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Teacher Resilience in High-Poverty Schools:

How Do High-Quality Teachers Become Resilient?

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

by

Kate Mansi Merrill

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Teacher Resilience in High-Poverty Schools:

How Do High-Quality Teachers Become Resilient?

by

Kate Mansi Merrill

Doctor of Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2013

Professor Robert Cooper, Co-Chair

Professor Diane Durkin, Co-Chair

The primary purpose of this study was to understand how high-quality teachers who began their career through Teach For America (TFA) became resilient while teaching in challenging, high-poverty schools. A secondary purpose of this study was to ascertain how, if at all, the teaching experiences of TFA teachers who stayed in the profession differed from those who left the profession shortly after fulfilling their two-year commitment to TFA. This study adds to the current literature on teacher resilience by focusing on the unique group of teachers that are brought into the profession by TFA: high-ability college-graduates who have no prior background or preparation in education and who initially signed-on for only a two year teaching commitment. This was a qualitative study consisting of two phases. In Phase One, 72 former TFA corps members participated in an Internet-based survey. In Phase Two, I interviewed 14

teachers and 9 former teachers who were selected based on survey responses. The interview process allowed me to understand how teachers' lived experiences have contributed to their resilience. The teachers and the former teachers in this study did not differ substantially in terms of their early motivation to enter the profession and their teaching experiences. The only thing that differentiated the former teachers from the teachers was the fact that the former teachers left the profession, most commonly due to burnout. Consistent with the research on teacher resilience, data show that the teachers' main source of resilience is the positive impact they have on their students. The teachers felt that the main challenges facing public education in high-needs areas have little to do with the students; rather, the system, and the adults within the system, make effective teaching difficult. Two unexpected findings resulted from this study. First, the teachers' ability to change roles and advance their career stood out as a significant factor that contributed to their resilience. Second, the teachers acknowledged that they had to come to terms with the idea that society views them as "just a teacher."

The dissertation of Kate Mansi Merrill is approved.

Louis M. Gomez

James W. Stigler

Robert Cooper, Committee Co-Chair

Diane Durkin, Committee Co-Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2013

DEDICATION

To my students in Albuquerque, New Mexico. You are the true embodiment of resilience.

Thank you for sharing your hearts, your minds, your history, and your strength with me. Most of

all, thank you for pointing me in this direction.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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To my sweet little boy, Andrew, who was only two months old when I started at UCLA…you are now a bright and beautiful three year-old who makes my life happier and more interesting every day. You were too little to know how many times my heart broke when I had to sacrifice playtime with you for study time at UCLA. Thank you for loving me anyway and for allowing me the honor of being your mommy.

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VITA

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CHAPTER ONE: STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

According to data collected from the Schools and Staffing Survey, almost 30% of beginning teachers nationwide leave the profession after the first year, and between 40% and 50% of teachers leave within the first five years (Ingersoll & Merrill, 2010). Attrition rates of both beginning and experienced teachers are particularly high in high-poverty schools, which are estimated to lose roughly one-fifth of their faculty each year (Ingersoll, 2007). Adding to this problem is the fact that many of our nation's most qualified teachers work in the wealthiest schools, while high-poverty schools struggle to attract and retain qualified teachers (Ascher & Fruchter, 2001; Bacolod, 2007; Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, Rockoff, & Wyckoff, 2008; Ingersoll & Merrill, 2010; Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002; Peske & Haycock, 2006). This study investigates why some high-quality teachers persist in high-poverty schools. Specifically, I focus on teachers who began their career with Teach For America (TFA), an organization that recruits high-ability college graduates into the teaching profession. The purpose of this study is to understand how such teachers become resilient, despite being assigned to the neediest schools with the highest attrition rates, and despite having no prior background in education.

