of minority teachers for both urban and suburban schools.”¹⁸ He cites several factors that contribute to the program’s success: meaningful teacher support and training; high standards for teacher quality, including by virtue of the elimination of emergency certification; and the disavowal of teacher reassignments to areas in which they are not specialized.

¹⁶ National Center for Alternative Certification. Available [online] <http://www.teach-now.org/myresults.cfm>. The exceptions are Alaska, North Dakota, and Rhode Island.

¹⁷ State of New Jersey Department of Education. “Licensure and Credentials: Provisional Teacher Program.” Available [online] <http://www.state.nj.us/education/educators/license/provprogram.htm>.

¹⁸ Klagholz, Leo. “Growing Better Teachers in the Garden State: New Jersey's "Alternate Route" to Teacher Certification.” Thomas B. Fordham Foundation. January, 2000. Available [online] http://eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/16/1a/d5.pdf.

In neighboring New York, the possibilities for involvement in alternative certification programs are myriad. In New York City, for example, the New York City Teaching Fellows program provides a pipeline of thousands of new teachers each year. NYCTF was started in 2000 to address staffing shortages in particular subject areas. Similar to TFA, it is a highly selective program, accepting one in eight applicants to join its corps.¹⁹ Unlike TFA, however, NYC Teaching Fellows pursue subsidized Master's degrees in education concurrent with their classroom teaching. According to Boyd (2006), the majority of Teaching Fellows complete their coursework in two years. He notes that Teaching Fellows are older, on average, than TFA corps members, are more likely to have graduate degrees, and are more often placed in specialty subjects, including middle and high school math and science, and special education.²⁰ In his analysis of student test scores of NYCTF and TFA teachers, Boyd found that although TFA teachers improve test scores relative to traditional and NYCTF teachers in their first year, the gains of NYCTF teachers by the third year eclipse the TFA teachers.²¹ Partially, Teaching Fellows' continued success is a function of their lower attrition rates: while one study of New York City teachers found that only 18% of TFA corps members remained in the district after five years, almost half of Teaching Fellows still taught in NYC, a number comparable to traditional teachers.²² Moreover, NYCTF is more successful than TFA at placing teachers in schools: in the seventeenth year of TFA, 5,000 corps members

¹⁹ "New York City Teaching Fellows: Program Overview." Available [online] http://www.nyctf.org/the_fellowship/prgm_overview.html.

²⁰ Boyd, Donald, et al (2006), p. 181.

²¹ Boyd (2006), p. 198.

²² Kane, Thomas J., Jonah E. Rockoff, and Douglas O. Staiger. "Teacher Certification Doesn't Guarantee a Winner." *Education Next*. Winter 2007, Vol. 7, No. 1. Available [online] <http://www.hoover.org/publications/ednext/4612527.html>.

teach in 26 regions across the country;²³ in NYCTF’s eighth year in operation, there are 8,000 Fellows in NYC schools.²⁴ (See Table 3 for a comparison of Teach for America and the Teaching Fellows program.)

Table 3: Comparing TFA and NYC Teaching Fellows²⁵

Program	Total Alumni	2007 Corps	Attrition Rate (4 years)
TFA	12,000	2900	85.0%
Teaching Fellows	13,000	1900	54.4%

The Alliance for Catholic Education presents yet another alternative route into urban education. ACE’s Teacher Formation Program, founded by the University of Notre Dame, is similar to TFA in its two-year time commitment. However, ACE focuses exclusively on under-served Catholic schools, and its training and support are far more extensive than TFA’s. During two summers, ACE corps members earn Master’s Degrees through Notre Dame’s Master of Education program. They are also placed in housing with other corps members, and receive mentorship and guidance from an Academic Supervisor, a Pastoral Staff Contact, a School Principal, and a Mentor Teacher.²⁶ According to the program, their supportive structure pays off in retention: over 95% complete the two-year term, and 75% of participants remain in education thereafter.²⁷

Within the world of academic discourse on education, there has been a great deal of controversy surrounding alternative certification programs and their

²³ “Teach for America: Our Impact.” Available [online]

http://www.teachforamerica.org/mission/our_impact/our_impact.htm.

²⁴ “New York City Teaching Fellows: Our History and Statistics.” Available [online]

<http://www.nyctf.org/about/history.html>.

²⁵ Data garnered from Boyd, et al, and TFA and NYCTF’s respective websites. Total participants refers to the number of corps members who have entered the program since it was founded. Figures for the 2007 corps refer only to new entrants (i.e. first year corps members beginning in 2007). Attrition rate refers to the percentage of corps members no longer teaching in NYC four years after their starting date.

²⁶ “Support During ACE.” Available [online] <http://ace.nd.edu/academic-programs/teacherprogram/benefits-of-ace/support>.

²⁷ Ibid. As with TFA’s claims of retention, these figures are not qualified, so it is not possible to know precisely how ACE defines “remaining in education.”

ability to provide quality teachers. Detractors point out that low-income students of color are more likely to be taught by teachers without certification, and “that even though some studies show that by the end of a well-structured alternative program teachers may be equal to or superior in teaching skills to traditionally certified programs, the extant data suggest that during the beginning and middle of the school year, many alternatively certified teachers assume the full responsibility for a classroom without the training they need to be successful.”²⁸ Despite evidence that suggests that lower-income students need increased support, they often serve as “guinea pigs” for novice teachers. Darling-Hammond (2002) found that teachers who entered schools through a traditional route felt more prepared than teachers from alternative programs, including in designing curriculum and instruction, teaching subject matter content, using instructional strategies, and understanding the needs of learners.²⁹ Teachers’ perception of their own preparation matters: teachers who felt more prepared were subsequently more likely to remain in teaching, and more likely to feel satisfied with their career choice.³⁰ In addition to considering alternative certification programs similar to TFA, then, it is also important to consider potential ways to strengthen existing teacher education programs.

The Bank Street College of Education program is an example of one traditional school method that has achieved exceptional results. Bank Street College, located in upper Manhattan, was founded in 1916 as the “Bureau of

²⁸ Zeichner (2001), p. 268.

²⁹ Darling-Hammond, Linda, Ruth Chung, and Fred Frelow. “Variation in Teacher Preparation: How Well Do Different Pathways Prepare Teachers to Teach?” *Journal of Teacher Education*, September/October 2002, Vol. 53, No. 4, p. 12.

³⁰ Darling-Hammond (2002), p. 18.

Educational Experiments” in order “to discover the environments in which children grow and learn to their full potential, and to educate teachers and others to create these environments.”³¹ Graduate school students spend four semesters at Bank Street, completing coursework, working in the classroom through supervised fieldwork, and preparing an Integrative Master's Project. Graduates of the program rate themselves as better prepared than other novice teachers, particularly in curriculum development and the ability to create a positive, productive learning environment for students.³² Participants cite the school’s progressive conceptual approach, which focuses on child development and social learning, as a key factor in their ability to teach.³³ As well, professional advisement throughout the program and experiential learning in conjunction with the Bank Street School for Children contribute to the sense of teacher preparedness and facility in the classroom.³⁴

In his examination of the Development Teacher Education Program at the University of California at Berkeley, Snyder (2000) similarly finds that traditional pathway teachers from nontraditional schools can have a positive impact on student achievement. The DTE program is a component of UC Berkeley’s Graduate School of Education, and requires students to complete four semesters of coursework and student teaching, as well as a Master’s Project related to “the

³¹ “Bank Street College of Education: About Bank Street.” Available [online] <http://www.bankstreet.edu/aboutbsc/>.

³² Darling-Hammond, Linda and Maritza Macdonald. “Where There is Learning There is Hope: The Preparation of Teachers at the Bank Street College of Education.” *Studies of Excellence in Teacher Education: Preparation at the Graduate Level*. Linda Darling-Hammond, ed. New York: National Commission on Teaching & America’s Future, 2000, p. 13.

³³ “Bank Street College of Education: The Bank Street Approach.” Available [online] <http://www.bankstreet.edu/gs/approach.html>.

³⁴ Darling-Hammond (2000), p. 68.

application of developmental principles to classroom practices.”³⁵ Snyder reports that DTE graduates were almost three times more likely than other novice teachers to feel “very well” prepared for teaching.³⁶ As with the Bank Street program, DTE stresses “intensive study of developmental theories and their educational implications through coursework and student teaching.”³⁷

Taken together, research on alternative certification programs and selected traditional education schools suggests that there are certain programmatic aspects that can impact the quality of teachers, and thereby impact student achievement. Feistritz and Chester (2000), in their examination of state alternative certification programs, define several characteristics of successful programs (See Table 4).

Table 4: Successful Program Standards³⁸

Program	Requirement
Recruitment	Rigorous screening process, such as passing tests, interviews, demonstrated mastery of content
Design	Field-based
Training	Course work or equivalent experiences in professional studies before and while teaching
Mentoring	Candidates for teaching work closely with trained mentor teachers
Completion	Candidates must meet high performance standards for completion of the programs

³⁵ “Development Teacher Education Program at the University of California at Berkeley.” Available [online] <http://www-gse.berkeley.edu/program/dte/dte.html>.

³⁶ Snyder, Jon. “Knowing Children—Understanding Teaching: The Development Education Teacher Program at the University of California, Berkeley.” *Studies of Excellence in Teacher Education: Preparation at the Graduate Level*. Linda Darling-Hammond, ed. New York: National Commission on Teaching & America’s Future, 2000, p. 99.

³⁷ “Development Teacher Education Program at the University of California at Berkeley.” Available [online] <http://www-gse.berkeley.edu/program/dte/dte.html>.

³⁸ Feistritz, E.E. and D.T. Chester. *Alternative Certification: A State by State Analysis 2000*. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Information. As quoted in Zeichner (2001), p. 279.

