

ED 405 331

SP 037 214

AUTHOR Tatel, Edith S.
 TITLE Teach for America: An Effective Emergency Teaching Corps.
 PUB DATE 97
 NOTE 21p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (49th, Phoenix, AZ, February 26-March 1, 1997).
 PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
 EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
 DESCRIPTORS *Alternative Teacher Certification; *Beginning Teachers; College Graduates; Elementary Secondary Education; Rural Schools; *Teacher Effectiveness; *Teacher Persistence; *Teacher Recruitment; Teacher Supply and Demand; Urban Schools
 IDENTIFIERS *Teach for America

ABSTRACT

Teach for America (TFA) is a national teacher corps of outstanding individuals who commit themselves to teach for 2 years in urban and rural areas that are experiencing persistent teacher shortages. TFA selects corps members through an intensive application process, operates inservice institutes to prepare them to enter the classroom, clusters them in placement sites, and establishes local offices in these areas to arrange for ongoing support and professional development. Ongoing professional development takes the form of support groups, workshops, and university or district programs that result in certification. Since 1990, TFA has placed 500 teachers annually in under-resourced classrooms. Despite some criticism of the quality of teaching by TFA teachers, surveys of students, parents, principals, and superintendents show ratings that are overwhelmingly positive. TFA retention rate is better in urban than in rural areas; in all areas TFA teacher retention is higher than that of other teachers in the same systems. TFA members' classes often show improvement on standardized tests far above that of other classes in the same school, and many TFA teachers are actively involved in providing extensive extra-curricular activities for their students. TFA corps members willingly accept assignments in under-resourced schools, work to teach their students, and exert a significant positive impact on students, their schools, and communities. (Contains 39 references.) (JLS)

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Edith S. Tatel

Director of Professional Development, Teach For America

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Leadership for Transforming the Profession: Fulfilling the Commitment to Children,
Communities, and the Common Good
AACTE Annual Meeting
Phoenix, Arizona

February 28, 1997

Teach For America: An Effective Emergency Teaching Corps

Edith S. Tatel

Since 1990 Teach For America (TFA), responding to principals' calls for help, has placed 500 teachers each year in under-resourced urban and rural classrooms. This year, 1996-1997, 936 corps members (TFA teachers) are responsible for over 100,000 of our nation's children in 9 urban regions and 4 rural areas (Table 1). In addition to those teaching for their first or second year--the term of their original agreement--nearly half of the alumni, the former corps members, are teaching beyond their commitment for their third, fourth, fifth, or sixth year. This paper examines some urgent questions about school district needs for emergency teachers, and TFA corps members' effectiveness, including retention, particularly in light of the contexts in which they work. Is there a need? Are TFA corps members effective teachers? Are they effective leaders beyond their classrooms? Can they be effective in the challenging contexts in which they work?

I first encountered Teach For America in 1995 when the Washington, D. C. Executive Director appealed to area universities for substantive graduate studies for the 50 corps members teaching in District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS). TFA wanted corps members to receive more high quality professional preparation and corps members needed to fulfill credentialing requirements by the end of their second year of teaching. As then Director of Teacher Education at American University, I was interested. Our education students trained in some D. C. schools, so I was familiar with the context, personnel, and expectations of DCPS. These new TFA teachers were quick learners in their classrooms and ours. Their university work excelled, and they constantly examined pedagogical learning in terms of their daily classroom goals. As part of our program, I visited corps members in their classrooms and found that they met the immense challenges of beginning teaching with vigor, creativity and resourcefulness. They welcomed new ideas, incorporating them into their teaching. When they floundered and fumbled, as all new teachers do, they regrouped and replanned, refocusing

on meeting their students' needs. Refusing to give up, they searched for ways to set the same high standards for their students as they themselves were accustomed to meeting.

At the time I proposed this paper, my experience with TFA corps members was limited to my interactions within the framework of our university collaboration. Six months ago, in September, 1996, I became more involved, working with TFA nationally as their Director of Professional Development. I had read some horror stories about TFA (Darling-Hammond, 1994) and I had read some glory stories (Bowler, 1995; Leyden, 1994; Sommerfield, 1995). Viewing TFA through more information and with independent data helps to clarify the distortion created by both horror stories and glory stories.