Context of the Study

Teach For America was borne from the idea that our nation's achievement gap could be closed if the best and brightest college graduates committed to teach for two years in the nation's poorest schools (Foote, 2008). To bring this idea to fruition, TFA recruits and selects high-achieving college graduates to teach for two years in predominantly low-performing schools serving low-income students. TFA bases acceptance on teacher characteristics that are known to increase student achievement, including academic achievement, leadership experience, and critical thinking skills, with considerable emphasis on academic achievement (Dobbie, 2011;

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Donaldson, 2008; Foote, 2008). Once accepted into the program, TFA corps members attend five-weeks of summer training that includes a small amount of student teaching and coursework in pedagogy. Corps members begin to work toward teacher certification once they are given their teaching assignment in order for school districts to meet the "highly-qualified" stipulation of No Child Left Behind. Many TFA corps members leave the profession at the end of their two-year commitment, even after achieving full certification (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2006; Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, & Heilig, 2005; Donaldson, 2008; Heilig & Jez, 2010). Despite their high attrition, some researchers have found that TFA has helped to reduce the teacher-quality gap between high- and low-poverty schools by bringing certain characteristics, such as high academic-ability, to schools that typically draw from a pool of teachers that lack such qualities (Boyd et al., 2008).

TFA provides a fitting context to this study of resilience in high-quality teachers for three reasons. First, a considerable amount of research shows that academically-able college graduates are far less likely to enter the teaching profession than are less academically-able college graduates (Bacolod, 2007; Hanushek & Pace, 1995; Henke, Chen, & Geis, 2000; Ingersoll & Merrill, 2010; Podgursky, Monroe, & Watson, 2004). However, TFA recruits some of the most academically-able college graduates in the nation and places them in teaching positions (Boyd et al., 2008; Teach for America, 2012). By the nature of their academic ability, TFA corps members were not likely to enter the profession to begin with, had they not been selected by TFA. Second, corps members are accepted into TFA based on traits that are known to increase student achievement, such as high academic ability and leadership experience (Boyd et al., 2008; Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2010; Donaldson, 2008; Wayne & Youngs, 2003). These corps members are placed in high-poverty schools, where the supply of teachers possessing such

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qualities is severely limited (Ascher & Fruchter, 2001; Bacolod, 2007; Boyd et al., 2008; Ingersoll & Merrill, 2010; Lankford et al., 2002; Peske & Haycock, 2006). Third, TFA corps members are unique to other teachers who may possess the same academic ability because they initially enter the profession for only a two-year teaching commitment. TFA corps members generally do not have a background in education and generally do not plan to stay in the profession for more than two years. Indeed, most of them have left the profession by the end of their third year of teaching (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, Michelli, et al., 2006; Heilig & Jez, 2010; MacIver & Vaughn, 2007). However, some, though very few, stay. These teachers who stay are the focus of my study. These teachers possess academic strengths that are not typically characteristic of teachers in high poverty schools, they have stayed in the profession despite having no background in education and, in some cases, no initial intention to stay in the profession, and they have persisted in schools that typically experience high attrition. By understanding the reasons why such teachers persist in the most challenging schools, we can tap into a pool of potential teachers who would otherwise never consider entering or staying in the profession, but could positively impact student achievement if they did.

Teacher Resilience

Much of the research on teacher retention in high-poverty schools focuses on external factors that contribute to a teacher's decision to stay in or to leave the profession. Such factors include administrative support, quality of the school environment, access to resources, student behavior, and teacher-subject placements (Boyd et al., 2011; Boyd, Hamilton, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2001; Donaldson & Johnson, 2010; Ingersoll, 2002, 2007; Ingersoll & Merrill, 2010). However, when we consider the concept of teacher "resilience," there are

relatively few studies that examine why teachers stay in the profession *despite* adverse circumstances, such as poor administrative support and poor working conditions.

Resilience, for the purposes of this study, is an internal, personal construct that refers to the ability of teachers to "maintain their commitment to teaching and their teaching practices despite challenging conditions and setbacks" (Brunetti, 2006, p. 813). Studies of teacher resilience tend to focus on veteran teachers who have persisted in high-poverty schools with little context given regarding how such teachers entered the profession, or on programmatic aspects of teacher preparation that enable novice teachers to become resilient. This study adds to the current literature on teacher resilience by focusing on the unique group of teachers that are brought into the profession by TFA: high-ability college- graduates who have no prior background or preparation in education and who initially signed-on for only a two year teaching commitment. For this group of teachers to have stayed in the profession, a transformation must have occurred at some point in time in which the teacher decided to stay in the profession, despite initially having plans to leave. This study seeks to understand how teachers' prior experiences led to this decision, thus making them resilient despite the challenges associated with high-poverty schools.