Similarly, Zeichner (2001) posits that education programs—be they alternative or traditional certification programs—should have a “common and clear vision of teaching and learning that guides all program courses, rigorous and academically challenging courses and field experiences, [and] the availability of high-quality clinical settings.”³⁹

Given that the goal of TFA—and all education programs generally—is to improve student performance, understanding which methods of teacher preparation best promote student learning can provide a blueprint to creating the best possible program. The experience of the Bank Street program or the Development Teacher Education program certainly suggests the power of teaching developmental theory as a way of fostering teacher preparedness and flexibility. ACE’s on-going support may make a crucial difference in encouraging participants to remain in education. New York City Teaching Fellows may be as inexperienced in their first year as TFA teachers, but their greater commitment to teaching over the long term ultimately provides a greater benefit to students. In both programs, teacher gains in experience are retained, rather than lost as they are in TFA. New Jersey’s Provisional Teacher Program helps to demonstrate the case for on-going support and mentoring as vital components to an alternative certification program. Although each of these models is open to their own criticisms, they offer a guide to improving TFA’s model in order to strengthen its work.

³⁹ Zeichner (2001), p. 279.

Teach for America's Model

Teach for America began with an idea by then Princeton senior, Wendy Kopp, in 1989. During a summit on the education system, she started thinking about the possibility of “top recent college graduates” committing themselves to two years in urban and rural public schools as part of a “national teacher corps” on the model of the Peace Corps.⁴⁰ As she recounts in “One Day, All Children,” her memoir about TFA’s first decade in operation, she developed the idea in her senior thesis, and then began to raise funds and recruit participants after graduation. Without experience in pedagogy, and with a staff similarly untrained, TFA’s model relied mainly on Kopp’s vision. Over time, of course, the program has evolved, with new staff brought on, input from actual corps experience, and technological advances, but the overall framework of TFA has not dramatically shifted from Kopp’s original plan.

Despite the advice of experts in the non-profit world, Kopp believed that her teaching corps had to start at a national scale: “This was not going to be a little non-profit organization or a model teacher-training program. This was going to be a *movement*.”⁴¹ Again, the dichotomy between TFA’s dual missions was evident: creating a corps of powerful educational advocates required a national launch, even if refining a teacher preparation program might have been better accomplished on a small scale. In its first year, TFA’s fledgling team recruited 500 corps members to teach in public schools in New York City, Los Angeles, New Orleans, Baton Rouge, North Carolina, and Georgia.⁴² Although Kopp recounts in detail the recruitment process for corps members,

⁴⁰ Kopp, Wendy. *One Day, All Children: The Unlikely Triumph of Teach for America and What I Learned Along the Way*. New York: PublicAffairs, 2003, p. 6.

⁴¹ Kopp (2003), p. 23. Emphasis in original.

⁴² Kopp (2003), p. 54.

she does not delineate the process by which districts were selected. In TFA’s current growth plan, which seeks, among other priorities to “grow to scale while increasing the diversity of the corps” and to “build an enduring American institution,” there is no mention of the school districts that TFA corps members serve.⁴³ The site does claim, though, that the 1,000 public schools in 26 regions with TFA corps members represent the areas “most profoundly impacted by the gap in educational outcomes. More than 80 percent of the students we reach qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, and the overwhelming majority of our students (95 percent) are African-American or Latino. All of the districts we serve are classified as ‘high-need’ local education agencies by the federal government.” TFA continues to expand, both within districts and across the country, with a Denver site added in 2007, and new regions scheduled to participate starting in 2008, including Indianapolis, Jacksonville, and Kansas City.⁴⁴ (See Table 5 for a list of TFA regions.) Although TFA’s literature does not specify how sites are selected, the list of project sites presumably represents a multiple step process. The program must perceive a need in a particular district, be accepted by district officials, and finally receive the support of individual school officials in order to begin assigning corps members.

⁴³ “Teach for America Growth Plan.” Available [online] http://www.teachforamerica.org/about/our_growth_plan.htm.

⁴⁴ “Teach for America Regions.” Available [online] <http://www.teachforamerica.org/about/regions/index.htm>.

Table 5: TFA Sites⁴⁵

Region	Year Founded	Corps
Atlanta	2000	200
Baltimore	1991	154
Bay Area	1991	200
Charlotte	2004	125
Chicago	2000	230
Connecticut	2006	110
Denver	2007	56
Eastern North Carolina	1990	143
Hawaii	2006	98
Houston	1991	338
Indianapolis	2008	50*
Jacksonville	2008	50*
Kansas City	2008	50*
Las Vegas	2004	103
Los Angeles	1990	386
Memphis	2006	89
Miami-Dade	2003	90
Mississippi Delta	1991	156
New Mexico	2001	75
New Orleans	1990	126
New York City	1990	1000
Newark	1993	70
Philadelphia/Camden	2003	291
Phoenix	1994	288
Rio Grande Valley	1991	165
South Dakota	2004	50
South Louisiana	1990	74
St. Louis	2002	146
Washington, DC	1992	242

* Denotes Projected for 2008

Both in Kopp’s memoir and on TFA’s website, the process by which corps members are selected is more transparent. In collaboration with her original staff, Kopp devised twelve criteria for recruits: “persistence, commitment, integrity, flexibility, oral communication skills, enthusiasm, sensitivity, independence and assertiveness, ability to work within an organization, possession of self-evaluative skills, ability to operate

⁴⁵ All data available taken from http://www.teachforamerica.org/corps/placement_regions/placement_regions.htm.

without student approval, and conceptual ability/intellect.”⁴⁶ No mention is made of the ability to work with children or to manage a classroom. According to Kopp, these criteria were selected based on staff interviews with school principals and “reading books and articles on the subject,” with some evolution over time.⁴⁷

TFA’s recruitment efforts on college campuses reflect its drive for established leaders, and therefore its long-term goal of fostering influential advocates for education. The program selectively recruits at schools identified as top tier, and its admissions numbers match this focus: in 2005, TFA accepted approximately one-sixth of all applicants, but one third of Ivy League applications.⁴⁸ In a New York City sample, nearly 70% of corps members had graduated from schools identified as highly competitive by Barron’s Profile of American Colleges, compared to 10% of traditional pathway public school teachers. Only 3% of corps members were alumni of the least competitive colleges, versus 25% of traditional public school teachers.⁴⁹ Similarly, a study conducted in Houston, Texas found that 70% of corps members received degrees from very competitive colleges, compared to 2.4% of other (public school) teachers.⁵⁰ According to TFA’s president and chief program officer, Matt Kramer, “We look for the same things McKinsey consulting does,” referring to the highly selective management and strategy consulting firm.⁵¹ Broad leadership experience is prized over specific interest in teaching; 95% of the 2007 entering TFA corps held leadership positions in

⁴⁶ Kopp, p. 35.

⁴⁷ Kopp, p. 35.

⁴⁸ Lewin, Tamar. “Top Graduates Line Up to Teach the Poor.” *New York Times*. October 2, 2005.

⁴⁹ Boyd, Donald, Pamela Grossman, Hamilton Lankford, Susanna Loeb, and James Wyckoff. *How Changes in Entry Requirements Alter the Teacher Workforce and Affect Student Achievement.* American Education Finance Association, 2006, p. 184.

⁵⁰ Decker, Paul T., Daniel P. Mayer, and Steven Glazer. “The Effects of Teach for America on Students: Findings from a National Evaluation.” *Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.*, June 9, 2004, xiii.

⁵¹ Azimi, Negar. “Why Teach for America.” *New York Times*. September 30, 2007.

college, while only 2% majored in education.⁵² The program also claims to be committed to hiring a diverse group of teachers, although its corps does not reflect the ethnic composition of the students it teaches (See Table 6).

Table 6: Corps v. Student Racial Composition⁵³

Race/Ethnicity	Corp %	Student %
Caucasian	71.7	9.7
African-American	10	43.2
Latino/Hispanic	6	40.4
Asian-American	5	5
Native American	0.3	1.1
Other/Multi-ethnic	7	1.3

The program’s recruitment efforts are extensive, particularly on elite college campuses, and by all accounts, they have been remarkably successful. TFA was ranked #10 on BusinessWeek’s list of “Undergrads’ 25 Most Wanted Employers,” in 2007.⁵⁴ At several top schools, including Amherst and the University of Chicago, 10% or more of the senior class applied.⁵⁵ (See Table 7 for a list of select TFA recruitment schools.) Their recruitment does not stress the rigors of classroom management or the potential to become a life-time teacher, however. Rather, it focuses mainly on the benefits to TFA alumni once they leave teaching.⁵⁶ Recruiters frequently mention several accolades received by the program, including Fortune Magazine’s selection of TFA as #7 in its list of “20 Great Employers for New Grads.”⁵⁷ TFA’s regional recruitment teams target student leaders as early as sophomore year, with student coordinators at select schools

⁵² “Teach for America: Our Corps Members.” Available [online] <http://www.teachforamerica.org/corps/index.htm>.

⁵³ All data taken from http://www.teachforamerica.org/corps/placement_regions/placement_regions.htm. Note that the racial composition of students does not refer to the actual students of TFA teachers, but instead the total students in TFA districts. Figures are from the 2007 corps.

⁵⁴ Gerdes, Lindsey. “Undergrads’ 25 Most Wanted Employers.” Available [online] http://www.businessweek.com/print/careers/content/may2007/ca20070514_406243.htm. May 11, 2007.

⁵⁵ “Teach for America Press Kit Overview.”

⁵⁶ Personal communication with a Teach for America recruiter.

⁵⁷ Tkaczyk, Christopher. “20 Great Employers for New Grads.” Available [online] http://money.cnn.com/galleries/2007/fortune/0705/gallery.great_for_new_grads.fortune/7.html.

responsible for finding potential applications and raising the program’s profile on campus. Identified leaders are courted by TFA recruiters in much the same way as they would be by corporate human resource departments: information sessions, lunches, and dinners, and informal chats.

