Teach For America Influence on Non-TFA Teachers in TFA-Hiring Schools

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Abstract: Teach For America (TFA) has left an indelible mark on education in the United States and worldwide through its expansion via Teach For All. A considerable body of research examines the impact and experiences of teachers who enter the profession via TFA and related organizations, including the ways in which they embody controversial policies and new forms of teacher expertise and professionalism. Scant research, however, has examined the experiences of non-TFA teachers who work alongside them. This instrumental case study draws on interviews with nine non-TFA teachers working in

traditional public schools to explore their experiences of interacting with TFA teachers at their schools. The findings focus on the perceived inexperience of TFA teachers as well as the labor expended by non-TFA teachers in support of these novice teachers. The paper also examines experiences of TFA teacher attrition and its impact on other teachers, students, and staff at the schools. The paper concludes by discussing the significance of this study and related research across individual, institutional, and broader structural levels.
Keywords: Teach For America; sociocultural policy studies; case study; teacher attrition

La influencia de Teach For America en los maestros que no pertenecen a TFA en las escuelas de contratación de TFA
Resumen: Teach For America (TFA) ha dejado una huella imborrable en la educación en los Estados Unidos y en todo el mundo a través de su expansión a través de Teach For All. Un cuerpo considerable de investigación examina el impacto y las experiencias de los docentes que ingresan a la profesión a través de TFA y organizaciones relacionadas, incluidas las formas en que encarnan políticas controvertidas y nuevas formas de especialización y profesionalismo docente. Sin embargo, escasa investigación ha examinado las experiencias de los docentes que no son TFA y que trabajan con ellos. Este estudio de caso instrumental se basa en entrevistas con nueve maestros que no son TFA que trabajan en escuelas públicas tradicionales para explorar sus experiencias de interacción con maestros TFA en sus escuelas. Los resultados se centran en la inexperiencia percibida de los docentes de TFA, así como en el trabajo realizado por docentes que no son de TFA en apoyo de estos docentes principiantes. El artículo también examina las experiencias de abandono escolar de los maestros de TFA y su impacto en otros maestros, estudiantes y personal escolar. El artículo concluye discutiendo la importancia de este estudio y la investigación relacionada a niveles individuales, institucionales y estructurales más amplios.
Palabras clave: Teach For América; estudios de política sociocultural; estudios de caso; deserción docente

Influência da Teach For America em professores não TFA em escolas de contratação de TFA
Resumo: Teach For America (TFA) deixou uma marca indelével na educação nos Estados Unidos e no mundo por meio de sua expansão via Teach For All. Um corpo considerável de pesquisa examina o impacto e as experiências de professores que ingressam na profissão via TFA e organizações relacionadas, incluindo as maneiras pelas quais eles incorporam políticas controversas e novas formas de especialização e profissionalismo dos professores. A pesquisa escassa, no entanto, examinou as experiências de professores não TFA que trabalham com eles. Este estudo de caso instrumental baseia-se em entrevistas com nove professores não TFA que trabalham em escolas públicas tradicionais para explorar suas experiências de interação com professores TFA em suas escolas. Os resultados se concentram na inexperiência percebida dos professores TFA, bem como no trabalho despendido por professores não TFA em apoio a esses professores iniciantes. O artigo também examina experiências de abandono de professores do TFA e seu impacto em outros professores, alunos e funcionários das escolas. O artigo conclui discutindo o significado deste estudo e pesquisas relacionadas em níveis individuais, institucionais e estruturais mais amplos.

Palavras-chave: Teach For América; estudos de política sociocultural; estudos de caso; deserção do professor

Teach For America Influence on Non-TFA Teachers in TFA-Hiring Schools

Teach For America (TFA) is a national teacher recruitment and training organization that leverages alternative licensure pathways to place its corps members (CMs), who typically hail from elite colleges and universities, in urban and rural public school districts for two-year teaching commitments. Although its recruits represent a small fraction of public school teachers in the United States, the organization has become increasingly visible, in part as the result of its political advocacy for neoliberal education reform efforts, including charter schools, increased standards and assessment, and 'teacher quality' policies (e.g., Kretchmar et al., 2014; Lefebvre et al., 2022; Mead et al., 2015; Russo, 2012; Waldman, 2019). Additionally, while CMs make up a small portion of the teaching population nationally, they can impose a larger influence given that TFA places them in concentrated locations (e.g., post-Katrina New Orleans). This visibility and influence has focused the attention of policymakers, researchers, educators, and other stakeholders primarily on the organization's measured outcomes (e.g., student achievement, principal satisfaction, retention). Yet, there exists an expanding body of research that proposes more multi-dimensional understandings of the organization's theoretical mission and practical materiality (Anderson, 2020).

This paper represents one important addition to this body of work via an investigation of how the introduction of TFA has influenced teachers who work with TFA's recruits. Although there exists considerable research that details the perspectives of TFA CMs as they are prepared for and initiated into U.S. classrooms (e.g., Blumenreich & Rogers, 2021; Crawford-Garrett, 2013; Matsui, 2015; Veltri, 2010), no research of which we are aware has qualitatively investigated how the introduction of TFA might influence the schools themselves and the existing faculty who work with, and alongside, TFA CMs.1 As such, the overarching goal of this work was to solicit the perspectives of non-TFA educators regarding how TFA as an organization, and its recruits, have influenced their schools.