One of the intended outcomes of this study is to provide recommendations to TFA regarding how corps members can be supported and encouraged to persist in high-poverty schools. TFA has no control over the conditions present in such schools, and may therefore only affect teacher retention by helping corps members to be resilient "in the face of adversity" (Patterson, Collins, & Abbott, 2004, p. 3). While studies have linked self-efficacy and out-of-field teaching assignment as predictors of whether or not a TFA corps member will complete the two year commitment (Donaldson, 2008; Donaldson & Johnson, 2010; Klein, 2009; Swearingen,

2009), no qualitative study has examined why TFA corps members persist beyond two years. Furthermore, no study has focused on intrinsic factors that have contributed to veteran TFA teachers' persistence in high-poverty schools beyond their commitment, despite adverse working conditions. Therefore, the present definition of resilience provides a new lens through which to view the persistence of high-quality teachers.

Given research that shows that classroom teachers have the biggest impact on student achievement (Dobbie, 2011; Hanushek, Rivkin, Rothstein, & Podgursky, 2004; Kane, Rockoff, & Staiger, 2008), this study focuses on TFA corps members who remain in *teaching* positions beyond their two-year commitment. Using administrative data from New York City, Houston, Baltimore, and Louisiana, Heilig and Jez (2010) report that between 5% and 20% of TFA corps members actually remain in the district after five years (three years beyond their two year commitment). Regardless, of those that do teach beyond their two year commitment, little is known about why they choose to stay in the profession, or how they were able to become resilient in the face of adversity. In order to understand how these teachers' experiences are unique from those who choose to leave the profession, this study also gathers data from TFA corps members who have left the profession.

Project Rationale

A study that investigates how high-quality teachers become resilient will enable both TFA and school districts that serve high-poverty populations to develop programs to support and encourage such teachers to stay in the classroom, thus increasing their potential impact on student achievement in high-poverty schools. Specifically, this study focused on the following research questions:

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1. What do TFA teachers who have stayed in the profession beyond three years say are their reasons for staying in teaching beyond their two-year commitment?

    a. How, if at all, have the early teaching experiences of these teachers contributed to their resiliency?

    b. Do these teachers cite a particular event or turning point in their teaching career that served as a catalyst in their decision to stay in the profession, and if so, what?

2. What do TFA teachers who have stayed in the profession beyond three years cite as significant challenges they had to overcome in order to stay in the profession?

    a. How, if at all, did these challenges contribute to their resiliency?

3. What forms of external support do TFA teachers who have stayed in the profession beyond three years cite as having a significant impact on their resiliency?

4. How, if at all, do the early teaching experiences of TFA teachers who have stayed in the profession beyond three years differ from the teaching experiences of TFA former teachers who left the profession after their two-year commitment?

    a. How, if at all, do teachers and former teachers differ in terms of what they say motivated their decision to enter the teaching profession?

    b. How, if at all, do teachers and former teachers differ in terms of what they cite as significant challenges they encountered while fulfilling their two-year teaching commitment?

    c. How, if at all, do teachers and former teachers differ in terms of what type of external support they relied upon during their two-year teaching commitment?

The Study

Working with TFA Los Angeles, I gathered data on former TFA corps members with emphasis on those who remained in teaching positions in high-poverty schools beyond their two-year commitment to TFA. This was a qualitative study that relied on survey and interview data and consisted of two phases. This study was guided by prior research in teacher resilience and placed emphasis on qualitative data that revealed the experiences and perspectives of former TFA corps members. Phase One of this study consisted of an initial, Internet-based survey, and Phase Two consisted of participant interviews. Survey data collected during Phase One was descriptive in nature and informed the selection of participants for interviews in Phase Two. This two-phase design allowed for the collection of broad demographic and experience data in Phase One and specific qualitative data related to participants' individual circumstances and experiences in Phase Two. This approach allowed me to better understand how teachers' resilience was impacted by variables that are not quantifiable, such as intrinsic motivators, family situations, etc. It also allowed participants to expound on specific experiences that had a direct impact on their decision to stay in or to leave the teaching profession.