TFA Helps Fill a Need

State and national school reform efforts have focused, correctly I believe, upon improving teacher quality as a central way to improve student learning. In the mean time, however, school systems in under-resourced areas search, often quite unsuccessfully, to attract and retain qualified teachers. Schools of education prepare thousands of new teachers, but few of them choose needy schools as a professional work place. Hundreds of applicants compete for suburban positions while urban and rural advertisements go unanswered (Haberman, 1996). AACTE data show that only 15% of education school students prefer teaching in urban areas (Zeichner & Hoeft, 1996). Rural locations find recruiting and retaining teachers more difficult still. Sadly, in many cases, the only education graduates willing to teach in needy places are those with few other options themselves. Teach For America corps members, outstanding college graduates who have many employment options, compete for acceptance to TFA and the opportunity to be placed in these under-resourced schools.

Satisfying emergency needs in challenging districts, TFA plays a very small role in the larger national picture. Throughout America under-resourced districts, needing teachers for their student-filled classrooms, issue temporary licenses to people they hope will fulfill the

critical role of teacher. States hire around 50,000 uncertified teachers each year (Wolk, 1997). Fewer than 1000 of them are TFA corps members. New Orleans (Louisiana) Parish alone has 400 emergency certified teachers in this 1996-97 school year; 15 TFA corps members teach in New Orleans Parish. Last year Mississippi gave emergency certificates to 1500 teachers; 47 of these are TFA corps members. In 1995-96 Baltimore City needed around 500 new teachers but received less than one application for each vacancy; TFA filled 51 positions. Teach For America places corps members only in districts such as these, where teacher shortages require emergency measures, and TFA has left regions that once requested corps members but began attracting adequate teacher applicants.

TFA corps members differ from typical emergency certified teachers. Part of the difference derives from their strong academic records: The average 3.3 GPAs, compared to average emergency GPAs of 2.41 (Dill, 1996) mean, among other things, that they need no waivers from state requirements designed to recruit quality candidates from nontraditional sources. In Baltimore, for example, the state of Maryland requires, and Baltimore corps members possess, a GPA of 3.0; the state requires, and all pass before placement, the National Teacher Examination. By contrast, Baltimore applicants from several other programs often need to request waivers (which Maryland frequently grants) from the requirements. Part of the difference is also that TFA deliberately uses selection criteria to identify applicants who will succeed in the kinds of schools in which corps members work.

The School Context

TFA corps members demonstrate the kind of enthusiasm, smarts, and commitment that all teachers need, but that are especially crucial in the settings where TFA places teachers. What are these schools like? Most corps members work in inadequate facilities. One second grade classroom in Compton, Los Angeles, had no wall-mounted, school-sized blackboards; the school provided one portable board just big enough for a few math problems. A Mississippi middle school science teacher excited his students by promising that the next day they would

all take turns viewing drops of water under the (one) microscope. D. C., Delta, and California classrooms I visited each had only a dozen or so free reading books stacked in bookcases that were nothing more than cardboard boxes tipped on their sides. Many elementary school libraries are closed because librarians have been laid off, and few libraries contain current books, or even very many books. In four libraries I visited, the latest encyclopedia was printed in 1978 and there was definitely no CD-ROM updated version of anything. Many elementary schools have no playground equipment. Walls need paint, ceilings need tiles (and leaks) patched, bathrooms need a building inspector. If teachers want an overhead projector, they have to buy it. In some schools, teachers have no copying machines, and if they do, it is not unusual that they may use no more than 100 sheets of paper for copying in a week, even if they teach 125 students every day and have no class sets of textbooks. Rarely do computers operate; more rarely do knowledgeable faculty incorporate up-to-date software into students' regular curricula. These places are not the schools where educators attending this conference send our own children.

The schools do not simply lack adequate resources; they are needy in multiple ways and for multiple--although not always identical--reasons. Nearly all the students are poor and their communities reflect the chaos and uncertainty that accompany poverty. School buildings are deficient in architecture, furnishings, and human resources. It is difficult to attract qualified teachers to such places, for professionals know how these conditions can smother teacher initiative and suffocate children's futures. Teach For America corps members expect placements in such schools. What is unusual about corps members, however, is that within these difficult contexts they find ways to inspire students to learn and to succeed.