Review of Literature

The growth and prominence of TFA in the education reform landscape has garnered a considerable amount of investigation.[2] Common emphases in the research literature include the recruitment and training of corps members (Brewer, 2014; Donaldson & Johnson, 2011), their lived experiences (Blumenreich & Rogers, 2021; Brewer & deMarrais, 2015; Matsui, 2015; Thomas & Lefebvre, 2020; Veltri, 2010), perceived outcomes (e.g., student achievement, principal satisfaction, etc.; Clark et al., 2013; Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; Glazerman et al., 2006; Kane et al., 2008; Turner et al., 2011), retention (Brewer, 2014; Donaldson & Johnson, 2011), and what alumni go on to do after their two-year stint in the classroom (Dobbie & Fryer, 2011; Higgins et al., 2011; McAdam & Brandt, 2009), such as law school, school administration and leadership, charter school

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1 One study investigates the spill-over effects in Miami-Dade County, but it largely focuses on student achievement data, as opposed to the personal experiences of teacher-colleagues (see Backes et al., 2019).
2 Although the literature surrounding TFA is considerable, this paper presents a basic introduction to the research landscape complete with select, representative citations. For a more complete literature review, see Anderson (2020).

management, politics, policymaking, and in some cases, continued teaching. Broadly understood, the literature on TFA has largely centered corps members across the myriad lines of inquiry. For example, there has been substantial focus on how CMs navigate and make sense of their experiences with TFA and in the classroom (Brewer & deMarrais, 2015; Matsui, 2015; Thomas & Mockler, 2018; Veltri, 2010), as well as the potential dangers associated with CM pedagogical practices and educational dispositions (Anderson, 2013a, 2013b).

Additionally, TFA's operations and dispositions fit squarely within the broader, market-oriented/neoliberal aim to privatize (Kretchmar et al., 2014; Lahann & Reagan, 2011; Lefebvre et al. 2022) and deregulate schools and teacher certification (Brewer & Cody, 2014). For example, TFA's organizational mission statement (Teach For America, n.d.) does not include any reference to teachers or teaching but, rather, focuses on "leadership" as an artifact of TFA's nearly singular focus on moving CMs quickly into, and out of, the classroom to enter positions of political influence (Anderson, 2020; Cersonsky, 2013). Moreover, TFA often recruits using a bait-and-switch tactic that exploits the good intentions of potential CMs (Millen, 2015), and has spent many hours and dollars seeking to marginalize critics or CMs who speak out on such topics (see Joseph, 2014; Levine & McCambridge, 2015). Others have long documented the inherent benefits that CMs experience through their affiliation with TFA – regardless of any educational impact (positive, negative, or neutral) their presence may have in classrooms (Clement, 2018; Labaree, 2010; Veltri, 2008).

This extant literature surrounding TFA has brought a considerable amount of pressure on the organization and represents, still, an area of continued inquiry. However, the study here expands the investigation into TFA by looking beyond the implications for its corps members. That is, TFA certainly plays an influential role in the lives of recruits, CMs, and many alumni, but it also has a measurable impact on non-TFA educators. This impact includes educators who work directly with TFA CMs (what our analysis, here, explores), other educators in those buildings, and the broader teaching profession both in terms of reinforcing the temporary and missionary status of teaching as feminine work – and thus low-paid work (Goldstein, 2014; Griffiths, 2006; Urban & Wagoner, 2009) – as well as broader policy implications. To be sure, many of the themes that have been explored across the research literature on CMs arise in our work here (e.g., missionary disposition, retention), but in what follows, we explore these issues from the perspective of those teachers who work alongside corps members in an effort to bolster our understanding of the organization's impact beyond the experiences of its CMs.

Theoretical Framework: Sociocultural Policy Studies

This paper is grounded theoretically in sociocultural policy studies and related anthropological and sociological research that examines people's lived experiences with policy.[3] Beyond aiming to simply measure instrumentally the intended effects of policy – and whether policy mechanisms are effective, or not – this broad body of theoretical and applied work aims to "people" policy and understand the ways in which it is enacted, appropriated, and experienced by individuals most closely connected to policy (Nielson, 2011). Ball et al. (2011), for instance, outlines a range of roles played by teachers in relation to policies, including but not limited to policy translators, receivers, and critics. These and other subjectivities of teachers have received increased attention in recent decades as approaches to policy analysis have diversified.

Largely missing from this theoretical framing of the subjectivities of teachers and their interactions with policies, however, is an understanding of teachers themselves as reflecting or

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3 See Molla (2021) for an overview of multi-disciplinary approaches to critical policy studies and analysis.

embodying policy. As alternative certification policies and state/federal laws allow new routes into the profession, new categories of teachers enter classrooms, schools, and the teaching profession, writ large (Thomas & Lefebvre, 2020; Thomas & Xu, 2022). In the case of TFA teachers, CMs in many ways embody controversial education policies related to teaching and teacher education (see Thomas, 2018a). They are quite literally visual and embodied representations of policies that have enabled new routes to teaching and/or the support and formation of new types of charter schools, for instance. This has led some CMs and alumni to try to hide their TFA affiliation due to fear of, at best, awkward conversations with non-TFA peers, or at worst, professional rejection and ill-treatment (see Mawhinney & Rinke, 2020; Schneider, 2017; Thomas, 2018a). In particular, Thomas (2018a) highlighted how many CMs sought to avoid identifying their affiliation with TFA, and some even intentionally (mis)appropriated common discourses to obfuscate the preparation they had received: some CMs referred to their five-week Summer Institute experience as "student teaching" in order to more closely reflect the terminology utilized by traditional teacher education programs, and therefore further delay identification with TFA amongst their non-TFA public school teacher colleagues. These examples demonstrate the complicated lived experiences of CMs who embody particular policies and programs within educational spaces where these approaches are frequently challenged.

Beyond informing the "policy embodiment" experienced by TFA CMs (Thomas, 2018a), sociocultural policy studies also enables a rich investigation of the experiences and perspectives of non-TFA teachers who work alongside CMs. As noted above, a considerable body of research has explored the insights of TFA CMs; however, scant analysis has concerned itself with "the voices of those co-teachers and non-TFA traditional teachers who partner with them in classrooms and welcome them into the local school community, or not" (Thomas, 2018a, p. 193). These teachers are also subject to the policies and programs that place TFA CMs in their schools, as well as the residual effects that influence the socialization and cultural processes occurring within schools. They may feel targeted by the introduction of TFA, and have been characterized, at least according to popular media and even CMs themselves (Brewer, 2015), as protectors of the status quo and even outwardly "hostile" to "change" (i.e., neoliberal education reform; Anderson et al., 2015). It is this reality that we aim to explore, as a policy "finds expression through sequences of events, new sets of relations, new political subjects, and new webs of meaning" (Shore & Wright, 2011, p. 1). In short, we build on Thomas (2018a) by examining the ways in which non-TFA teachers are also embodied via education discourses about policy and the teaching profession, and possess valuable knowledge about how the introduction of TFA has impacted their schools and reconstituted their daily practice (see also Ellison et al., 2018). To this end, we hope our "emphasis on the purposeful practice of diverse social actors reinstates agency across all levels of the policy process, making it possible to see policy not only as mandate but also as contested cultural resource" (Levinson & Sutton, 2001, p. 3).