Methods

The link to the Internet-based survey was sent to former TFA corps members through the use of a monthly, TFA-produced Alumni Bulletin and through snowball sampling from November 2012 through January 2013. The purpose of the survey was two-fold: to obtain background information that identified potential interview participants; and to draw a baseline comparison between the experiences and motivation of TFA corps members who left the profession (former teachers) and TFA corps members who stayed in the profession (teachers). Data drawn from the survey included participants' age, race, years of teaching experience,

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current occupation, motivation to apply to TFA, career aspirations, and the timing of their decision to stay in or to leave the teaching profession.

Interviews were conducted from December 2012 through February 2013 in Phase Two of the study. Based on survey data, those who remained in teaching positions were selected for an interview in Phase Two using four criteria: they were willing to be interviewed; they did not major or minor in education; they had taught for more than three years; and they intend to remain in education for the foreseeable future. Participants who were no longer teaching were selected for an interview based on three criteria: they were willing to be interviewed; they did not major or minor in education; and they did not have initial expectations to leave the teaching profession immediately following their two-year commitment to TFA.

While the survey identified some of the challenges and experiences that impacted their decision to stay in or to leave the teaching profession, the interview process uncovered reasons why such factors were important. Interview questions focused on participants' descriptions of their own background and professional experiences as they related to challenges and experiences identified in the survey. Each participant's survey responses were used to inform their interview protocol. For example, if a participant indicated on the survey that they were motivated to apply to TFA because they were inspired by the organization's mission, I asked them to explain this further in the interview.

Participants

Participants in this study included 63 former TFA corps members from cohorts 1990 through 2010. Seventy-two participants took the voluntary, Internet-based survey. However, those that were school or district administrators or who worked in private schools were eliminated from analysis, as this study focused on resilience of public school teachers compared

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to those who left the K12 public education system entirely. This eliminated nine people from the participant pool.

Interview participants included 23 former TFA corps members from cohorts 1997-2009, 14 of whom remained in teaching positions. I selected teachers with at least three years of experience for interviews so that I could ensure that they had achieved standard certification (otherwise, they would not be teaching in public schools), and so that I could lower the likelihood that they remain in the teaching profession "for now." This is consistent with research that has found that TFA teachers are most likely to leave the profession by year three and that TFA teachers become more effective after achieving standard certification (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; Decker, Mayer, & Glazerman, 2006; Donaldson, 2008; Heilig & Jez, 2010; MacIver & Vaughn, 2007).

Though the focus of this study is to understand resilience of teachers who have stayed in the teaching profession, the decision to collect data from teachers who have left the profession is important for one critical reason. As the entire pool of participants began their careers through TFA, they share similar backgrounds and academic qualities that set them apart from teachers typically found in high-poverty schools, and they all began their careers in schools facing similar challenges due to the student populations that they serve. However, some of these participants decided to stay in the profession, while the majority decided to leave. By collecting data from both groups, I wanted to ascertain if survey responses and experiences relayed in the interviews make the teachers unique from the former teachers, given that they come from similar backgrounds.