Satisfaction with TFA Corps Members

Demand for TFA corps members is growing. Even knowing that TFA teachers have only one summer of instruction and field experience, districts nevertheless ask for them. Many principals, seeking positive role models for their students and wanting teachers who have

sound academic preparation and high expectations for student learning, prefer TFA corps members to other applicants. In 1996-1997, Washington, D. C. principals wanted 70 corps members (28 were placed there), continuing to call during the year as vacancies become available (requests impossible to honor). For 1997-1998 one California district has requested 250 corps members; one Phoenix-area district wants 50 bilingual teachers (other requests TFA lacks the capacity to honor). Reports of poor teaching (e.g., Darling-Hammond, 1994) discredit TFA and deserve attention, but they seem to describe situations that are outliers from the predominant findings. Data accumulating about TFA teachers' classroom effectiveness describe high satisfaction among superintendents, principals, parents, and students (Kane, Parsons & Associates, Inc., 1995, 1996).

The 1995 and 1996 Kane, Parsons surveys of students, parents, principals, and superintendents revealed that ratings of corps members are overwhelmingly positive. The survey statistics were more specific and descriptive in 1996, but both surveys have some limitations because of uneven and sometimes small sample sizes. Data from the 1996 survey, however, report that 91% of 46 superintendents rated corps members as at least as good as both beginning teachers and the overall teaching faculty in their own school districts, and 99% of the superintendents reported satisfaction with corps members' overall contribution to their school districts.

Of the 287 principals responding, 75% said that corps members have had a greater impact on students than other beginning teachers in their schools. Most rated corps members higher than other beginning teachers on 20 attributes that describe excellent teachers (such as interest in students, intellectual ability, motivation and dedication to teaching, commitment to continually improve as a teacher, and ability to work well with both administrators and other teachers). In addition, like the superintendents, most principals rated corps members higher than their entire faculties, not just other beginning teachers.

Surveys distributed to parents of students in corps members' classrooms did not identify the teachers as Teach For America corps members; rather, parents were asked to respond in terms of their own children's teachers. Like superintendents and principals, "[p]arents of students taught by corps members share in these favorable impressions" (Kane, Parsons, 1996, p. 8). More than 80% of the parent respondents rated corps members higher than other of their schools' teachers in areas such as improving reading, math, and writing skills, making children want to do the best they can, explaining material, motivation and dedication to teaching, interest in students, and helping children work better with others. Of responding parents, 96% reported that corps members involved them in their child's education in some way, including inviting the parent to visit the classroom, contacting the parent in writing, by telephone, or in person about the child's progress, inviting parents to come along on field trips, sending home projects for parent and child to work on together, or asking for volunteers in the classroom.

Significantly, students, those most familiar with teachers in the classroom contexts, were also asked to contribute to the documentation. Among student responses, "appreciable majorities of students rated corps members as better than other teachers [not just other new teachers] in each of 12 skill areas" (Kane, Parsons, 1996; Feistritzer, 1996), including knowledge of subject matter, motivation, ability to teach, and willingness to help students outside of class.

The key to those positive independent evaluations probably lies in TFA's careful attention to recruitment and selection, which includes a heavy focus on choosing corps members who understand, as best they can, the conditions at the schools where they will be working, and who are committed to sticking it out. In addition, TFA's improved programs of preparation and support for corps members try to help them be effective. It is important that local stakeholders themselves, those directly affected by these new teachers, assess TFA corps members positively. As Good concluded, "teaching effectiveness research, no matter how well

conceived and how abundant, will always have to be interpreted in relation to the context and values of local situations" (1996, p. 659).

A Louisiana middle school principal who hired three TFA corps members wrote, unsolicited, "Mr. Hooks' Top 10 Advantages of Having TFA Corps Members on Staff":

1. They have the ability to guide others in positive directions.
2. They never complain.
3. They always have a positive attitude.
4. They always do whatever is asked of them.
5. They work well with others.
6. They are always accepting of others' ideas.
7. They have proven themselves to be of the highest integrity.
8. Their strength of character is perhaps their most easily identifiable feature.
9. They have the ability to accept responsibilities and conduct themselves through meaningful ends.
10. They are dependable, responsive, courteous and possess an innate ability to get along well with others. (*The Red River Record*, 1997, p. 5)