Table 7: TFA Recruitment Schools⁵⁸

University	Applications
Amherst	11% of senior class applied
Spelman	11% of senior class applied
Univ. of Chicago	10% of senior class applied
Duke	10% of senior class applied
Notre Dame	8% of senior class applied
Princeton	8% of senior class applied
Wellesley	8% of senior class applied
Univ. of Pennsylvania	5% of senior class applied

For the more than 18,000 individuals attracted by these efforts who apply to TFA annually, the application process is three-fold. Applicants submit basic information and an essay on a broad leadership topic; for the 2008 entering class, the topic was “Describe a time when you encountered serious obstacles to success while working on a project. You may choose any academic, professional, or extracurricular project you have worked on during the past four years.” TFA screens the applications, and invites selected students to participate in a telephone interview with a TFA representative. Finally, remaining applicants attend an all-day interview, which includes “teaching a sample lesson, completing a problem solving activity, participating in a group discussion, and

⁵⁸ Data from http://www.teachforamerica.org/newsroom/documents/081507_Largestcorps.htm. Data for the University of Pennsylvania from the Daily Pennsylvanian, <http://media.www.dailypennsylvanian.com/media/storage/paper882/news/2007/12/04/News/Perspective.Homework.Checks.And.Bathroom.Passes.All.In.A.Days.Work-3130660.shtml>.

interviewing one-on-one with a Teach For America representative.”⁵⁹ In total, for 2007, the program accepted 21% of applicants, and nearly 80% of the chosen few signed on.⁶⁰

Individuals who make it through the screening process and opt to sign on with TFA, most of whom have no prior teaching experience, must learn how to prepare lesson plans and manage a classroom of children between graduation in May or June and the beginning of the school year in September. TFA’s preparation method involves an intensive five-week training institute, held in six sites across the country, which revolves around six core competencies (See Table 8 for a description of the training modules). Prior to training, corps members receive information about the corps experience and specific issues within teaching. Then, during the first week of the summer institute, corps members attend sessions on how to teach, including lesson plan design, behavior management, the “TFA Teaching as Leadership” model, and dealing with diversity (See Table 9 for a description of the Teaching as Leadership framework). Corps members also learn how to and begin to prepare lesson plans that they will deliver during the second week of the program. For the remaining four weeks, each corps member teaches a full class for forty-five minutes per day, with an additional hour of small group instruction. Corps members are observed by Corps Member Advisors (CMAs), who provide feedback on teaching styles and lesson planning. Corps members also rehearse lesson plans in smaller groups as preparation. The remainder of the time during the institute is spent either in additional sessions on instruction methods or in reflection.⁶¹

⁵⁹ “Teach for America: How Does the Application Process Work?” Available [online] http://www.teachforamerica.org/admissions/faqs/faq_applying.htm.

⁶⁰ “Teach for America Press Kit Overview.” Available [online] http://www.teachforamerica.org/assets/documents/Press_Kit_Overview.pdf.

⁶¹ Personal correspondence with two TFA corps members, HQ and KD. There is some discrepancy between corps member accounts and TFA’s official literature as to the design of the training institute, but I have presented the basic layout of training described by all three.

Table 8: Training Core Competencies⁶²

Core Competency	Explanation
Teaching As Leadership	Focuses on the overarching approach of successful teachers in low-income communities
Instructional Planning and Development	Presents a goal-oriented, standards-based approach to instruction, including diagnosing and assessing students, lesson planning and instructional delivery
Classroom Management and Culture	Teaches how to build a culture of achievement to maximize student learning
Diversity, Community and Achievement	Examines diversity-related issues new teachers may encounter
Learning Theory	Focuses on learner-driven instructional planning
Literacy Development	Explores elementary and secondary methods for teaching literacy

Although TFA attempts to pair corps members with their preferred location, grade level, and subject area, the process is imperfect, and adjustments are made even as corps members prepare for their assignments during the summer institute. As corps member HQ recounts, “The program didn’t prepare me in the sense that my summer teaching experience is so much different from my full-time teaching experience. I was assigned to teach 7th Grade ESL, but now I teach 8th Grade English and Social Studies. The program really needs to commit to matching every corps member with his/her subject matter. I also taught a group of 13 well-behaved 7th graders, which did not prepare me for the classroom management issues I would face in the fall with 35 unruly 8th graders.”⁶³

⁶² Information taken from <http://www.teachforamerica.org/corps/training.htm>.

⁶³ Personal communication, February 28, 2008.

Table 9: Teaching as Leadership Framework⁶⁴

Category of Action	Description
Set an ambitious vision of students' academic success	Big goals are meant to energize teachers and students with the motivation and focus they will need to carry them past the inevitable internal and external obstacles on the path to academic achievement.
Invest students and their families in working hard toward the vision	Teachers attempt to tackle and change students' learned belief that intelligence is a "fixed" characteristic and convince their students that if they work hard enough, they will "get smart."
Plan purposefully to meet ambitious academic goals	Teachers ask key questions, "where are my students now versus where I want them to be", and "What is the best possible use of time to move them forward?" and infuse goal-driven efficiency into every aspect of instruction and classroom management.
Execute those plans thoroughly and effectively	Teachers make good judgments about when to follow through on their plans and when to adjust them in light of incoming data. They offer their students consistent, caring, demanding leadership, and constantly seek to maximize the time students have to work hard toward their goals.
Work relentlessly to meet high academic goals for students	Teachers refuse to allow the inevitable challenges that they face to become roadblocks. Instead, they see those potential challenges—lack of books, overcrowded classrooms, broken copy machines, lack of time—as obstacles that they will navigate on their path to ambitious goals.
Continuously reflect and improve on leadership and effectiveness	Teachers use data-driven self-analysis to ensure that they are maximizing the learning opportunities in their classrooms, thereby increasing their impact in the fight against the achievement gap.

Nonetheless, at the end of the summer institute, all corps members who remain with the program are placed in classrooms to begin the task of teaching.⁶⁵ During their two year terms in schools, the program continues to have some interaction with its participants. Project directors observe and monitor teachers four times per year, providing detailed advice and criticisms. Corps members are also required to attend several Professional Learning Communities sessions throughout their term, focusing on

⁶⁴ "Teaching as Leadership Framework." Available [online] http://www.teachforamerica.org/corps/teaching/teaching_leadership_framework.htm.

⁶⁵ Teach for America does not publicize a detailed attrition rate, and it is not clear if its posted attrition rate encompasses recruits who drop out during the summer institute.

strategies and sharing resources. Otherwise, TFA corps members generally receive the same treatment and support as other public school teachers. They are also paid the same; school districts pay TFA participants as they would other novice teachers, and provide the same medical benefits, given that the corps members are school district employees. The TFA program does not contribute to their salaries, although it does offer need-based transitional grants and no-interest loans between \$1,000 and \$6,000, based on an applicant's demonstrated need and the cost of living in the assigned region. The program also provides room and board during the training session. Because TFA is part of AmeriCorps, corps members are eligible for two education awards of \$4,725 each for their two years of service, which may be used for future educational costs or to repay loans. Many TFA corps members use their education awards to pay for any teacher certification courses, the cost of which is not covered by the program.⁶⁶

Once corps members have finished their two years, however, the benefits of participation multiply. TFA alumni have a number of lucrative options available through the program. TFA's Career and Leadership Center "works to support corps members and alumni through the entire career development process to help them achieve their personal and professional goals."⁶⁷ Accordingly, the organization has developed partnerships with a number of elite graduate schools, from the Wharton Business School at the University of Pennsylvania to Harvard University Law School to the Yale University School of Medicine. Many schools offer TFA alumni special benefits, including two-year deferrals,

⁶⁶ Personal communication with TFA recruiter.

⁶⁷ "Teach for America: Career Services." Available [online] http://www.teachforamerica.org/alumni/career_services.htm.

fellowships, course credits, and waived application fees.⁶⁸ Duke University's Terry Sanford Institute of Public Policy, for example, guarantees all alumni a minimum annual \$10,000 scholarship. In total, nearly 150 degree programs give preferential treatment to TFA alumni.⁶⁹ TFA's Career and Leadership Center also helps corps members and alumni seeking fellowships, including Rhodes Scholarships and Fulbright Grants, as an additional benefit to corps members interested in higher education.

As well, TFA has established significant ties to the corporate world. TFA alumni are wooed by Goldman Sachs, KPMG, Bain & Company and Wachovia; while JPMorgan and Google treat TFA as a "core recruiting school." Numerous firms, including Citigroup and Deloitte, allow new hires the chance to defer their offers for two years to join TFA, and provide summer internships for corps members.⁷⁰ Of course, many of these firms compete with TFA for the same population: high-achieving students with leadership experience. Given the caliber of students that TFA accepts, there is no way to tell if the program itself improves the odds that any individual will gain entrance into an elite graduate school program or be hired by a prestigious Wall Street firm. However, it is clear that the program actively cultivates its image as an ideal "launching pad" for a high-powered career. In its advertising and its recruitment pitches, TFA repeatedly boasts of its tenth place ranking on BusinessWeek's list of the "Best Places to Launch a Career."⁷¹

⁶⁸ "Teach for America: Graduate School Partnerships." Available [online] http://www.teachforamerica.org/alumni/grad_school_partnerships.htm.

⁶⁹ Lipka, Sara. "Elite Company." *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 00095982, 6/22/2007, Vol. 53, Issue 42.

⁷⁰ "Teach for America: Employer Partnerships." Available [online] http://www.teachforamerica.org/alumni/employer_partnerships.htm.

⁷¹ Gerdes, Lindsey and Sophia Asare. "Teach for America Taps Titans." Available [online] http://www.businessweek.com/print/careers/content/sep2007/ca20070913_229347.htm. September 13, 2007.

Presenting the Evidence: Is Teach for America Working?