Public Engagement

I worked closely with TFA Los Angeles throughout this study. Based on my findings, I can provide recommendations regarding how TFA can support its corps members so that they are more likely to stay in the profession beyond their two-year commitment. However, this study also has broader implications for teacher recruitment and retention. The schools that receive TFA corps members typically employ some of their districts' most poorly-prepared teachers (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2006; Boyd et al., 2008; Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; Decker et al., 2006; Lankford et al., 2002; Peske & Haycock, 2006). However, TFA corps members hail from some of the nation's top universities and post high GPA's and SAT scores, which sets them apart from the teachers typically found in high-poverty schools. If we can understand why some of these teachers are resilient, despite their assignment to the schools with the highest attrition rates, then we may begin to understand how to foster resiliency in similarly-qualified teachers assigned to high-poverty schools. Therefore, I hope to present these findings to school districts who regularly recruit teachers for assignments in high-poverty schools.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This study investigated why some teachers who began their career with Teach For America (TFA) choose to stay in the teaching profession despite their placement in schools that typically experience high attrition. By understanding the reasons why these teachers stay in the profession despite their assignment to some of the nation's neediest schools, we may understand how to foster resiliency in similarly-qualified teachers assigned to high-poverty schools. In the review that follows, I provide the context for this study through a synthesis of recent literature on teacher retention and quality in high-poverty schools, the impact of increased teacher quality on student achievement, and teacher resiliency. Specifically, this chapter is organized by the following guiding questions:

1. Who teaches in high-poverty schools?

2. Does an increase in teacher quality impact student achievement?

3. Why do some teachers persist in high-poverty schools?

Who Teaches in High-Poverty Schools?

Teacher Retention in High-Poverty Schools

Over the past two decades, many researchers have propagated the belief that our nation is facing an inevitable and crippling teacher shortage due to the large number of teachers facing retirement (Bacolod, 2007; Hanushek & Pace, 1995; Murnane & Olsen, 1990). However, data from recent iterations of the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) show that this is not the case (Ingersoll, 2002, 2004, 2007; Ingersoll & Merrill, 2010; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Administered by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), the SASS and the Teacher Follow-Up Survey (TFS) gather data from a sample of more than 50,000 educators and school districts across every state. The TFS is administered one year after the SASS to teachers in the original

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sample who have since left their school for any reason. To date, six cycles of SASS have been administered: 1987-88, 1990-91, 1993-94, 1999-2000, 2003-04, and 2007-08. Ingersoll (2002) and Ingersoll and Merrill (2010) have used data from the SASS and TFS to identify trends of teacher placement and retention. The data indicate that although teacher retirements make up a small portion of teacher turnover each year, the majority of teacher turnover results from teachers either moving to other schools or leaving the profession entirely well before reaching retirement age (Ingersoll & Merrill, 2010).

Ingersoll and Merrill's (2010) analysis of the SASS data reveals that the teaching force is becoming "less stable" (p. 18). The data do not indicate that there is a teacher shortage. On the contrary, the teaching force is "ballooning," having grown by 48% since 1988, in fact much faster than student enrollment. However, the perception of a teacher-shortage stems from the fact that a large number of new teachers enter the profession each year but leave within a few years. Between 40% and 50% of beginning teachers leave the profession within their first five years of teaching (Ingersoll, 2007), thus creating a "revolving door" of new teachers each year (p. 2). This problem is most pronounced in high-poverty schools, which may lose up to one-fifth of their entire staff each year. Hence, while there is not a teacher shortage across the board, there is a shortage in high-poverty schools.

Exacerbating this problem is the issue of teacher-turnover, which has increased by 28% since the early 1990s (Ingersoll & Merrill, 2010). This increase was highest for first-year teachers, up 31% from 1988 to 2004. This turnover does not always result in a teacher's exit from the profession, as some migrate between schools or across districts. However, nearly half of all teacher-turnover occurs in just one-fourth of public schools. The SASS data indicate a "significant annual shuffling of teachers from poor to wealthier schools, from high-minority to

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low-minority schools, and from urban to suburban schools" (p. 19). These findings are supported by studies conducted in New York that found that only 29% of teachers who began teaching in urban schools in 1993 remained in their schools five years later compared to 43% in suburban schools (Ascher & Fruchter, 2001; Lankford et al., 2002). These studies also found that teachers migrated to more-advantaged school districts as they gained more experience.