Retention

A persistent criticism of TFA has been that corps members do not make teaching their careers, but leave after their two-year commitment (Darling-Hammond, 1994). Although TFA retention is better in urban than in rural sites, nationwide TFA statistics are impressive. Retention comparisons are difficult because many districts lack data, but nationally, 96% of TFA corps members complete their first year and 83% remain for two years. In New York City, 93% of TFA teachers complete their first year, compared with 75% of the districts' regularly licensed first-year teachers. While Baltimore City typically loses 25% of new teachers during or after the first year, as of this moment at the end of February, 1997, 100% of TFA Baltimore corps members are completing their first year. Other regions with current 100% retention of first-year corps members are Bay Area, Houston, Mississippi/Arkansas, Shreveport, and Washington, D. C. Close behind are Los Angeles (98%), Phoenix (97%), and all the other regions: New Jersey (94%), New York (93%), Rio Grande Valley (92%), North Carolina (92%), and South Louisiana (91%).

Criticism about retention is difficult to assess, since only 60% to 70% of teacher education graduates go into teaching at all (Choy et al., 1993), and of those who do begin to teach, about 15% leave after their first year and another 10% leave by the end of their second year (Schlechty & Vance, 1983). Overall, nearly half of new teachers have left the profession within their first five years of teaching (Gold, 1996; Haberman, 1992). TFA retention rates, then, compare favorably both to similar districts and to the profession in general.

Many corps members do remain teaching in classrooms, however. Of alumni who were corps members from 1990-1992, 46% were still teaching in 1996, while 7% more were enrolled in graduate schools of education and another 11% worked in some educational organization (Teach For America, 1996b). Some may make teaching their careers, some may return to teaching after a hiatus, and many may become education leaders. As Sprinthall et al. (1996) wrote, "The career cycle is not unidirectional . . . teachers [move] in and out of positions in the cycle" (p. 670).

Non-traditional Preparation for Teaching

As teachers look back on their debut year, they generally agree that whatever preparation they had, it was inadequate for their first year's experience (Feistritzer, 1990). If teachers in well-supported suburban schools feel underprepared, such inadequacy magnifies in under-resourced schools. As Zumwalt (1996) wrote, "In reality, neither traditionally nor alternatively certified teachers are prepared to meet the challenges of teaching in our most needy schools" (p. 42).

Some recent studies suggest that teachers who enter the profession through non-traditional routes may actually remain in their classrooms longer than teachers who enter through traditional routes (Murnane, Singer, Willett, Kemple, & Olsen, 1991). In New Jersey, for example, "18% of new teachers prepared in traditional collegiate programs

leave their classrooms at some point during the first year of teaching" compared to 5% of the provisionally certified teachers (Gold, 1996, p. 553; Kramer, 1991).

Dill (1996) describes several studies verifying that alternatively certified teachers are more likely to work in needy schools and, in addition, to hold higher expectations for their students than traditionally trained teachers. New Jersey has found alternative certification candidates' performance, on average, "significantly higher . . . than . . . those who have received standard certification" (Toch, 1991, p. 160). Studies in California, Georgia, New Jersey, North Carolina, and Dallas, El Paso, and Houston, Texas all found student achievement not degraded by alternatively certified teachers (Dill, 1996).

Teacher Input Variables

It is imperative that schools recognize teacher selection criteria that actually improve student learning. In a recent study of school input variables that make a significant difference in student learning, Ferguson and Ladd (1996) identified teacher test scores as by far the most powerful correlate of increased student test scores. Because Ferguson and Ladd studied Alabama data, they referred to ACT scores, significant because they are precollegiate scores. Comparing teacher characteristics before college avoids comparing GPAs from disparate post-secondary institutions where assessment at highly competitive schools or departments yields an entirely different description than at less or non-competitive places. Corps members were themselves strong students (average SAT 1205), many of them attending selective, competitive colleges (Table 2), all of them, wherever they attended college, meeting stringent selection criteria.

High teacher precollegiate test scores are also important for schools to consider because they relate to high student achievement more strongly even than post-baccalaureate studies. Ferguson & Ladd (1996) found that a teacher with a masters degree increases student learning very little: "Although the fraction of teachers with master's degrees

appears to have little or no effect on reading scores, it exerts a small positive effect on student math scores" (p. 278).

Knowing that smart, hard-working students who become teachers are more likely to produce smart, hard-working students is important because districts and principals need to know what characteristics to value when hiring teachers. Experience is another basic trait. We generally assume that more experienced teachers are better teachers. Some research findings, however, deemphasize tenure's importance to student learning (Ferguson & Ladd, 1996; Sprinthall et al., 1996), suggesting that length of experience is not as significant as other school input factors.