Teach for America may be a great place to launch a career, but is it accomplishing its goal of bridging the educational divide? There are five extant studies that presume to measure TFA corps member effectiveness in the classroom. Their conclusions are often contradictory, and provide no simple explanation as to the value of Teach for America.

The first study, conducted by the Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) uses data from the Houston Independent School District collected 1996—2000.

Raymond, et al (2001), compares student performance on standardized tests between TFA and non-TFA students, and also provides a profile of TFA teachers in Houston.

Darling-Hammond, et al. (2005) also used data from Houston, TX, between 1996 and 2002, but went beyond CREDO's analysis by increasing the number of standardized test scores used. Laczko-Kerr and Berliner (2002) examined five Arizona school districts' student scores on one standardized exam between 1997 and 2000, comparing students with certified and uncertified teachers.

Decker, et al (2004), working for Mathematica Policy Research, provides a more rigorous analysis of the program by virtue of a random assignment of students in Chicago, Los Angeles, Houston, New Orleans, and the Mississippi Delta during the 2001-02 school year. It is the only research study on the program advertised on the TFA website and in their materials, although their literature highlights selected positive findings.⁷² Again, the study looked at student standardized test score performance, but it also interviewed corps members about their commitment to and attitudes about teaching.

⁷² "Teach for America: Studies on corps member impact: What the research says." Available [online] http://www.teachforamerica.org/mission/our_impact/studies_corps_impact.htm.

Boyd, et al (2006), studied several pathways into teaching in New York City, using city data from 1996 to 2004 to compare TFA, Teaching Fellows, traditional college-recommended teachers, and other alternative programs. Their work provides the most comprehensive analysis of differential routes to becoming a teacher, including effects on student test scores, performances on teacher certification exams, and attrition rates for each pathway.

Although each of the five studies differs in its assessment of the program, taken together, they indicate that TFA corps members do no better than other teachers, and often, significantly worse. Coupled with other research into educational best practices, it is apparent that TFA is failing to improve student performance relative to other programs. Each facet of its model reveals shortcomings, and thus provides potential ways to strengthen the program.

Is Teach for America Addressing the Real Problem?

TFA's model is premised on the idea that the "real problem" in American education is two-fold: a shortage in the supply of quality teachers, and a shortage in the number of educational advocates. The program's short-term goal is to ameliorate the shortage by funneling graduates of prestigious schools toward the teaching profession, albeit for a two-year stint, while its recruitment strategy stresses the possibilities for educational advocacy after TFA teachers leave the program. However, some educational experts question whether TFA is addressing the central problem in education at all, and indeed, whether TFA's approach exacerbates educational iniquity by virtue of a flawed model.

According to Wendy Kopp, the idea behind a national teaching corps was that teaching in low-income communities could not attract enough quality teachers without an external mechanism. “The teacher corps would make teaching in low-income communities an attractive choice for top grads by surrounding it with an aura of status and selectivity...”⁷³ In its theory of change, the program notes that, “we need as many teachers as possible willing to go above and beyond the constraints of the system to ensure that their students excel.”⁷⁴

Kopp’s 1989 thesis reflected public concern at the time over what was perceived to be a national crisis. In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education published “A Nation at Risk,” focusing attention at the issue of educational quality. Its language reflected the urgency of the problem: “Our Nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world... We report to the American people that while we can take justifiable pride in what our schools and colleges have historically accomplished and contributed to the United States and the well-being of its people, the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people. What was unimaginable a generation ago has begun to occur— others are matching and surpassing our educational attainments.”⁷⁵ In examining how teachers contributed to inadequate education, the report particularly focused on a shortage of qualified math and science teachers, in addition to a need for specialists in education for the gifted and talented, non-

⁷³ Kopp (2003), p. 8.

⁷⁴ http://www.teachforamerica.org/mission/theory_of_change.htm

⁷⁵ “A Nation at Risk.” Available [online] <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/risk.html>.

native English speakers, and handicapped students.⁷⁶ The media seized on the results, reinvigorating fears of a looming teacher shortage.⁷⁷

Richard Ingersoll, a Professor of Education and Sociology at the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education, and a nationally renowned expert on the teaching profession, disputes TFA and the media's claim that a shortage of teachers is the predominant problem in American education. Rather, he posits that attrition is what drives educational iniquity, and thus TFA's two-year term worsens the quality of schools. By analyzing data from the National Center for Education Statistics' Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) and the Teacher Follow-up Survey, Ingersoll found that "school staffing problems are not primarily due to teacher shortages, in the sense of an insufficient supply of qualified teachers. Rather, the data indicate that school staffing problems are primarily due to a "revolving door"—where large numbers of qualified teachers depart their jobs for reasons other than retirement."⁷⁸

Statistics from the NCES bear out Ingersoll's claim: in 2006, there were 3.6 million active elementary and secondary school teachers, a 19 percent increase from 1996. Moreover, the increase in public school teachers has outpaced the rise in students over the past ten years. In 1996, the student per teacher ratio was 17.1; in 2006, it was 15.4.⁷⁹ As well, it appears that student interest in education is not insignificant; between 1983 and 1998, the amount of new teaching graduates increased 49%, while total post-

⁷⁶ "A Nation at Risk: Findings." <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/findings.html>

⁷⁷ See, for example, "The Truth Behind the Teacher Shortage," <http://www.ncei.com/WSJ-12898.htm>.

⁷⁸ Ingersoll, Richard M. "Is There Really a Teacher Shortage?" Consortium for Policy Research in Education and the Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy. September, 2003, p. 3.

⁷⁹ National Center for Education Statistics. "Digest of Education Statistics: 2006." <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d06/index.asp>

secondary school enrollment only rose 15%.⁸⁰ In the 2003-04 school year, 6.7 percent of undergraduates in American colleges and universities were education majors; by comparison, 4.2% studied engineering, and 3.9% majored in life sciences.⁸¹ In a study by the Urban Institute prepared for the U.S. Department of Education Planning and Evaluation Service, researchers found that the supposed national teaching shortage was a myth; there was, in fact, an oversupply in the 1980s and 1990s.⁸²

This is not to suggest, however, that teacher demand and supply are perfectly aligned. As Ingersoll reports, 58% of schools claimed to have difficulty in filling one or more teaching openings, and the problem is decidedly worse in lower-income areas. As well, shortages in math and special education were particularly acute.⁸³ Again, however, he emphasizes that the problem is not recruitment, but retention. Enough teachers are qualified to teach, even in the math and science fields, but too few teachers remain in the classroom.⁸⁴ He found that the shortage of math and science teachers was actually a result of greater job dissatisfaction; 40% of math/science teachers, compared to 29% of all teachers, reported that they moved from or left their teaching positions because of job dissatisfaction, particularly due to frustrations over low salaries and the lack of administrative support.⁸⁵ The same revolving-door pattern is evident in lower-income schools; high turnover fuels increased demand. In the 2000-01 school year, teacher

⁸⁰ Clewell, Beatriz Chu, et al. "Literature Review on Teacher Recruitment Programs." The Urban Institute. September 2000, p.8.

⁸¹ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003–04 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study.

http://nces.ed.gov/das/epubs/2007165/showTable2007.asp?rt=p&tableID=3673&b=tables_figures.asp%23p1

⁸² Clewell (2000), p. 3.

⁸³ Ingersoll (2003), p. 5.

⁸⁴ Ingersoll, Richard. "Turnover Among Mathematics and Science Teachers in the U.S." National Commission on Mathematics and Science Teaching for the 21st Century. February, 2000.

⁸⁵ Ingersoll (2000), p. 9.

turnover in low-poverty schools was 12.8 percent; that figure was 16.4% in rural high-poverty schools and 22% in urban high-poverty schools.⁸⁶

If, as the SASS data suggests, teacher shortages are a result of difficulties in retention rather than recruitment, TFA's model is likely to exacerbate the problem, given that TFA teachers only agree to teach for two year terms. Raymond, et al. (2001), found that TFA teachers left the Houston School District after two years at far higher rates than non-TFA teachers: between 1996 and 1999, 60 to 100% of TFA participants left the district, compared to 42.8 to 51.5% of non-TFA new teachers, and 9.5 to 16.7% of teachers overall.⁸⁷ Similarly, Darling-Hammond, et al. (2005) found that after the third year, between 72 and 100% of recruits were no longer teaching in the Houston School District.⁸⁸ Boyd, et al (2006), estimated that over 80% of TFA recruits were no longer teaching in the New York City school system after four years.⁸⁹ (See Table 10.) That is more than double the four-year attrition rate for traditionally education teachers (36.8%).⁹⁰ TFA teachers were also more likely to report less of a commitment to teaching than other teachers; Decker, et al (2004), found that only 11.4% of TFA teachers reported a desire to stay in teaching "as long as able" or "until retirement," compared with 68.8% of novice teachers, and 60.6% of all teachers. TFA teachers were also nearly twice as likely to report that they expected to stay in teaching "until something better

⁸⁶ Ingersoll, Richard. "Why Do High-Poverty Schools Have Difficulty Staffing Their Classrooms with Qualified Teachers?" *Renewing Our Schools, Securing Our Future: A National Task Force on Public Education*. November, 2004, p. 9.

⁸⁷ Raymond, Margaret, Stephen Fletcher, and Javier Luque. "Teach For America: An Evaluation of Teacher Differences and Student Outcomes In Houston, Texas." CREDO, Hoover Institution. July, 2001, p. 20. The range refers to different years, and different grade level teachers.

⁸⁸ Darling-Hammond, Linda, Deborah J. Holtzman, Su Jin Gatlin, and Julian Vasquez Heilig. "Does Teacher Preparation Matter? Evidence about Teacher Certification, Teach for America, and Teacher Effectiveness." Stanford University. Presented at AERA Conference, April 15, 2005, p. 18.