The data presented above demonstrate that teacher attrition is a problem in high-poverty schools. The purpose of this study is to understand why some teachers persist in high-poverty schools that typically experience high attrition through a focus on teachers who began their career through TFA. However, while TFA places high-ability college graduates in schools facing high teacher attrition, TFA corps members generally leave the profession after fulfilling their two year commitment. Given that the attrition rate of beginning teachers is already especially high for urban schools, MacIver and Vaughn (2007) looked at data from the Baltimore City Public School System (BCPSS) in an effort to understand if TFA exacerbates the problem of high-attrition in urban schools. They identified five cohorts of teachers depending on when they entered the profession: 1999-2000, 2000-01, 2001-02, 2002-03, and 2003-04. They traced the career trajectory of each cohort through the end of the 2005-06 school year. The authors found that while more than 80% of TFA and other alternatively certified teachers returned to the district after their first year, only about two-thirds of fully-certified teachers returned. Furthermore, the three-year retention rate for TFA teachers tended to be as high as the three-year retention rate for fully-certified teachers (between 31% and 50%). It wasn't until after three years (one year past a TFA corps member's commitment), that TFA retention rates began to fall lower than retention rates of fully-certified teachers. The authors conclude that though TFA teachers tend to leave after three years, their fully-licensed counterparts contribute to poor

retention rates in urban schools to a greater extent earlier in their careers. Therefore, it is difficult to say with certainty that TFA teachers exacerbate the problem of poor teacher retention any more than do fully-licensed beginning teachers.

MacIver and Vaughn's (2007) research shows that TFA corps members may be able to alleviate teacher shortages in high-poverty schools because they fill in the gap left behind by other beginning teachers who either migrate to suburban schools or leave the profession altogether. While this particular data on TFA retention rates is promising, it does not fully address the problem of teacher shortages in high poverty schools. In the next section, I present research that shows that the teachers who tend to leave high-poverty schools are often more qualified than the teachers they leave behind.

The Distribution of Teacher Quality

What makes a teacher qualified to teach? This question has been posed by educational researchers for decades, and there is no clear agreement on the answer (Aloe & Becker, 2009; Wayne & Youngs, 2003). What is clear in the research is that teachers possessing certain characteristics, such as academic ability and experience, tend to sort away from high-poverty schools (Ascher & Fruchter, 2001; Bacolod, 2007; Boyd et al., 2008; Clotfelter et al., 2010; Lankford et al., 2002; Peske & Haycock, 2006; Player, 2009). For the purposes of this study, I will present research that uses teachers' academic qualities, such as college GPA, test scores on ACT or SAT, teacher-exam scores, and competitiveness of undergraduate institution, as indicators of teacher quality. While these measures are imperfect and are contested in some of the available research (Aloe & Becker, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2001; Darling-Hammond et al., 2005), many studies show that the academic ability of teachers is linked to student achievement (Boyd et al., 2008; Clotfelter et al., 2010; Presley, White, & Gong, 2005; Wayne &

Youngs, 2003). In this section, I describe where teachers who possess such qualities choose to teach.

While the studies presented in this section will show that teachers with the highest qualifications tend to sort away from high-poverty schools, many researchers have found evidence that the most academically-able college graduates tend to choose not to enter the teaching profession at all (Bacolod, 2007; Hanushek & Pace, 1995; Henke et al., 2000; Ingersoll & Merrill, 2010; Player, 2009; Podgursky et al., 2004). When comparing cohorts of college graduates, many studies use either the competitiveness of undergraduate institutions or SAT/ACT scores as measures of academic ability. In Ingersoll and Merrill's (2010) analysis of the 2007-08 SASS data, the researchers found that fewer than 10% of first-year teachers graduated from institutions ranked as highly competitive by Barron's *Profiles of American Colleges*. Rather, 25% graduated from less-competitive or not-competitive institutions. Using data from the NCES Baccalaureate and Beyond Survey (B&B), Ingersoll and Merrill (2010) found that in the college graduating class of 2000, SAT scores were lower among education majors than non-education majors. This is consistent with Bacolod's (2007) finding using B&B data on the college graduating class of 1993. In this case, the researcher found that college graduates with higher SAT and ACT scores were significantly less likely to enter the teaching profession. Similarly, Podgursky, Monroe, and Watson (2004) found that ACT scores of college graduates in Missouri who entered the teaching profession in 1998 and 1999 were, on average, 0.23 standard deviations lower than the ACT scores of college graduates who did not enter the profession. The results of these studies indicate that the teaching profession does not necessarily attract the "best and the brightest" of all college-graduates.