Finally, sociocultural policy studies help highlight both the symbolic and tangible effects of policies such as the introduction of cadres of TFA teachers. Symbolically, new entrants into the teaching profession who come from alternative routes may signify shifts in expectations about the roles, judgements, knowledges, and skills of the profession, thereby altering conceptualizations of what is required to be prepared as an exemplary teacher (see Holloway, 2021; Thomas & Lefebvre, 2020). These perceptions are more than just opinions of the general public about particular educational policy issues; rather, the perspectives of non-TFA teachers offer insights into the lingering symbolic effects of TFA on the chosen career of these teachers, with potential implications

for status and career esteem.[4]

More tangible effects are also likely to be felt by teachers – such as changes to the professional work culture of the school – and experienced by the students themselves. For example, experienced teachers understand that the continuity of high-quality pedagogy across classrooms and between school years serves as an opportunity to help students actualize greater learning. To the contrary, when students experience low-quality teaching (in a previous class during the day or across a previous school year) from more novice teachers (TFA or otherwise), the transition to other classrooms and grades becomes more difficult. Another potential tangible effect, and one explored below, may be the additional mentoring and labor that non-TFA teachers spend to support their TFA teacher colleagues. In this way, non-TFA teachers also operate as embodied beings who in many instances experience a diverse range of effects from TFA and the policies that enable its continued operation. In sum, sociocultural policy studies and related concepts have enabled us as researchers to consider the ways in which policy is lived out in the quotidian experiences of non-TFA teachers who work alongside the CMs in their schools.

Research Methods

We label this research a single instrumental case study as it occurs within a bounded system (nine teachers in one southeastern U.S. city) and "focuses on a unique, information-rich situation, concern, or problem" (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 110). The research question guiding the inquiry and bounded case was "What are the experiences (with TFA as an institution and on an individual level) of non-TFA teachers teaching in TFA-hiring traditional public schools?" To address this question, nine teachers, whose teaching careers spanned from 5 to 38 years, were interviewed. These teachers were recruited using criterion-based sampling techniques (Roulston, 2010) that solicited participants based on the following criteria: non-TFA teachers with a minimum of three years of teaching experience who work in schools that hire TFA CMs in one southeastern U.S. city. The decision to focus on a single U.S. city was made in an effort to maintain geographic, curricular, and district consistency within the context of the study. Additionally, we opted to focus our efforts on traditional public schools, as charter schools characteristically hire an outsized number of TFA corps members and employ a pedagogy in closer alignment with TFA (Horn, 2011, 2016; Lefebvre & Thomas, 2017; Stahl, 2017), who are not the focus of this research.

To facilitate the interview process, Anderson reached out to professional contacts, who were asked to share a recruitment flyer with potential interviewees. Individual participants then independently contacted Anderson so as to ensure anonymity amongst contacts and to avoid coercion. The interviews themselves, which were conducted by Anderson via Zoom, a virtual meeting tool, employed a semi-structured format where a list of questions (see Appendix A) opened the discussion, but the teachers ultimately guided the trajectory of the interviews. Once the interviews were conducted, the audio recordings were transcribed, anonymized, and submitted to participants for member checking.

The data were then coded by Anderson to maintain analytical consistency across interviews. Several cycles of both *in vivo* and descriptive coding were utilized to identify patterns and themes in the data (e.g., Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Saldaña, 2009). While *in vivo* codes are those that signal the language used by the participants themselves, descriptive codes summarize the primary topic of a

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4 As an example of the potential influence of TFA teachers' perspectives on the teaching profession, see Kraemer-Holland (2020). Also, see Lam's (2020) exploration of Teach For China, which incorporated perspectives from both Teach For China fellows and other teachers working alongside them in the schools.

passage, and so reflect our broader interests and language (Saldaña, 2009). As a result, the codes that were selected inevitably structured the interpretations and analyses. After the data were coded, patterns were identified and categorized according to the dictates of thematic analysis. This approach required that particular attention be paid to repeated words, phrases, and/or evidence of potential answers to research questions (Grbich, 2007). Next, the coded data were organized into discrete categories using a taxonomic approach that allowed data comparisons across the interviews, and so moved us towards developing themes and data representation (Grbich, 2007).

All the teachers who were interviewed identified as White, which is an overrepresentation according to national (as well as city) teacher data sources (Hussar et al., 2020). Moreover, the sample size is relatively small and does not fully capture the broad contexts (e.g., teaching content, demographic, and geographic) in which TFA operates. These are clear limitations of the study and suggest potential areas of future research. However, the participants do indicate an overrepresentation of male teachers, as well as varied institutional affiliations, i.e., elementary, middle, and high school, subject areas, and years of experience (see Table 1). As such, there does exist some diversity of lived experience, as expressed in the interviews. Additionally, the data from these nine interviews revealed a clear level of consistency across the themes, indicating that saturation had been reached.

Table 1

Participant Profiles

Pseudonym	Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Area	Experience
Sarah	White	Female	HS Social Studies	5 years
Jack	White	Male	HS English	10 years
Rob	White	Male	HS English	10 years
Charles	White	Male	HS English/History	11 years
Joan	White	Female	Elementary Ed	12 years
Jane	White	Female	MS Math/Science	15 years
Jason	White	Male	HS History/Geography	16 years
Mary	White	Female	Elementary Ed	27 years
Linda	White	Female	MS Special Ed	38 years

Certainly, our positions as researchers/educators who are interested in educational (in)equity, as well as the lived and embodied effects of education policy are relevant to the analysis. These positions are supplemented with the following identity markers: Anderson identifies as a cis-hetero female, who is raced White (and so privileged), classed with limited material wealth despite status through education, and a former high school teacher certified via an alternative licensure pathway;

Thomas identifies as a cis-hetero male, White, middle class, traditionally-certified teacher who taught TFA CMs at a university partner institution, and a former public middle and high school teacher; and Brewer identifies as a cis-hetero male, White, materially privileged, traditionally-certified teacher who joined TFA during the Great Recession, and a former middle and high school teacher. To mediate the ways in which these unique positionalities impacted our interpretations of the data, we engaged in a process of recursive reflexivity, wherein we iteratively reflected on our unique identities and how they informed our analyses (Noblit et al., 2004).