In fact, the research evidence is not sanguine concerning the quality of teaching by experienced teachers. Nate Gage some years ago found that experience by itself bore almost no relationship to either teaching effectiveness or student achievement (1978). More recently, the National Center for Research on Teacher Education (NCRTE, 1991) study reached the same conclusion. There were no significant differences between beginner and experienced (10 year) teachers in elementary schools . . . and only a little in the experienced secondary school teachers. (Sprinthall et al., 1996, p. 678)

Examining school inputs that affect student test scores in reading and math, Ferguson and Ladd (1996) corroborate the finding that career teachers do not significantly improve student learning: "the teacher experience variable, teachers with five or more years of experience, apparently exerts no significant effect in either subject" (p. 278).

Feiman-Nemser (1983) found that teachers revert to their own familiar patterns with remarkable ease, particularly under stress. Well educated, knowledgeable teachers can fall back onto strong academic patterns and high expectations for content, performance, assessment, and involvement. Teachers with weak learning histories inevitably rely on weak skills, shallow knowledge, and less effective performance patterns. Joyce and Showers' (1988) literature on teacher professional development indicates that only constant support and ongoing awareness through coaching and practice change old habits and outlooks. Because teachers in under-resourced schools rarely have such support, coaching, and professional

development, children in such challenging environments particularly need teachers selected for their proven success in learning, motivation, and achievement. As Zeichner & Hoeft (1996) recommend, a rigorous selection must "focus more on picking the right people rather than on trying to change the wrong ones" (p. 529). Careful screening of highly talented, successful, and motivated applicants undergirds TFA effectiveness.

Effectiveness as Teachers

The Kane, Parsons surveys (1995, 1996) depict corps members as effective teachers. Specific evidence of student learning improvement focuses the picture: In D. C., Cameron, in his second year of teaching, moved his eighth-grade math students from an average 5.8 standardized score to 8.4, as measured by school-wide testing. This leap occurred in the same junior high described in a *Washington Post* series about "a cycle of classroom failures" (Strauss & Horwitz, 1997, p. A1), the same school in which a veteran teacher, echoing other defeated teachers, lamented that, "Quite a few of my seventh-graders are behind . . . But you can't bring them up to seventh-grade level in one year" (Strauss & Horwitz, p. 17).

At a bilingual elementary school, first-year corps member Monica began to document the progress of one third grader who arrived in September and "couldn't read (at all!), he hated Spanish, and English, and Math, and everything else about school. He hated his teachers. He punched, kicked, swore, spit, threw food, walked away from you on field trips, left the classroom unannounced and carried himself with an attitude of total disdain" (*Capital View*, 1996, p. 1). By the end of the year Monica could not promote him to fourth grade, but she did request him for the following year. This year, with Monica's continuing insistence on meeting standards and after more sweat and tears by her, the child, and the child's parents, the child does his homework, earns good grades, and has friends.

Clear evidence of corps member effectiveness was reported in December, 1996: The Mississippi Commission on School Accreditation recommended that the entire Tunica,

Mississippi school system, which had been "on probation for seven of the past eight years, be placed in conservatorship for failing to make 'significant' improvement in test scores" (Sullivan, 1996, p.1). Performance scores are low throughout the state, but Tunica's are dismal. The exception was Tunica Junior High School where scores increased for two consecutive years. Of the school's 18 classroom teachers, five are TFA corps members and two are TFA alumni. Principal James Bulloch "singles out the TFA teachers for their zeal. 'They have five different techniques for everything . . . They recognize the students' learning styles'" (Sullivan 1996, p. 12). The principal credits TFA with propelling the entire school's learning improvement.

Special Education Placements

Placing beginning teachers with little experience as special education teachers, an extremely stressful role, amplifies the difficulty of the school context and so has attracted criticism (Darling-Hammond, 1994). Because I share this concern, I always inquire specifically about corps member effectiveness in special education contexts. In Louisiana, where the special education population is growing by 15% each year, a full 45% of the state's special education teachers are uncertified (compared to 15% of regular classroom teachers). A St. John Parish (Louisiana) administrator who hired 50 new special education teachers in 1995, half of them TFA corps members, testified to the quality, effectiveness, and retention of TFA teachers.