On the contrary, TFA, which provides the context for this study, has been successful in attracting many of the nation's top college graduates to the teaching profession, an accomplishment that, as this research indicates, has not historically been easily achieved. In 2011, 18% of Harvard University's graduating class applied to TFA, as did 16% of Duke University's graduating class (Teach for America, 2012). While TFA has been successful in recruiting high-ability college-graduates from top-ranked institutions, they have not been successful in retaining them in large numbers beyond three years. Unfortunately, teachers with the highest academic qualifications that do stay in the profession tend to sort away from high-poverty schools. For example, Bacolod (2007) used data from the Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study (B&B) to track the career trajectories of more than 10,000 college students who were seniors in 1992-1993. By 1997, one-thousand eighty-six of these graduates entered the teaching profession. Bacolod found that teacher quality, as measured by SAT score, was not evenly distributed across schools. Teachers with higher SAT scores were far more likely to teach in suburban schools than central-city schools. States that had an abundance of high-poverty schools attracted fewer college graduates into the teaching profession. Regardless of SAT scores, graduates who chose to teach were less likely to teach in high-minority schools.

Researchers have found similar results in New York State. Using years of experience and level of licensure as indicators of teacher quality, Ascher and Fruchter (2001) looked at the teaching force in schools that were under state review for low-performance (labeled as SURR schools – Schools Under Registration Review) between 1995 and 1997. These schools were compared to other low-performing schools that were not under review and to schools that were considered high-achieving according to student scores on a state-mandated reading test. In the low-performing schools, 93% of the students received free or reduced lunch and 98% were

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students of color compared to 37% and 52% respectively in high-performing schools. The researchers found that fully licensed teachers with more experience were most likely to teach in high-performing schools with fewer students living in poverty and fewer students of color. For example, at the elementary level, 30% of teachers at SURR schools and 26% of teachers at low-performing schools were not fully licensed compared to 7.6% of teachers at high-performing schools. Furthermore, 35% of teachers at SURR schools and 33% of teachers at low-performing schools had less than five years of experience compared to 24% at high-achieving schools.

Also in New York State, Lankford, Loeb, and Wyckoff (2002) tracked teacher-sorting across schools and school districts using teacher-exam test scores and competitive status of undergraduate institution as measures of teacher quality. Using seven linked datasets from the New York State Education Department and The State University of New York, the researchers matched teacher personnel information to scores on the National Teacher Examination (NTE), the New York State Teacher Certification Exam in Liberal Arts and Science (NYSTCE), and the SAT. Teachers were also matched by undergraduate GPA, competiveness of the undergraduate institution as measured by *Barron's College Guide*, years of teaching experience, and level of licensure. All teachers in New York State were examined, based on the above criteria, in 1999-2000.

Overall, teacher qualifications were not evenly distributed across schools in New York State (Lankford et al., 2002). Schools that had low teacher-quality measures in one area (such as exam scores) were likely to have low quality measures across all areas. New York City fared the worst in the state when it comes to teacher quality, though urban areas throughout the state had teachers with lower qualifications than did schools in suburban areas. For example, in Buffalo, one-third of teachers failed the NYSTCE compared to one-fifth in suburban school districts.

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Overall, the authors found that non-white, poor, and LEP students were more likely to have low-quality teachers than were white, non-poor, and non-LEP students. Twenty-one percent of non-white students had teachers who failed the NTE or NYSTCE compared to 7% of white students. For poor students, this number was 28% compared to 20% for non-poor students. Using test scores of fourth and eighth grade students on the state English Language Arts exam, the researchers found that at schools where students scored at the lowest level, 35% of teachers had failed the NTE or NYSTCE. At schools where no student scored at the lowest level, only 9% of teachers failed the NTE or NYSTCE.