Our positionality vis-à-vis TFA is also worth noting. To begin, we certainly recognize there are some great TFA teachers and alumni; however, we are also critical of instances where TFA has negatively impacted education policy, schools, students, and communities. Varied manifestations of this criticality are evident in our individual bodies of scholarship on TFA, all of which are rooted in the data themselves and should not be presumed as purely ideological in nature. Our interpretations of the data surrounding TFA – gathered in different ways over multiple years across diverse sites – has supported a general disposition that allows for critique of the organization. Moreover, and in line with the theoretical framing above (e.g., Levinson & Sutton, 2001; Molla, 2021; Shore & Wright, 2011), we do not see TFA (and its international variants) as purely rational solutions to objectively identified problems; therefore, the "shared problems, shared solutions" mantra (see Ahmann, 2015) does not resonate with our understandings of educational policies and the programs with which they are aligned. In fact, we do not view any policies in this manner, but instead understand problems themselves to be discursively created and politically motivated (e.g., Bacchi, 2009). These understandings have undoubtedly contributed to the interpretations that we provide in this paper, yet we attempted to mediate the positionalities that we describe here (and to add to the trustworthiness of our interpretations) by, for example, including frequent analytic memos in the process of analysis and engaging in member checking with the participants themselves. It is nonetheless true that the research questions asked and explored are always necessarily informed by the positionalities and lived experiences of the researchers.

Findings

While not intended as a monolithic standard of the non-TFA experience, the analyses revealed clear, yet at times overlapping, themes that we outline here.
1. *Problems with Teacher Attrition*: This theme, the most pronounced one across the data, refers to various problems of attrition, as well as the overall outcomes of teacher attrition in their schools.
2. *Perceptions of the TFA Experience*: This theme refers to the various perspectives shared by the participants at both micro (individuals) and macro levels (TFA as an institution).
3. *School Environments*: This theme describes the varied, often challenging, school environments in which the teachers' schools exist, including the potential challenges that those environments might produce for CMs (classroom management skills and an overall lack of preparation) and the ways in which the teachers, their schools, and TFA have attempted to mediate those challenges.

In what follows, we detail each of these themes and provide examples to showcase the experiences of the non-TFA teachers who were interviewed.

Problems with Teacher Attrition

This theme was, by far, the largest theme identified. That is, nearly all the participants pointed to CM attrition as a significant concern, especially when they, themselves and the district, expend a great amount of time to help develop CMs.[5] As elaborated below, in many ways the participants' comments reflect ongoing scholarly discussions about CM attrition, though CMs are of course not the only teachers to leave.[6] In fact, one of the participants, Rob, noted:

> I feel the success rate is about the same. I mean, if you know one in two teachers in a traditional ed program is going to quit after a year, then one of two of the TFA-ers quits in a year, and so I haven't seen a big disparity between the needs necessarily or the knowledge gaps or anything like that between at least the ones that I have worked with, the TFA corps members and then traditional teacher prep programs.

Apart from anecdotal recounts of their unique experiences with TFA teacher leavers, the participants' discussions of teacher attrition were represented by two primary subthemes:

1. *Expending time and resources*, wherein participants shared how problems of attrition often negated the time and energy spent on developing TFA CMs.
2. *The costs of attrition*, which underlines the participants' understandings of how attrition might be influencing their schools/communities, as well as how the attrition of TFA might be influencing the teaching profession at large.

Regarding the first subtheme, many of the teachers who were interviewed described working to help TFA CMs to be successful, largely due to a sense of obligation to students, even when that additional support meant expending valuable time. Mary provides a helpful example here:

> So what we are seeing now is the teachers who are TFAs are coming in and they are extremely dependent on other teachers to help them learn to teach a class so they're having to be supported . . . because they have no clue, and in order for those children to not be experimented on, and to be sure that they make the gains that are supposed to, that's been the function of teachers who do what I do. They're [TFA CMs] not able to do a classroom by themselves.

For Mary, the limited preparation and experience that many TFA CMs have as a result of the training/support model means that other teachers have to pick up the slack so as not to subject students to the kind of experimentation that TFA often engenders amongst its CMs. Similarly, Jack says,

> They've got all these other people [teacher mentors and TFA support] who are kind of trying to support them to make sure their transition into the role is good.

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5 For example, TFA CM attrition constitutes a significant amount of financial loss for districts (Brewer et al., 2016).

6 Though it is beyond the scope of this paper to review the evidence on teacher attrition, it has been well established that many novice teachers – TFA or otherwise – do not remain in urban settings long-term and the first years are often the most challenging (Boyd et al., 2006; Ingersol, 2004). CMs, specifically, may be remarkably unlikely to turn over during their two years in TFA, but they then "turn over at incredibly high rates at the end of their 2-year commitment" (Redding & Henry, 2019, p. 229). Moreover, in the long term attrition among TFA teachers is generally higher than for traditionally certified teachers, likely due at least in part to the programmatic emphasis within TFA on temporary teaching rather than career teaching (Boyd et al., 2006; Brewer, 2014; Donaldson & Johnson, 2011).

> It is smooth. The problem with that is if people are here two years, you know, if folks are here for two years and then gone, it feels bad to say, but some of that energy is wasted. You know, some of that energy is wasted if all we are asking is for those teachers to survive two years and then head on their way then if you're that new teacher mentor, if you're that new teacher mentor principal who is responsible for an entire mentorship program, it can definitely feel like the investment . . . the return on the investment is pretty low.