TFA fills an enormous need . . . without corps members we would be hiring daily substitutes. But the TFA selection process is advantageous in that the individual qualities are qualities we desire in teachers, particularly their enthusiasm and motivation. They are like sponges absorbing everything. They try suggested approaches . . . have no preconceived ideas [about the limitations of the students]. The esprit of the corps carries their departments and has invigorated veteran teachers. (Brown, 1996)

Similarly, in Washington, D. C., outside evaluators assessing Special Education programs were so impressed by a first-year TFA elementary resource teacher's understanding of the complex special education policies that they asked her principal to grant professional leave

for her to help them evaluate other D. C. schools. In her second year of teaching, this corps member served as special education chair for her school. An Arizona Director of Staff Development and his Associate Superintendent both lauded corps members, including those in special education placements in their district, saying that "part of their intelligence is to be analytical, to find solutions . . . and to be willing to jump in and . . . succeed with the children" (Peña and Zepeda, 1997).

Contributing to Students Beyond the Classroom

In impressive numbers, corps members use their teaching responsibilities as portals to further civic participation, extending their commitment to activities that reach children and their communities. Corps members in every region are leading entire school communities to improve the lives of their students. Ryan, who teaches math, wrote the curriculum that is being used by his Bay Area school's science department and organized a school-wide Net Day, leading a team of 15 volunteers to wire several classrooms. Mississippi corps member Brooke teaches seventh grade, coaches basketball and, in addition, formed a partnership between his school's newspaper and the local newspaper so that reporters and business managers visit the classroom to comment on student work and provide insight into their professions. Corps members coach school sports teams, special Olympics teams, chess teams, and dance teams. They have begun art clubs, recycling clubs, reading clubs, drama clubs, science clubs, and photography clubs. They construct web sites, peer mediation networks, electric cars, and e-mail learning teams. They have written grants and led kids to raise money for trips from the Mississippi Delta to Paris, from New York to Philadelphia, from Baltimore to Michigan and to Alaska, from Houston's barrio to Cornell University's summer program, and from Phoenix to Washington, D. C. These new teachers become school leaders in only two years.

Two Bay Area corps members exemplify the resourcefulness and spirit of TFA: At the end of his first year of teaching in Oakland, CA, Preston proposed, lobbied for, and received a

\$100,000 grant offered by Berkeley Biotech Education, Inc., a local nonprofit organization. Under a program which he will supervise, the funds will be used to administer a specialized study program that trains students at his high school in practical scientific skills, matches them with science-based companies for internships, helps them apply to junior college programs, and connects them with jobs after graduation. According to Preston, "Most of my students are the principle breadwinners in their families and do not have the money to go to college or the time to study and apply. With this new program, students will be earning money, learning new skills, and preparing for a more challenging and profitable future" (*Bay Area Ephemera*, 1996). Another Bay Area teacher, Stephanie, returned to her East Palo Alto classroom for a third year, launched an after school phonics program for Spanish-speaking students, and assumed responsibility as her school's Youth Community Service Advisor. She and a group of students initiated a school-wide recycling program which donates its proceeds to the San Mateo AIDS Education Fund. They have also helped to feed the hungry with their home-cooked lasagna meals at a local shelter and have cleaned up the graffiti on buildings adjacent to their school site through a weekend neighborhood initiative.

Among Washington, D. C.'s current 46 corps members, 30 of them began or continued extra-curricular activities in the 1995-96 school year. For example, Erin, who teaches K-6 ESL, began an after school Spanish club for non-Spanish-speaking fourth-to-sixth graders and coached a school soccer team begun the year before by another TFA teacher. Valyncia, teaching at the same school where she was a student and that her own children now attend, runs a youth group on weekends. Tyrone, who teaches middle school Spanish, coaches late-afternoon community basketball five times a week. Lisa and Russell teamed up to found the Tubman Elementary Young Authors Club, whose creative writing contest yielded over 130 entries from the K-6 students and was judged by all of the members of the school's support staff. Naya, who teaches K-6 ESL, helped bridge the gap between the African American and Latino populations of her school by offering back-to-back after school ESL programs for

Spanish-speaking parents, and Spanish instruction for English-speaking parents; between the two classes the parents practice with each other, forging positive interactions. Jeff and Paul established the LIMITS (Lincoln Mountain Teams) program to bring middle school students into the wilderness to challenge their skills. When they left the classroom to develop their program further, David, still in his two-year commitment period, took over the sponsorship of LIMITS. Julie joined with several TFA colleagues in the fall of 1994 to found DC SCORES, a league supported by parent volunteers with a boys and a girls team at each of ten schools. In addition to games and practices, the league includes a required literacy component; teams meet once weekly during the season and two days off-season. Julie won sponsorship from Youth Service America's Leader's Program and secured additional private funding to cover the costs of field construction, uniforms, equipment, and training for the high school students who tutor in the writing workshop under the guidance of teachers, most of whom are current corps members.