⁸⁹ Boyd, et al (2006), p. 208.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

comes along,” 12.9% of TFA teachers compared to 7% for all teachers. There was a similar divide in expectation to “leave as soon as possible,” 10% of TFA teachers vs. 4.2% of all teachers. No novice teacher reported an expectation to leave under either circumstance.⁹¹

Table 10: Teach for America Cumulative Attrition Rates⁹²

Study	Time Period	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Boyd, et al	2000-04	10.7	47.7	72.7	85
Darling-Hammond, et al	1996-97	-	81	96	-
Darling-Hammond, et al	1997-98	-	64	72	-
Darling-Hammond, et al	1998-99	-	57	85	-
Raymond, et al	1996	8.3	63.9	-	-
Raymond, et al	1997	5	60	-	-
Raymond, et al	1998	29.3	100	-	-
Raymond, et al	1999	15	84.2	-	-

Teacher attrition is detrimental for students and school systems for several reasons. First, the instability in a school caused by teacher turnover has negative consequences for students and for the cohesion of staff.⁹³ As Boyd, et al (2007), point out, “This instability may be particularly problematic when schools are trying to implement reforms, as the new teachers coming in each year are likely to repeat mistakes rather than improve upon implementation of reform.”⁹⁴ For the students themselves, unpredictability can be detrimental, particularly in low-income populations where transience and volatility are already factors of life. As a colleague warned Kopp in the

⁹¹ Decker, et al. (2004), p. 14.

⁹² Attrition rates are presented as corps members leaving their assigned school district after one year of service, two years, etc.

⁹³ Loeb, Susanna, Linda Darling-Hammond, and John Luczak. “How Teaching Conditions Predict Teacher Turnover in California Schools” *Peabody Journal of Education*, 80(3), 2005 p. 49.

⁹⁴ Boyd, Don, Pam Grossman, Hamp Lankford, Susanna Loeb, and Jim Wyckoff. “Who Leaves? Teacher Attrition and Student Achievement.” September 30, 2007, p. 2.

beginning of her career, “after ‘finding themselves,’ [the] inexperienced, privileged teachers would leave their kids feeling abandoned.”⁹⁵

Secondly, as Decker points out, constant turnover increases the costs and resources needed to recruit and train new teachers; although TFA’s model accounts for the recruitment and initial training, ongoing support is provided by schools. According to a report by the Texas Center for Educational Research (2000), the cost of teacher attrition is over \$8,000 per teacher.⁹⁶ Most importantly, teacher turnover, particularly within the first three years, reduces the quality of teaching. Numerous studies have found a strong correlation between teacher experience and student achievement, with a three year “learning curve;” novice teachers need that much time in the classroom to develop classroom management skills and hone their practice.⁹⁷ In their analysis of New York City schools, Boyd, et al. (2006), found that regardless of the pathway through which a teacher entered a school, student scores improved dramatically between first and third year teachers.⁹⁸ Thus, “pathways with higher teacher attrition”—like Teach for America—“will have their overall student achievement gains reduced as inexperienced teachers with lower student achievement gains are substituted for teachers who would have produced stronger gains in student achievement.”⁹⁹

TFA’s model may be centered on placing recruits in schools for two years, but its recruitment strategy and public literature stresses its long-term vision:

The experience of teaching successfully in low-income communities is a transformative one for corps members. It informs and influences career

⁹⁵ Kopp, p. 21.

⁹⁶ Benner, A.D. “The Cost of Teacher Turnover.” Austin, TX: Texas Center for Educational Research, November, 2000, p. 2.

⁹⁷ See, for example, Rivkin, Steven G., Eric A. Hanushek and John F. Kain. “Teachers, Schools and Academic Achievement.” *Econometrica*, Vol. 73, No. 2 (March, 2005), p. 449.

⁹⁸ Boyd (2006).

⁹⁹ Boyd (2006), p. 211.

paths for some alumni, thus building a new leadership force for change from within education and related social sectors—a leadership force that has the experience, perspective and moral authority that comes from having succeeded with a class of students. At the same time, Teach For America gives our alumni firsthand evidence that we can solve this problem as well as a grounded understanding of how to solve it; as they assume positions of influence in sectors ranging from policy to business to journalism, they have the potential to change the conversation around educational inequity and ultimately to help us make different societal choices.¹⁰⁰

However, it is far from clear if educational advocates are the solution to education’s intractable problems. Many educational advocacy organizations have been actively fighting on behalf of parents, students, and teachers since before TFA was created, from the American Federation of Teachers to the Families and Advocates Partnership for Education project (See Table 11 for a list and brief description of selected educational advocacy organizations).

Moreover, education is already perceived as a vital issue: despite the fact that only 29% of Americans have children in elementary and secondary school, nearly 40% of voters listed education as an extremely important issue in determining their vote for president in a Gallup poll conducted February 8-10, 2008.¹⁰¹ Clearly, many “business leaders and newspaper editors, U.S. senators and Supreme Court justices, community leaders and school board members,” are already “advocates for social change and education reform,” without having participated in TFA.¹⁰² If Teach for America, then, is flawed in its short-term approach and its long-term plan, its model should be altered to improve its service to the people it purports to help.

¹⁰⁰ Teach for America. “Our Theory of Change.” Available [online] http://www.teachforamerica.org/mission/theory_of_change.htm.

¹⁰¹ “What Voters Want: Key Indicators.” Available [online] <http://www.gallup.com/poll/103534/What-Voters-Want.aspx>.

¹⁰² Kopp, p. 7.

Table 11: Educational Advocacy Organizations

Organization	Year Founded	Participants	Mission
National Parent Teacher Association	1897	6 million volunteers	PTA is a powerful voice for all children, a relevant resource for families and communities, and a strong advocate for the education and well-being of every child.
American Federation of Teachers	1916	1.4 million teachers	The mission of the AFT is to improve the lives of our members and their families, to give voice to their legitimate professional, economic and social aspirations, to strengthen the institutions in which we work, to improve the quality of the services we provide, to bring together all members to assist and support one another and to promote democracy, human rights and freedom in our union, in our nation and throughout the world.
National Education Association	1857	3.2 million education professionals	Our mission is to advocate for education professionals and to unite our members and the nation to fulfill the promise of public education to prepare every student to succeed in a diverse and interdependent world.
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development	1943	175,000 educators	ASCD, a community of educators, advocating sound policies and sharing best practices to achieve the success of each learner.
Alliance for the Separation of School & State	1994	Advocacy/ Fundraising Organization	The Alliance for the Separation of School & State has a two-fold mission: 1. Help parents and others understand the true nature and the dangers of compulsory state schooling. 2. Show parents and others how they can take back their freedom and ensure a bright future for their children and our country.
Alliance for School Choice	2004	Advocacy/ Fundraising Organization	The mission of Alliance for School Choice is to improve our nation's K-12 education by advancing systemic and sustainable public policy that empowers parents, particularly those in low-income families, to choose the education they determine is best for their children.

Are There Problems with TFA's Model?

Even if we grant that TFA's mission is meaningfully related to the problems of the American system, and that its model is perfectly executed, we must still question whether the program is appropriately designed in order to meet its goal of eliminating the educational achievement gap. How well does TFA's model accord with the best practices suggested by education research? Are there problems with TFA's approach,

and if so, at what particular stages of the program do they exist? Most importantly, how can existing problems with the program be ameliorated?

Does TFA recruit good teachers?

TFA is very selective in their recruitment of corps members. They focus their efforts on elite schools, and select only those candidates with a record of leadership and a 2.5 out of 4.0 minimum cumulative grade point average. In assessing potential corps members, the program looks for:

- Demonstrated past achievement: achieving ambitious, measurable results in academics, leadership, or work
- Perseverance in the face of challenges
- Strong critical thinking skills: making accurate linkages between cause and effect and generating relevant solutions to problems
- Ability to influence and motivate others
- Organizational ability: planning well, meeting deadlines, and working efficiently
- Understanding of and desire to work relentlessly in pursuit of our vision
- Respect for students and families in low-income communities
- Evidence that applicants operate with professionalism and integrity, and meet basic writing standards.”¹⁰³

It is not clear, however, how these criteria came to be defined, and if they represent an understanding of the skills and attributes necessary to be a good teacher.

According to Darling-Hammond (1999), the idea that general intelligence is a good indication of teaching ability is a myth: “Even very bright people who are enthusiastic about teaching find that they cannot easily succeed without preparation, especially if they are assigned to work with children who need skillful teaching. Perhaps the best example of the limitations of the “bright person” myth about teaching is Teach for America...”¹⁰⁴ Although no empirical studies have crafted the ideal formula to

¹⁰³ “Teach for America: Who we’re looking for.” Available [online] http://www.teachforamerica.org/admissions/who_were_looking_for.htm.

¹⁰⁴ Darling-Hammond, Linda. “Educating teachers: The academy’s greatest failure or its most important future?” *Academe*, v85 n1, Jan-Feb 1999, p. 30.

describe a good teacher, findings from two studies suggest that a background in education can improve student outcomes: “One study found education coursework to be a better predictor of teaching performance than GPA in the major or National Teachers Examination Specialty score. In another study, the researcher found that courses in undergraduate mathematics education contribute more to student gains than do courses in undergraduate mathematics.”¹⁰⁵ Based on a meta-analysis of other research, Stroot, et al (1998), posit that quality teachers—those who maximize student learning—demonstrate multiple characteristics:

- A deeper knowledge base with respect to curriculum
- Educational goals that are ambitious
- The ability to distinguish between short-term and long-term goals
- The ability to encourage conceptualization, problem-solving, and critical-thinking skills
- The ability to develop lesson plans that are complex and multifaceted
- The ability to develop extensive evaluation procedures
- Complexity and diversity in their teaching style
- The ability to vary the environment to compensate learning goals¹⁰⁶

Indeed, other successful teacher education programs focus more on teaching-related criteria in their recruitment: Bank Street seeks “applicants who demonstrate sensitivity to others, flexibility, self-awareness, and a willingness and capacity to engage in self-reflection; who demonstrate clear evidence of positive interpersonal skills and relationships with both children and adults; [and] who demonstrate evidence of healthy motivation and commitment to learning and to children.”¹⁰⁷ Berkeley’s DTE program

¹⁰⁵ Wilson, Suzanne M., Robert E. Floden, and Joan Ferrini-Mundy. “Teacher Preparation Research: Current Knowledge, Gaps, and Recommendations.” Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy. February, 2001, p. 8.