Here, Jack describes the (potentially wasted) energy that many non-TFA teachers and mentorship teams (which was part of Jack's school culture) expend trying to support CMs as they transition into their new roles. Although, as non-participants, they were largely disconnected from the TFA program as a whole, Mary and Jack demonstrate in these excerpts some of the ways in which the local school context is altered by TFA's insertion, all of which is afforded by larger state-level policies.

Regarding the second subtheme, the participants identified several ways in which teacher attrition impacted their schools and the profession at large. As representative of this identification, Linda describes how attrition negatively influenced her students:

> My problem is that . . . if a student comes across a teacher for three years in a row, it really has a very strong impact on what happens . . . when the students see [CMs] leave teaching [after two-years], it has a bit of an ability to negate what happened.

For Linda, teacher continuity is something that significantly impacts a student's learning and, because TFA rates of attrition are characteristically high, students of leaving CMs are negatively affected. Similarly, Charles shares,

> Often times family units are always changing, there's no security in where you live or the amount of money you might have and so for a lot of these kids, having a present, a dependable personality there at the school is so important . . . Because that was their anchor, you know? . . . And then by the nature of the program, you're taking that anchor away.

Here Charles highlights the temporal and longitudinal nature of educational experiences for students, even when policy initiatives like TFA encourage CMs to pursue leadership and effect change at levels beyond the classroom. For the students who remain behind, removing a teacher "anchor" or source of stability may be detrimental.

Likewise, the participants suggested that teacher attrition negatively influences the teaching profession. For example, Sarah describes the ways in which experience and teacher attrition intersect: "Teaching is such a craft that . . . to come in for one to two years, maybe three . . . your third year is when you start figuring it out." Here, Sarah describes the effort that goes into teaching, and thus the importance of experience, which is minimized by TFA's contention that a two-year requirement is sufficient. In this way, TFA undermines the time and effort needed to teach and to teach well. Similarly, Jack sums up his thoughts thusly:

> TFA as an institution is designed to do exactly what it does and that is to fill teaching gaps in the communities, in communities that are historically underperforming, underserved, and to try and take high impact teaching strategies and implement them quickly and by leveraging very talented, very bright young people. I think they do exactly that. They're doing that at the school

level though. If your school sees . . . an influx of TFA-ers, it does impact your faculty, it impacts your culture because everybody knows that they're going to be gone in two years or gone in three years and you know that those people are going to work their butts off. You know that they're going to go above and beyond in their classrooms. They're going to teach with lots of energy and they're going to shine more than likely. The problem with that is definitely that we're saying, "Please come shine and give your best to kids and this community that is under-resourced generally; give your best for two years. Serve for two years. Don't make a career out of this. We don't want you to make [one]. Whether or not you make it a career is not our interest; just come give." So, we're doing a disservice to the teaching industry in general in saying that people, I mean this is an avenue for people to come, to drop in and leave. You know, and give it a shot. It sends a terrible message to veteran teachers. It sends a terrible message to teachers who are coming through teacher preparation programs, thereby lowering morale because you feel less valued as a teacher. I mean teachers are already generally underpaid across the entire [State] and then you bring in fresh new faces who see more or less teaching as a service, as something an active service and not as a profession, a career, to be devoted to and I mean you're effectively slapping teachers in the face and saying kind of they're undervalued.

For Jack, although TFA CMs may be successful in the classroom, problems of attrition represent a significant, institutional concern. That is, TFA serves as a school-based solution to a systemic challenge that exacerbates existing negative perceptions of career educators. In this manner, policies and programs that enable or even encourage shorter-term teaching reshape the lived realities of others in the school, particularly those invested deeply in the teaching profession (as a long-term career), and the cultivation of high-quality teaching among their teacher colleagues. Yet, these embodied policy effects, as experienced by teachers like Jack, are often overlooked. In sum, the participants raised serious concerns about teacher attrition, indicating that TFA does influence the schools and non-TFA faculty to whom they are exposed.

Perceptions of the TFA Experience

The participants all shared their experiences with individual CMs, which were typically positive, while also expressing concerns about the institution as a whole. Subthemes that were classified under this theme include:

1. *Perceptions of individuals*, wherein the participants described their direct experiences with CMs, past and present.
2. *Perceptions of TFA*, which refers to the participants' understandings of the institution as a whole, including potential benefits/harms done to both their schools and the teaching profession at large.

This subtheme also generally concerns larger, public perceptions of TFA, which are broadly characteristic of other significant critiques of the organization, such as problems with attrition; young, unprepared teachers; deprofessionalization of teaching; missionary/savior mentality; that TFA serves as a "stepping stone" towards another more promising or lucrative career, etc.

Regarding the first subtheme, while most of the participants acknowledged the general unpreparedness of the CMs with whom they worked, they also shared that the relationships were mostly positive (or at worst inconsistent), something many attributed to the youth and enthusiasm

that CMs brought into their schools. Charles sums up his experience: "I would say that all of them as individuals had good hearts and were really well intentioned, but as far as being educators, they were pretty unprepared."[7] Similarly, Jack describes the enthusiasm and work ethic of the CMs with whom he collaborated:

> In some instances they're not that much older than some of the students, and they're bright-eyed and energetic and unjaded, uncynical . . . They come in very focused, very energized, but they're also lost in trying to . . . a TFA-er is more likely to hide in their classroom for the first week or two, head down, nose to the grindstone, doing what they know best, and struggling through it probably, but there are all these other resources, all these people, all these structures in place that are there to help if they need them.

Here, both Charles and Jack outline the enthusiasm and caring stance of the TFA CMs they knew, who were likely striving to embody TFA's relentless pursuit of results (see Thomas & Lefebvre, 2018). The self-isolation, however, may speak to larger contextual factors related to the insularity of TFA's programming and broader sociocultural positioning of non-TFA teachers by the organization itself. Importantly, though, many novice teachers struggle in the first weeks – not just TFA teachers – and may be apprehensive to ask for advice too early.