These illustrations of extra-curricular involvement in the lives of students explain some of the enthusiasm and satisfaction identified in the Kane, Parsons survey of superintendents, principals, parents, and teachers. A Louisiana principal concluded that, "These are brave jobs for brave new teachers. Corps members go above and beyond and take on more than expected. We rely on them for extracurricular activities" (Schum, 1997). A Director of Personnel said that "Most activities would not go on without Teach For America" (Donaldson, 1997).

Conclusion

TFA corps members struggle mightily, as do almost all beginning teachers. Most teachers remember in stereo and technicolor their first excruciating year. Teaching is clearly not for the faint of heart. In the first years of teaching, all teachers "report limited knowledge of instruction, lack of professional insight, and a desire to conform to preconceived images of teaching" (Burden, cited in Sprinthall, Reiman, & Thies-Sprinthall,

1996, p. 667). Studies of beginning teachers consistently identify deficiencies in classroom management and long-term planning. But superintendents, principals, parents and children find TFA corps members to be flexible, resourceful, creative, enthusiastic, and effective teachers. It also appears that while teachers in general enter teaching to make a difference in the lives of children (Lortie, 1975; McLaughlin & Yee, 1988; Tatel, 1993), TFA teachers in particular find or create ways to make a big difference, working within extremely challenging contexts.

According to superintendents, principals, parents, and students, Teach For America corps members are effective teachers. For these teachers to be effective at the beginning of their careers and in their contexts is remarkable. Their own sound schooling, backgrounds of academic and personal success, and willingness to make a commitment to their students' educational progress seem to help them through the turbulent waters of beginning teaching. Their ability to reach their students by involvement with the communities beyond their classrooms is particularly impressive, for such planning and organization take valuable time, energy, and resources that beginning teachers normally reserve for their classrooms. Although TFA corps members have an intense, abbreviated preparation, they willingly accept assignments in under-resourced schools, work to teach their students, and exert a significant positive impact on students, their schools, and communities.

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Table 1: Number of First-Year Corps Members Placed At Each Site

<u>Region</u>	<u>1990</u>	<u>1991</u>	<u>1992</u>	<u>1993</u>	<u>1994</u>	<u>1995</u>	<u>1996</u>
Baltimore	-	-	71	71	18	29	22
Bay Area	-	36	48	47	41	29	39
Georgia	10	8	11	7	8	-	-
Houston	-	200	80	45	32	53	38
Los Angeles	215	186	81	81	91	83	65
Mississippi/Arkansas	-	8	22	29	26	33	20
New Jersey	-	-	-	26	26	11	18
New York City	175	23	52	75	55	65	75
North Carolina	29	33	41	39	20	32	27
Phoenix, AZ	-	-	-	-	22	20	33
Rio Grande Valley, TX	-	22	26	21	16	42	24
Seattle	-	-	-	-	17	-	-
Shreveport	-	-	-	-	10	7	16
Southern Louisiana	60	190	115	57	35	54	46
Washington, D. C.	-	-	19	39	29	27	28
Totals	489	706	566	537	446	485	451

from *Statistical History of Teach For America 1990-1996* (TFA 1996b)

Table 2: Colleges Most Attended by TFA 1996 Corps Members

University of Michigan	34
University of California at Berkeley	22
Miami University of Ohio	21
Northwestern University	19
Georgetown University	17
Stanford University	16
Cornell University	16
Yale University	15
University of Wisconsin	15
Harvard University	14
Wesleyan University	13
University of Virginia	13
University of Maryland	13
Spelman College	12
SUNY Binghamton	12
Oberlin College	12
University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill	12
Duke University	12
University of California at Santa Cruz	11
Brown University	11
Tufts University	10
University of Colorado	10
Colgate University	10
Boston University	10
Howard University	8

from *Apply Yourself* (TFA, 1996a).



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