¹⁰⁶ Stroot, S., Keil, V., Stedman, P., Lohr, L., Faust, R., Schincariol-Randall, L., Sullivan, A., Czerniak, G., Kuchcinski, J., Orel, N., & Richter, M. (1998). Peer assistance and review guidebook. Columbus, OH: Ohio Department of Education. Available [online] <http://www.utoledo.edu/colleges/education/par/Successful.html>.

¹⁰⁷ “Bank Street Graduate School of Education: Admission Requirements.” Available [online] http://www.bankstreet.edu/gs/adm_requirements.html.

selects candidates with a “strong interest in understanding child development as a basis for elementary teaching, [a] desire to meld theory with reflective practice, [and] experience working with elementary school children, preferably in a public school setting.”¹⁰⁸ TFA, by contrast, assures applicants that education coursework and experience is unnecessary: “A degree or coursework in education, however, is not required and has no bearing on a candidate's chances of admission.”¹⁰⁹

Is TFA’s training adequate?

In the traditional pathway into teaching, individuals often spend two to three years focusing exclusively on education, be it through student teaching or learning about educational theory and classroom management techniques. Conversely, TFA compresses its preparatory training into five weeks. Although there has been little research to suggest which components of a longer training model are essential for preparing qualified teachers, TFA’s shortened training obviously leaves something out. Johnson (2005) suggests that condensed alternative certification programs usually omit theory and research, focusing instead on the practical demands of teaching. As well, these programs often favor generic teaching skills over specific subject matter in order to train a greater variety of participants.¹¹⁰ TFA’s summer institute seems to follow this pattern: the content taught to corps members highlights lesson planning and classroom management, without a larger discussion about the theory that underpins pedagogy.¹¹¹ Stoddart (1990) argues that when teachers are prepared in this way, they become inflexible to adapt to

¹⁰⁸ Developmental Teacher Education Admissions Information.” Available [online] <http://www-gse.berkeley.edu/program/dte/dteadmit.html>.

¹⁰⁹ “Teach for America: FAQ Eligibility.” Available [online] http://www.teachforamerica.org/admissions/faqs/faq_eligibility.htm.

¹¹⁰ Johnson, Susan Moore, Sarah E. Birkeland, and Heather G. Peske. “A Difficult Balance: Incentives and Quality Control in Alternative Certification Programs.” Project on the Next Generation of Teachers, Harvard Graduate School of Education, September, 2005, p. 109.

¹¹¹ “Teach for America: Training.” Available [online] <http://www.teachforamerica.org/corps/training.htm>.

student need. “They develop modal approaches to learning which they apply and misapply routinely.”¹¹² Further, Zeichner and Schulte (2001) question the academic rigor of such a pre-training program, given that no formal examinations are administered.¹¹³ It is not clear that TFA penalizes corps members who do not develop the capacity to teach during the training period, or that underperforming corps members are prevented from entering the classroom, as would be the case in a traditional academic setting. Timing of the training is also a factor: because TFA training occurs over the summer, the only field teaching experience possible is summer school. Johnson (2005) notes that summer school training provides inadequate preparation for the classroom, given that it necessarily entails a limited range of options in terms of subject matter.¹¹⁴ The experience of corps member HQ, assigned over the summer to teach seventh grade ESL, but teaching English and Social Studies to eighth graders during the school year, may thus be common.¹¹⁵

The lack of preparation is potentially most acute in the lack of classroom management skills, according both to corps members and to researchers. As current corps member HQ noted, “My greatest challenge is definitely classroom management. I did all of the things I was supposed to, set up rules and consequences, establish firm expectations, reward positive behavior, call parents, etc. Unfortunately, my students knew that I was new and were determined to take advantage of any indecisiveness I showed.... Coupled with the extreme immaturity of my group of students makes getting

¹¹² Stoddart, Trish. “Lost Angeles Unified School District Intern Program: Recruiting and preparing teachers for the urban context.” *Peabody Journal of Education*, 67(3), p. 116.

¹¹³ Zeichner, Kenneth M. and Ann K. Schulte. “What We Know and Don’t Know from Peer-Reviewed Research about Alternative Teacher Certification Programs.” *Journal of Teacher Education*, 2001; 52; p. 270.

¹¹⁴ Johnson (2005), p. 110.

¹¹⁵ Personal communication. TFA does not release statistics on the number of corps members assigned to teach subjects other than those they taught during the summer institute.

through any lesson extremely difficult.”¹¹⁶ Decker (2004) found that TFA teachers spent more time, on average, managing classroom behavior, and therefore less on academic instruction, than other novice teachers.¹¹⁷ TFA teachers were also significantly more likely to report serious behavioral problems and student disruptions.¹¹⁸

Corps member frustrations in the classroom likely stem from a lack of prior experience in teaching (See Table 12 for a comparison of student teaching hours by program). Johnson (2005) found that “those who had extensive experience with children, as parents, coaches, or youth workers, may more easily grasp the demands of classroom management or the need to devise different strategies for motivating individual students than do recruits who have little experience with children.”¹¹⁹ In their assessment of teacher preparation programs, Wilson, et al. (2001) remark that “study after study shows that experienced and newly certified teachers alike see clinical experiences (including student teaching) as a powerful—sometimes the single most powerful—component of teacher preparation.”¹²⁰ Experience in teaching, according to Rivkin, et al. (1998), serves two purposes: “First, new teachers may need to go through an adjustment period where they learn the craft of teaching along with adjusting to the other aspects of an initial job. Second, a number of the early teachers discover that they are not well matched for teaching and subsequently leave the profession within the first few years.”¹²¹

¹¹⁶ Personal communication.

¹¹⁷ Decker (2004), p. 19.

¹¹⁸ Decker (2004), p. 45.

¹¹⁹ Johnson (2005), p. 112.

¹²⁰ Wilson, et al. (2001), p. 17.

¹²¹ Rivkin, Steven G., Eric A. Hanushek, and John F. Kain. “Teachers, Schools and Academic Achievement.” *Econometrica*, Vol. 73, No. 2 (March, 2005), 448.

Table 12: Student Teaching Hours by Program

Program	Length	Hours/Day	Days/Week	Total Hours
Bank Street	9 months	6	3	648
Berkeley DTE	56 weeks	3	3-4	606
Teach for America	5 weeks	2	5	50

Do teachers need certification to be effective?

Teacher certification is often a good proxy for the experience and knowledge needed to teach, and it is therefore generally required for entrants into teaching in the traditional pathway. However, the promise of alternative certification programs is that teachers can learn on the job, and receive certification concurrent with classroom teaching, or perhaps not at all. Darling-Hammond (2005) found that TFA corps members were less likely to be certified than other teachers.¹²² Under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, all teachers are required to be “highly qualified,” including by fulfilling state certification and licensing requirements. However, alternative certification programs, like TFA, enable participants to bypass this requirement effectively, by requiring certification by the end of the two year term. For corps members who leave schools after two years, there is little incentive to pursue accreditation seriously, particularly because the cost of certification is borne by the corps member him or herself.¹²³

Although the premise of TFA is that certification does not matter, or at least is not as relevant as enthusiasm and an elite educational background, most research has found that accreditation is a strong predictor of teacher success, including Fetler (1999),¹²⁴

¹²² Darling-Hammond (2005), p. 15. Her results, however, represent the 1999-2001 school years, before NCLB was passed. To my knowledge, there have been no studies conducted on TFA certification post-NCLB.

¹²³ Personal communication with TFA recruiter.

¹²⁴ Fetler, Mark. “High school characteristics and mathematics test results.” Education Policy Analysis Archives, 7(9), March 26, 1999.

Goldhaber & Brewer (2000),¹²⁵ Hawk, et al. (1985),¹²⁶ Monk (1994),¹²⁷ and Strauss & Sawyer (1986).¹²⁸ In their examination of test scores from Houston, Texas, Darling-Hammond, et al. (2005) determined that certified teachers were significantly more successful in increasing the test scores of their students.¹²⁹ TFA corps members performed at approximately the same level as other teachers with comparable certification; that is to say, certified TFA corps members performed better than uncertified TFA corps members.¹³⁰ Similarly, in their study of Arizona test scores, Laczko-Kerr and Berliner (2002) found “1) that students of TFA teachers did not perform significantly different from students of other under-certified teachers, and 2) that students of certified teachers out-performed students of teachers who were under-certified.”¹³¹ These results suggest that TFA corps members can be effective teachers, provided they are properly trained, and receive certification before becoming teachers of record.

Are TFA teachers provided with sufficient on-going support?

Smith and Ingersoll (2004) argue that novice teachers who are provided with mentors in the same field are more likely to remain in teaching.¹³² Carter and Francis (2001) assert, “The support provided to beginning teachers at this time is critical to the

¹²⁵ Goldhaber, Dan D. and Dominic J. Brewer. “Does teacher certification matter? High school teacher certification status and student achievement.” *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, Summer 2000, Vol. 22, No. 2, pp. 129-145.

¹²⁶ Hawk, Parmalee P., Charles R. Coble, and Melvin Swanson. “Certification: It does matter.” *Journal of Teacher Education*, 1985, 36(3), 13-15.