Jane's perspective did not clearly align with the others' positivity, however. She notes:

> My overall impression is that it is a really mixed bag. You can get a total jewel, a person who would not ordinarily think of teaching to make a career of it. Best case scenario: learn a lot, bring up equity issues, bring in best practices, work like a dog, coach, do all kinds of stuff that really will help out the school and develop relationships with families and even shake up the old teacher mentality and bring us along to see things in a new way. Best case scenario. And on the other side of that, they can be a whole year of not very good teaching for 100 kids.

This inconsistency amongst CMs meant that when it was good, a lot of good would come of it, but when it was bad, the students suffered. Taken collectively across the broader data set, the participants almost unanimously shared that CMs enter their placements with significant enthusiasm and a strong work ethic, something which the participants certainly praised. However, they also acknowledged potential pitfalls, which were characteristically connected with CMs' lack of preparation (including knowledge of the school culture) and, especially, classroom management skills (see the third theme on 'school environments' below).

Regarding the second subtheme, the participants often distinguished TFA CMs from TFA as an institution. While the first subtheme was typically positive (that is, the participants often shared that they enjoyed positive relationships with TFA CMs), the critiques leveled against TFA as an institution were often negative. Jason, for example, offers the following:

> If TFA and [other alternative training program], if all of these sort of non-traditional programs didn't exist, then our city would really see exactly what the numbers look like in terms of teachers, and it would be an absolute crisis, and as long as these programs exist, then they serve as Band-Aides, so to speak, in ways that allow our district and the city not to prioritize things like teacher pay that might actually galvanize more people to enter the teaching workforce. So some

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7 See Thomas (2018b) on the good intentions of TFA CMs.

> people, I know some people that think of TFA as a macro-level problem that
> holds the city back from addressing the real issue, which is the declining number
> of teachers that's missed. That's all over the place.

Here, Jason describes the ways in which TFA, as an institution, acts as a temporary solution to a particular construction of the teacher recruitment and attrition problems. In short, TFA helps mask deeper issues and effectually absolves the system of current ills, therefore impeding systemic change across the district. Further, this condition represents an opportunity for districts to save money through cheap labor contracts with TFA and by not having to recruit certified educators (Brewer et al. 2016).

Additionally, several of the participants discussed the ways in which TFA's mission effectively changes what it means to be a teacher, something they worried about often and believed to be detrimental to the profession. For example, Jane shares, "I worry about the profession being degraded by the idea that anybody can be a teacher." In Jane's view, TFA's mission, which rests on the notion that enthusiasm and leadership potential will trump extensive pre-service training, is problematic. Similarly, Mary shares:

> The Teach For America program . . . present today's young people – who do not
> have teaching degrees – the idea that they are going to come into these schools
> and save these children from evil teachers who are going to ruin their lives and
> who do not have their best interests at heart.

Here, Mary contributes to the production of normative discourses about who should teach, how teachers should be prepared, and more, though she herself is located as disempowered. She also draws on so-called 'savior' discourses in referencing the embodied role CMs are intended to play in delivering students from the harmful clutches of other teachers. Implicit in her comments is a belief that traditional and veteran teachers are villainized by TFA, and arguably the inner workings of public education as a whole. Certainly, TFA would challenge this assertion, though it characteristically upholds what we perceive to be harmful dichotomies that pit teachers against one another via, for example, its over-emphasis on the literature that highlights competition structures between its CMs and other traditionally prepared, certified, and/or experienced teachers (Anderson, 2020), or recent tensions related to whether TFA CMs were allowed to join fellow teachers to participate in union action in the form of teacher strikes (Waldman, 2019). Taken collectively, then, this theme describes how non-TFA teachers perceive their TFA colleagues at the micro level (usually positive), as well as TFA as an institution at the macro level (usually negative), concerns which echoed across the interviews and which are exacerbated by teacher attrition as described above.

School Environments

With this final theme we describe the often-challenging school environments in which the teachers are working and for which many of the CMs were not prepared. This theme also includes

the ways in which both non-TFA and TFA teachers attempted to mediate struggles they encountered. Subthemes that were collapsed into this theme include:

1. *Challenging school environments*
2. *TFA underpreparedness*
3. *TFA and school support/mentorship*

In general, then, this theme is representative of the ways in which TFA is positioned within larger school cultures, as well as the supports necessary to help CMs be successful in those environments.

Regarding the first subtheme, many of the teachers who were interviewed described the challenges that all teachers often face in their unique school environments. For example, Jason shares:

> The school I work in is, we have a lot of challenges to overcome. We don't really have time, we don't have time to bicker about who's in the building. It's been a pretty great place in the sense that there's, everyone in that building seems to understand how hard it is, everyone in that building shoots way over par a lot of days and it's really hard to birdie. There are no absolute rock stars that you go to and can depend on day in and day out to have sort of the ideal classroom where nothing goes wrong. Everything goes wrong all the time.

In these exceedingly challenging school environments, all novice teachers were believed to struggle, a sentiment that Rob echoes when he says, "I have found that working with TFA-ers, again in the context of a high needs school, really challenging school to work with to begin with, so even for a really solid, any kind of teacher it is a challenge."

Yet, CMs may be doubly disadvantaged by their overall lack of preparedness and inexperience, especially in the area of classroom management.[8] This concern was expressed across a majority of the interviews. For example, Joan shares:

> The only difference I see between them [traditionally trained teacher and TFA CM] is the teacher that actually went the traditional route knew how to set up spaces in her classroom and rules. She had an idea of what rules or procedures she wanted and where materials would be laid out in the classroom, to where the TFA teacher was trying to figure out all of that at the same time. She wasn't sure where should supplies be, what supplies do we need and what rules do we need and what should I do the first day of school, to where the traditional teacher had an idea of those things because she had seen it throughout her program.

For Joan, traditionally trained teachers were generally more prepared as the result of their extensive pre-service training and student-teaching practicum, while the limited pre-service training provided by TFA (about 2.5 days of student teaching) left its teachers lacking, particularly in the area of classroom management.[9] This sort of concern was similarly reflected in Jane's interview. She says,

> When it is bad, you're just like, they don't have classroom management, they don't have support, they don't have the chops like you've got to have your eyes in

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8 See Blumenreich and Rogers (2021) for a detailed discussion of the challenges related to teaching preparedness and classroom management for the inaugural TFA corps members from 1990.

9 TFA's primary focus is on-the-job training, not extensive pre-service training. The 2.5 days of teaching is a calculation from Brewer (2014) based on 18 hours of student teaching accrued during TFA's Summer Institute reported as a cumulative time based on a normal school day of 7 hours. In addition, TFA (2019) has

the back of your head, the with-it-ness, those kind of things when you're a teacher. When they don't have that, it is really hard.

Where more support did exist, many of the participants expressed more positive outcomes, however.

Regarding the final subtheme, teacher support and mentorship are essential for all teachers, not just CMs. However, as the result of their limited pre-service training, in-service support becomes exceedingly important. When that support existed in their schools, the participants reported more positive relationships with CMs. For example, Joan's school has a culture of mentorship, which she connected with improved outcomes for all teachers and especially TFA CMs. She shares, "They've held a lot of things after school on classroom management, number talks, morning meetings, things that classroom teachers need to help set them up for success." For Joan, then, school-based supports contributed to more positive outcomes.

In addition to these school-based supports, CMs also receive ongoing support from TFA itself. When that training was meaningful, which was not always the case, the participants reported that CMs benefited. For example, Joan says, "I think the TFA mentor support is great and all first-year teachers, whether they're alternatively certified or not, they should all get that kind of coaching and support." This sentiment, however, was not shared across the interviews as evidenced by Jason, who says,

I'll just share what I've heard even from some TFA-ers, is that the relationship tends to be within TFA. It's not as much within the school itself or with some of the other administrators, because there is a lot of coaching, and there is a lot of discussion of the TFA model and all of that, so some TFA-ers that I've spoken to were frustrated with that. They felt like there could be more connection with the school.

For Jason, while the TFA supports in place were beneficial in that they helped CMs to establish relationships with one another, he notes that the CMs with whom he worked wanted more connections with the schools themselves, whether that be at the level of the schools or TFA. This sentiment was echoed by Charles, who reached out to TFA specifically to solicit more support from the organization regarding how to work in his unique school context:

Because there is this issue where they were coming in and essentially speaking a different language than the school was speaking, I reached out to their coordinator specifically and then the coordinator for [city] and said look, "I understand that you, that your program has a certain thing, like you've got this training over the summer where you . . ." All of our teachers had done a kind of teaching crash course. They had taught a summer school session in rural [state] or something, which is fairly bizarre. So I made an appeal to them like, "I understand about your program has certain dictates and certain things you are doing, but it would be great if . . ." My proposal to them was that we make some sort of, almost like a binder that was just kind of like a "How To" manual in the beginning.

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noted previously that CMs at Summer Institute "work with one-to-three other corps members to co-teach a classroom of students for one or more hours each day…"

Charles' demonstrable concern over the positioning and experience of TFA teachers in his school manifested in an unsuccessful effort to engage TFA in the local culture of his school. Had there been more coordination between TFA and the schools, more positive outcomes for CMs may have resulted. Taken collectively, then, this subtheme points to the importance of mentorship at both the school and TFA organizational levels, something which many of the teachers who were interviewed took upon themselves.

Discussions and Implications

This research highlights the perspectives of educators who are often missing from the research on TFA and provides powerful insights into their experiences working alongside TFA CMs. In addition to capturing non-TFA teachers' perspectives and concerns, the paper shows how critiques leveled against TFA, where they existed, were typically institutional (e.g., many labeled TFA a "Band-Aid" for systemic educational problems), as opposed to individual (i.e., focused on CMs themselves). This perspective is largely absent from the literature, even as TFA and the international programs it has spawned through Teach For All (see Brewer et al., 2020; Thomas et al., 2021) may put "new 'quality teachers' on a pedestal and then expects the very people it is comparing them with to mentor them in a spirit of generosity" (Muir, 2020, p. 31). Certainly, this orientation is problematic, given TFA's characteristically high rates of attrition.

The predominant theme brought forth from our participants centered around perceptions of teacher attrition and the resulting implications and impacts that such attrition may have on the perspectives and practices of career educators. The non-TFA teachers shared that, while they appreciated the enthusiasm and energy brought in by TFA CMs, they were often frustrated by high rates of attrition and their lack of classroom management skills resulting from minimal training.[10] As a result, the participants felt disinclined to invest a lot of time and energy in helping advance the professional development of CMs, knowing that many leave after two years, if that. Yet most participants nonetheless invested in CMs if help was sought, feeling compelled to support the needs of CMs' students. One wonders how much more effective these non-TFA teachers could be in their own classrooms with fewer demands to help their TFA colleagues. In sum, the findings highlight the material effects of TFA in both tangible and symbolic forms.

Teacher attrition has significant tangible implications for administrators looking to hire TFA corps members (Anderson, 2019; Donaldson & Johnson, 2010), the teaching profession writ large, as well as for policymakers who look to TFA as a preferred alternative to other teacher training programs/models. That is, when TFA teachers leave their schools, if not the profession altogether, they take with them their unique knowledge of students and overall school culture, as well as the experience they have developed over their two-year commitments. Not only does this have real effects on administrators who must, then, continuously invest in rebuilding their faculty, but it also influences the teaching profession as a whole. Similarly, teacher attrition has significant symbolic effects in that, as we demonstrated in our findings, non-TFA teachers, expecting CMs to leave, are essentially disincentivized from investing in their TFA teacher colleagues and the overall teacher development process. Although they frequently mentored CMs anyway as the result of their commitments to student learning, the overall school cultures in which they worked were often negatively impacted by the symbolic effects of teacher attrition.

From a policy and professionalism standpoint, the churning of employment by minimizing teacher shortages with the practice of reserving positions for TFA continually resets the years of

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10 See Donaldson (2008, 2012), Donaldson and Johnson (2010, 2011), and Redding and Henry (2019).

experience for a teaching position back to zero (Brewer et al., 2016). While this effort reduces the cost of faculty employment for a district, it further problematizes the political and policy commitment to teaching as a profession. Namely, as a profession that has long realized comparatively lower pay given its historical status as a feminized job (Goldstein, 2014; Urban & Wagoner, 2009), the stifling of teacher pay reifies the work as temporary and of little value. Yet, this is precisely the institutional and discursive disposition of TFA: teaching is unprofessional and does not require meaningful training; teaching does not require a long-term career commitment; low teacher salaries are acceptable because, at least in the case of many CMs, it is likely only temporary work.