¹²⁷ Monk, David H. “Subject area preparation of secondary mathematics and science teachers and student achievement.” *Economics of Education Review*, 1994, 13(2), 125-145.

¹²⁸ Strauss, Robert P. and Elizabeth A. Sawyer. “Some New Evidence on Teacher and Student Competencies.” *Economic of Education Review*, 1986, 5(1), 41-48.

¹²⁹ Darling-Hammond (2005), p. 5.

¹³⁰ Darling-Hammond (2005), p. 25.

¹³¹ Laczko-Kerr, Ildiko and David C. Berliner. “The Effectiveness of ‘Teach for America’ and Other Under-certified Teachers on Student Academic Achievement: A Case of Harmful Public Policy.” *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 10(37), September 6, 2002.

¹³² Smith, Thomas M. and Richard M. Ingersoll. “What are the Effects of Induction and Mentoring on Beginning Teacher Turnover?” *American Educational Research Journal*, Fall 2004, Vol. 41, No. 3, pp. 681–714.

quality of their immediate professional experiences as well as to their longer-term professional learning.”¹³³ Bey (1995) writes that, ““Mentor teachers have become known as occupational life savers known for offering technical, social, and emotional support.”¹³⁴ Given the importance, then, of mentoring for new teachers, does Teach for America provide sufficient on-going support for its corps members? Participant reports suggest otherwise: “Some of the support they provide is not very good. Ultimately, I rely much more on teachers and my [school district provided] history coach than I do on TFA.”¹³⁵ Unlike other alternative certification programs, wherein an essential component of the program is on-the-job support, TFA touts its corps members as “more independent.”¹³⁶ The consequences of failing to provide sufficient ongoing assistance can be detrimental: “when [alternative certification] candidates ha[ve] little interaction with their new colleagues and... struggle... to survive in challenging schools, the lack of follow-up support compromise[s] their satisfaction and chance of success.”¹³⁷

Do TFA teachers stay long enough to make a difference?

One of the most enduring and significant criticisms of TFA has been its two year time commitment. Critics note both that the limited term exacerbates the teacher shortage in acute areas (e.g. Ingersoll, 2003), and that it ensures a steady flux of lower quality teachers, given the improvement in teacher performance over the first three years in the classroom (e.g. Rivkin, et al, 2005). Even if TFA corps members improve student

¹³³ Carter, Mark and Rod Francis. “Mentoring and Beginning Teachers’ Workplace Learning.” *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, Vol. 29, Number 3, 2001, p. 249.

¹³⁴ Bey, Theresa M. “Mentorships.” *Education & Urban Society*, 28(1), 1995, p. 11.

¹³⁵ Personal correspondence with corps member KD.

¹³⁶ Personal correspondence with TFA recruiter.

¹³⁷ Johnson (2005), p. 111.

performance during their tenure—a disputed claim—do they remain in the classroom long enough to have a long-term impact on students?

Boyd, et al (2006), suggests that the short term stay of TFA teachers is directly detrimental to student performance over the long-term, particularly in language arts. By modeling student results on test scores over time, they find that fourth and fifth grade students with TFA teachers do significantly worse on ELA tests after five years relative to teachers from other pathways, including New York City Teaching Fellows and those from the traditional route. Students with TFA teachers perform comparably on math to those with teachers in other alternative certification programs, but not as well as those from traditional backgrounds.¹³⁸ Any initial gains in test scores are lost as TFA corps members leave schools, and the program replaces a more experienced teacher with a novice. Conversely, teachers from the traditional pathway and other, longer-term programs remain in the classroom, building on their experience to continue to grow and develop as educators.

Darling-Hammond (1994; 2005) sees something potentially more problematic in the implications of the “Teach for Awhile”¹³⁹ mentality: a devaluation of urban students and the de-professionalization of teaching. “TFA offers no solution to the fundamental problems of teaching or the educational needs of urban children. It merely exacerbates the unequal access to qualified teachers that minority and low-income children already experience, and it does so in a way that is totally unaccountable for their welfare.”¹⁴⁰

According to the Schools and Staffing Survey, inner-city schools and those with a high

¹³⁸ Boyd (2006), p. 209.

¹³⁹ See Azimi (2007) and <http://roomd2.blogspot.com/2006/02/trajectory-of-tfa.html>.

¹⁴⁰ Darling-Hammond, Linda. “Who Will Speak for the Children?” Phi Delta Kappan, Sep94, Vol. 76, Issue 1, p. 39.

percentage of minority students (defined as over 30%) are more likely to hire less than fully-qualified teachers, assign teachers to non-specialized subjects or grades, and use long- or short-term substitutes to fill teacher vacancies.¹⁴¹ Zeichner and Schulte (2001) also question the ethical implications of “compelling many young people of color in urban schools, who are in need of the most competent of our teachers, to be subjected to teachers with limited training and experience.”¹⁴²

The programmatic focus on achievement after the two year term, rather than the teaching profession, adds to skepticism about TFA’s model. One former corps member recalls, “I never was encouraged to stay on as a teacher. It’s almost as if the program perpetuates the idea that if you went Harvard, a teaching career is below you.”¹⁴³ Another alumnus notes that, “the potential to enact change is inherently limited by policy approaches that systematically encourage, enable, and directs teachers out of the classroom.... Whether in the case of direct recruiting, the glaring lack of programs and support mechanisms designed to maximize the effectiveness of post-2nd year teachers, or simply the repeated message that continued teaching is just *not* what you are supposed to be doing anymore, TFA continually tramples on the ‘movement’ it purports to build.”¹⁴⁴ Educational advocates already lament the perception of teaching as an unskilled profession; TFA’s ostensible denigration of teaching, coupled with its assertion that no specific training is required before entering the classroom, merely serves to reinforce the profession’s negative reputation.

¹⁴¹ Schools and Staffing Survey: Percentage of public schools with teaching vacancies in this school year and percentage of those schools that used various ways of filling or eliminating the vacancy, by school level and selected school characteristics: 1999-2000. Available [online] http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/TableDisplay.asp?TablePath=tables/table_01.asp.

¹⁴² Zeichner and Schulte (2001), p. 268.

¹⁴³ Azimi (2007), p. 4.

¹⁴⁴ “The Trajectory of TFA.” Available [online] <http://roomd2.blogspot.com/2006/02/trajectory-of-tfa.html>. February 1, 2006.

Do TFA teachers improve test scores?

Ultimately, theoretical concerns about TFA, and its effect on societal perception of the teaching profession, are not as important as the actual impact on students.

Although there is controversy over the use of standardized test scores as a mark of student learning, they do provide one uniform empirical standard by which to measure teacher effectiveness.¹⁴⁵ In the absence of other reliable mechanisms for determining how teachers perform, then, we must consider those studies that have examined TFA's impact on student test-taking (See Table 13 for a comparison of studies measuring student performance).

The CREDO study shows the greatest gains by students in TFA classrooms. Elementary school students of TFA teachers performed significantly better in math than students of other new teachers, while middle school math students of TFA teachers performed significantly better than all other teachers studied. No other results were significant.¹⁴⁶ As Darling-Hammond, et al. (2005) point out, however, the CREDO study only compared TFA teachers to other unqualified teachers. The group to which TFA corps members were compared was not traditionally certified teachers, but instead a group that included few certified teachers, and even some who lacked bachelor's degrees.¹⁴⁷ When the study does aggregate data according to teacher experience, it finds that TFA teachers are less effective in their first and second years than non-TFA teachers, and only those that remain for a third and fourth year become more effective.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ See, for example, Ballou, Dale. "Sizing up tests scores." *Education Next* 2, Summer 2002, 10-15; or Kane, Thomas J. and Douglas O. Staiger. "Improving school accountability measures. National Bureau of Economic Research, Working Paper 8156, March 2001. Available [online] <http://www.nber.org/papers/w8156>.

¹⁴⁶ Raymond, et al. (2001).

¹⁴⁷ Darling-Hammond, et al. (2005), p. 5.

¹⁴⁸ Raymond, et al. (2001), p. 21.

Table 13: TFA and Test Scores¹⁴⁹

Study	Variables	Control	TFA Effect: Math	TFA Effect: Reading
1	Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), Stanford Achievement Test—Nine (SAT-9), and Aprenda	All teachers	Significant positive effect on TAAS math (0.696); Significant negative effect on SAT-9 math (-0.840); Significant negative effect on Aprenda math (-2.39)	Nonsignificant effect on TAAS reading (-0.056); Nonsignificant effect on SAT-9 reading (-0.575); Significant negative effect on Aprenda reading (-2.37)
2	NY State student exams and NYC DOE student exams	First year, traditional pathway teachers	Nonsignificant effect on math (0.007)	Significant negative effect on reading (-0.031)
3	Iowa Test of Basic Skills	All teachers	Significant positive effect on math (2.43)	Nonsignificant effect on reading (0.56)
4	Stanford Achievement Test—Nine (SAT-9)	Certified Teachers	Significant negative effect on math	Significant negative effect on reading; Significant negative effect on language arts
5	Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS)	All teachers	Nonsignificant effect on math (0.029)	Nonsignificant effect on reading (0.007)

¹⁴⁹ Study 1: Darling-Hammond (2005). Study 2: Boyd (2004). Study 3: Decker (2004). Study 4: Laczko-Kerr (2002). Study 5: Raymond (2001). The number in parentheses refers to the correlation between teacher pathway (i.e. participation in TFA) and student achievement gains; no figure was available for Laczko-Kerr. Because middle school students often have multiple teachers, several of the studies did not report robust findings for 7-8 students. The table therefore only contains data for elementary school students.

The study conducted by Mathematica Policy Research may be touted by TFA, but in reality, the study's findings are decidedly mixed. TFA teachers did prove significantly more effective in mathematics, but did not have a significant impact on reading.¹⁵⁰ However, as with the CREDO study, the control group of teachers included mainly other uncertified teachers.¹⁵¹ No comparison is made between TFA teachers and those who teach at select suburban schools, so it is unclear if TFA teachers are merely better than or comparable to under-qualified teachers. However, the study's teacher survey component sheds doubt on whether any gains are sustainable. TFA participants reported significantly less commitment to teaching as a career than did non-TFA teachers.¹⁵² Thus, any test score improvements generated by TFA teachers could be eclipsed as non-TFA teachers continue to gain experience. Finally, the survey also found that TFA teachers reported more difficulties in classroom management and discipline issues. Although researchers note that the differential expectations of TFA teachers may be a factor in their assessments of classroom behavior, along with poor classroom management skills, TFA teachers were unable to spend as much time on academic instruction because of their lack of preparation.¹⁵³

Boyd's study of pathways to teaching in New York City also found a slight increase in the math scores of TFA teachers, but researchers are more cautious in how they interpret these results. In comparing TFA teachers to those from other pathways, including NYC Teaching Fellows, temporary licensure, and the traditional route, Boyd finds that initial gains by students with TFA teachers practically evaporate by the fifth

¹⁵⁰ Decker, et al. (2004), p. 33.

¹⁵¹ Decker, et al. (2004), xii.

¹⁵² Decker, et al. (2004), p. 14.

¹⁵³ Decker, et al. (2004), p. 19.

year of teaching, given the higher rates of attrition of TFA corps members compared to other teachers.¹⁵⁴ Students of TFA teachers actually perform worse on ELA tests than all other teachers, in all years simulated.¹⁵⁵ (See Tables 14 and 15.) Although Boyd declines to make a recommendation as to the future of alternative certification programs, his data suggests that there are clear differences between different pathways into teaching.

Table 14: Average Value Added by Pathway (ELA, Grades 4 & 5)¹⁵⁶

Simulation Year	Traditional	Teaching Fellows	TFA
1	0.000	-0.035	-0.055
2	0.030	0.002	-0.019
3	0.044	0.023	-0.035
4	0.054	0.027	-0.026
5	0.059	0.029	-0.027

Table 15: Average Value Added by Pathway (Math, Grades 4 & 5)¹⁵⁷

Simulation Year	Traditional	Teaching Fellows	TFA
1	0.000	-0.040	-0.034
2	0.041	0.046	0.035
3	0.065	0.037	0.052
4	0.071	0.039	0.046
5	0.073	0.041	0.048

The remaining two studies of TFA cast additional doubt on the program's effectiveness. Darling-Hammond, et al. (2005) found that students of TFA teachers did significantly better in math on one test, but significantly worse in math on two other tests. In reading, TFA teachers had a statistically significant negative impact on one test, and a negative, but non-significant effect on two others.¹⁵⁸ Moreover, TFA-taught student

¹⁵⁴ Boyd, et al. (2006), p. 211.

¹⁵⁵ Boyd, et al. (2006), p. 209.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. No significance level was provided.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Darling-Hammond, et al. (2005), p. 19.

scores declined relative to other students during the years of the study. The researchers note that TFA teachers perform approximately as well as teachers with an equivalent level of certification, but that no measurement showed uncertified TFA teachers to be as effective as standard certified teachers.¹⁵⁹

Finally, Laczko-Kerr and Berliner (2002) concluded that, in general, “students taught by certified teachers significantly outperformed students taught by under-certified teachers on every test.”¹⁶⁰ When they analyzed TFA’s impact on students, they found that students of corps members performed as well as other uncertified teachers, but significantly less well than certified teachers.¹⁶¹

There is one other mechanism through which to measure teacher effectiveness, principal satisfaction, but its utility is suspect. TFA boasts about its ratings by principals in a 2007 survey conducted by Policy Studies Associates, noting that 95% of principals rated corps members “as effective as, if not more effective than, other beginning teachers in terms of overall performance and impact on student achievement.”¹⁶² However, according to Zeichner and Schulte (2001), such findings are of “very limited value.” Principals often have a stake in the assessments—because they have invited in and championed the program—and often the comparison groups are too vague for meaningful evaluation.¹⁶³ Further, principals who are unsatisfied with their own teachers are less likely to invite TFA in; and principals unsatisfied with their corps members are not likely to continue to host the program.

¹⁵⁹ Darling-Hammond, et al. (2005), p. 25.

¹⁶⁰ Laczko-Kerr and Berliner (2002), p. 39.

¹⁶¹ Laczko-Kerr and Berliner (2002), p. 42. Statistical significance varied by year of the survey; results were not significant for the 1998-99 year because of a low sample size.

¹⁶² “National Principal Satisfaction with Teach for America Teachers.” Available [online] http://www.teachforamerica.org/research/documents/2007NationalPrincipalSurveyHighlights_8.07.pdf.

¹⁶³ Zeichner and Schulte (2001), p. 276.

Conclusion

Although the empirical evidence on Teach for America suggests that the program does no more harm to children than the status quo, the relevant comparison of TFA's merit should not be with other inexperienced, uncertified teachers, or the programs that place them in poverty-stricken, failing schools. If TFA's promise is to reform education to benefit all children, the relevant comparison must instead be with the most qualified teachers. Would suburban parents, for example, want TFA corps members in their children's classrooms? If parents with greater resources would not accept unqualified teachers for their children, why then should low-income parents, whose children are already so hampered, accept any less than the best quality teachers? As one teacher suggested, "TFA should send its recruits to privileged suburbs and private schools, where their chances of success will be greater, and their failures will do less harm. In turn, these privileged schools could lend highly qualified teachers to urban schools, where their expertise would be of more use."¹⁶⁴

TFA has obviously been successful in generating interest among college students in taking a teaching job, albeit for a limited time. The program has also helped to raise the profile of educational iniquity by virtue of constant media coverage for its initiatives.¹⁶⁵ Its goal is admirable, and the number of awards and accolades it has received is worthy of note.¹⁶⁶ However, for the program to be truly effective, it must amend its model to accord with best practices in education and with the strategies suggested by empirical evidence related to TFA itself.

¹⁶⁴ Darling-Hammond (1994), p. 4.

¹⁶⁵ The effect of raised awareness, however, is unproven.

¹⁶⁶ Including, for example, a Fast Company/Monitor Group Social Capitalist Award, an Amazon.com Nonprofit Innovation Award, and mention in Crutchfield's *Forces for Good: The Six Practices of High-Impact Nonprofits*.

Other alternative certification programs, none of which enjoys the cachet of TFA, also point the way to programmatic improvements. ACE, like TFA, requires a two-year commitment, but it provides more support and guidance to participants, and therefore may encourage greater commitment to teaching. New York City Teaching Fellows has also been more successful than TFA at retaining teachers; the program's focus on preparing participants for careers in education—as opposed to TFA's promotion of careers in business or law with educational advocacy as a hobby—may explain the difference. The Provisional Teacher Program, considered the gold standard of state alternative certification programs, entails extensive pre-service training and at least 200 hours of formal instruction. The disparity between their preparation and those of TFA corps members is stark. In general, alternative certification programs have promise as a means of generating interest in the teaching profession and filling spot shortages. However, the stakes are too high to accept or encourage substandard preparation, insufficient on-going support, or inadequate commitment to students. These programs provide evidence that programmatic solutions to educational inequity are possible, given certain criteria.

Based on the differential results between the programs noted above and TFA and other evidence of best practices in education, I suggest four fundamental changes to the TFA model. The following recommendations are not meant to be comprehensive, but instead to suggest much-needed improvements to create an organization that can benefit those children it purports to help:

1. **Change the recruitment strategy to focus on those with prior teaching**

experience: TFA's current focus is on recruiting individuals with no interest in

teaching. This model ensures that most corps members will leave after two years, when their experience could be most beneficial. It also serves the purpose of placing unprepared, unqualified people in front of a classroom that requires quality teaching even more so than the average. Although there is no one prototype of a successful teacher, teachers who have some experience with children will be better able to respond to student demand, as Johnson (2005) notes. Moreover, corps members who have previously professed interest in teaching, and spent time with children, are less likely to become discouraged and leave the profession, according to Rivkin (1998).

2. **Require corps members to student-teach during the second semester of their senior years:** Even if TFA does not amend its model to focus on recruiting better teachers, it can approximate the value of prior experience by requiring incoming corps members to devote the second semester of their senior years to student-teaching. Given the high-level of interest in the program, requiring additional time commitment is unlikely to jeopardize TFA's ability to recruit. However, student-teaching will provide TFA corps members with more experience before they enter the classroom as the teacher of record, and enable them to use the summer training institute to build on their pre-existing knowledge.
3. **Increase the time commitment to five years, with the first year as a training year:** Study after study finds that the learning curve for novice teachers peaks after three years. TFA's two year term removes teachers from the classroom just as they become more effective. Moreover, the lack of student teaching experience and theoretical knowledge of pedagogy has hampered corps members in their

classroom work, in their ability to teach and to manage classrooms. Experienced teachers, particularly those with certification, perform significantly better than novices and those that lack credentials. Increasing the term to five years will also have the effect of reducing casual interest, thereby weeding out those who view TFA as resume fodder rather than a serious commitment to low-income students.

4. **Encourage corps members to stay in education by developing sustainability groups, much like is done with corps members leaving for business or graduate school:** Instead of focusing on the opportunities available to TFA alumni in elite institutions, the program has an ideal opportunity to convince corps members to stay in the classroom, using the experience garnered from their first two years to become more effective educators.

TFA has a number of assets that make it successful in terms of recruitment, publicity, and public opinion. However, it must alter its model if it wishes to be successful in fulfilling its mission. Until the program focuses on enabling the children it serves to attend Harvard, instead of its corps members; until it aligns its model with the best practices in educational theory; and until it takes the teaching profession seriously rather than as a stepping-stone to better occupations, Teach for America cannot hope to deliver on its promise.