These findings also concern individual school cultures, which differ across school contexts: where strong school-based cultures of mentorship existed, the participants offered help more quickly, as that was an expectation. Certainly, CMs received ongoing in-service training from TFA staff, a necessary prerequisite for the organization's overall approach to teacher education, i.e. extensive on-the-job training vs. the kind of extended pre-service training that is typical of traditional teacher preparation programs. For several of the participants, TFA's in-service support was something from which all teachers, not just CMs, would benefit, an interesting and novel finding of the study. Others, however, identified various problems with TFA's overall mentoring approach, which was largely insular and disconnected from the realities of their individual school cultures.

Should school-based mentoring, then, be more successful, it needs to be anchored in the specifics of the unique school environments. This is especially important for CMs who often hail from areas outside the communities in which they eventually teach. Again, this overall lack of knowledge about their newly adopted communities influences the larger school cultures in which CMs and their non-TFA peers work. Importantly, the acquisition of this kind of institutional knowledge is also undermined by TFA's high rates of attrition, thus presenting an additional symbolic effect of attrition that undercuts efforts to produce more long-term, systemic change (Anderson, 2019). As such, both mentoring and attrition are areas of concern for both TFA and the individual schools who host its CMs. Ultimately, the findings confirm the importance of in-service as well as pre-service mentoring (see also, Anderson & Aronson, 2020) and teacher education designed specifically for the synchronous-service roles inhabited by TFA CMs (Thomas & Lefebvre, 2020).

It is also worth pointing out that the institutional disposition that TFA takes towards pedagogy has been documented as creating a toxic environment within the corps itself leading to myriad health concerns (Matsui, 2015; Thomas & Lefebvre, 2018). During its Summer Institute, TFA has contracted with a suicide prevention hotline and ensures that all CMs have access to the number given the high-intensity and high-stakes environment surrounding CMs attempting to actuate a few days of training into meaningful academic gains for students, understanding a failure to do so as reflective of their own shortcomings. This reality, partnered with the low pay and explicitly short-term commitment, can exacerbate CMs leaving as soon as their two-year teaching stint is complete. Nevertheless, it can be the manufactured prestige of a TFA affiliation that reinforces institutional hubris (Levine & McCambridge, 2015) and continues to manifest as a barrier for collaboration between TFA and non-TFA teachers.

Finally, the participants were characteristically careful to distinguish TFA CMs from TFA as an institution. Importantly, the "institution" is a primary source of concern in populist politics. Consistent with what was shared by the participants themselves, TFA's larger, organizational mission rests on the assumption that enthusiasm and leadership potential trump training, experience, and longevity. This orientation, however, establishes dangerous competition structures that

effectively destabilize the teaching profession (and teacher education) as a whole. Certainly, competition within the education sector is not new; rather, it has been cultivated since the 1980s via neoliberal reform efforts that embrace the perceived advantages of market-based policies (e.g., standards, consequential accountability systems, school choice).[11] More specifically, these reform efforts have created a situation where traditionally prepared teachers are forced to compete (for test score advantages, jobs, etc.) with their TFA and other alternatively licensed counterparts. As Jane points out,

> We are competing with each other for the best test scores so that we look, we have to look good relative to each other, so the whole system sets us up to be adversaries with each other instead of collaborators, and that's a systemic problem even with experienced teachers.

For Jane, the competition structures set up by neoliberal education policies, including the introduction of programs like TFA, disincentivize teachers from collaborating with one another. Yet, although she knows spending hours to help new CMs may lead to reduced test scores for *her* students, she nonetheless tries to support new CMs because students deserve quality teaching:

> We plan everything together, I'm not holding anything back, I'm giving him everything I do, and he is lovely and grateful and receptive to it and when he has, when we did the planning this summer I said, "Give me these kids. They're hard. They're going to mess up his classes. He's not going to know what to do with these kids yet."

Her lived experience with this CM – who embodies TFA and other alternative certification policies and programs (Thomas, 2018a) – reflects not only the unintended consequences of TFA teachers in TFA-hiring schools, but also the daily practices of some non-TFA teachers who are key actants in the policy and pedagogical context created by the introduction of TFA. As such, this research represents previously unexamined impacts of TFA on the lives and work of non-TFA teachers and the teaching profession as a whole. We contend that further research examining the 'peopled' and embodied effects of Teach For America is necessary to add nuance to the ongoing debates about teaching, teacher education, and the teaching profession in the United States and beyond.

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11 See Blumenreich and Rogers (2021) for a helpful review of TFA and concomitant changes to teacher education policies and programs from the 1980s onward.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about yourself.
    a. Brief life story
    b. Self-definitions
    c. What are you doing now?
        i. Job?
        ii. Job Preparation?
        iii. Work in education?
    d. Motivation?
        i. What drew you to teaching?
        ii. What drew you to this school?
    e. Tell me about the school in which you teach
        i. School culture
        ii. Students
        iii. Faculty and Administration
2. Perceptions of TFA
    a. Public perceptions?
    b. Personal perceptions?
    c. What do you see as the role of TFA?
        i. What purpose does it serve?
    d. Is that role different from non-TFA teachers?
        i. How?
3. Experiences with TFA
    a. Tell me about your experiences with TFA.
        i. As an institution
        ii. With TFA recruits
    b. Do you have any personal experiences with TFA as an institution or with recruits in particular that you would like to share?
4. Impact on schools
    a. Has TFA impacted your school and, if so, how?
        i. As an institution and experiences with recruits
    b. What are your overall impressions of TFA and its recruits?
    c. What has been the overall outcome of TFA on your school?
        i. Students?
        ii. Other faculty?
        iii. Administration?
        iv. Community?
        v. School culture?
5. Overall Impressions
    a. What should I know about how TFA operates in your school?
    b. What is your overall assessment of TFA?
        i. Positive?
        ii. Negative?

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