The researchers found that the distribution of teachers has remained fairly consistent over the past 15 years. In terms of attrition, the teachers who transferred or left teaching in New York State altogether tended to have stronger qualifications than those who stayed. Teachers who transferred to other schools were 50% less likely to have failed the NTE or NYSTCE and were 35% more likely to have graduated from highly-competitive universities. Teachers who left teaching in the state altogether were even less likely to have failed the NTE or NYSTCE and were 60% more likely to have graduated from a highly-competitive university.

These findings have implications for the current study of high-quality teachers who remain teaching in high-poverty schools. TFA teachers, who provide the context for this study, are graduates of highly-competitive universities and are selected based on many attributes deemed necessary to help students achieve, among them academic ability (Foote, 2008). This ability is measured by undergraduate GPA and ACT or SAT scores. Lankford et al. (2002) used these very measures to rate teacher quality and found that teachers who rank higher tend to leave, or never enter, high-poverty schools. These same qualities, or lack of these qualities, were linked to student achievement on fourth and eighth grade English Language Arts exams. TFA teachers

are assigned to the very schools that this study found were lacking in qualified teachers. If teachers who do possess such qualities extend their stay in the profession, they may further impact student achievement in these schools.

While the research presented above verifies that teachers with certain qualities sort into schools with lower levels of poverty, each study draws from a sample of teachers that began teaching in the 1980s or 1990s, before the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). NCLB stipulates the presence of a "highly-qualified" teacher in every classroom. In the last ten years, states have increasingly passed measures aimed at attracting and retaining qualified candidates into the teaching profession. As a result, the teacher population in the nation's schools may be more highly qualified that it was 20 years ago. In a study conducted by the Education Trust, researchers found that as of 2004, highly-qualified teachers were still widely and inequitably distributed across high- and low-poverty schools in Cleveland, Milwaukee, and Chicago (Peske & Haycock, 2006). In Illinois, the state's Education Research Council assigns each school a Teacher Quality Index (TQI) based on five measures: the percentage of teachers with BA degrees from more-competitive colleges; the percentage of teachers with fewer than four years of teaching experience; the percentage of teachers with emergency or provisional credentials; the percentage of teachers who failed the Basic Skills test on the first attempt; and the average ACT composite score of teachers (p. 16). Using this measure, 84% of the highest-poverty schools had a TQI in the bottom 25% of the state, and 56% had a TQI in the bottom 10% of the state. In contrast, of the lowest-poverty schools, 46% had a TQI in the top 25% of the state, and only 5% had a TQI in the bottom 25% of the state. This data shows that the gap in teacher qualifications, at least as of 2004, had not improved with the passage of NCLB.

In another effort to understand if and how teacher qualifications have improved in high-poverty schools, Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, Rockoff, and Wyckoff (2008) drew on data from the New York City and New York State Departments of Education and from the College Board to determine whether or not the distribution of teacher qualifications across schools and districts had changed between 2000 and 2005. They found that there was indeed a "narrowing of the gap" (p. 799) in the distribution of teacher qualifications between high- and low-poverty schools. For example, the difference in teacher SAT scores between the highest poverty schools and the lowest-poverty schools shrank from 32 points to 16 points. This trend was similar across other qualification measures, such as pass rate on licensure exams, graduation rates from highly-competitive universities, and years of teaching experience (p. 799). However, while the gap is obviously shrinking, high-poverty schools still employ more teachers with low qualifications than do low-poverty schools. Most important to the present study, Boyd et al. (2008) found that 65% of the narrowing gap in teacher SAT scores between the highest- and lowest-poverty schools is explained by the increased presence of TFA and Teaching Fellows, another alternative licensure program that recruits academically-able college graduates to teach in high-poverty schools in New York City. The same trend was true in all other measures of teacher quality, with the exception of years of teaching experience.

As demonstrated in the research detailed above, studies have consistently found that teachers in high-poverty schools tend to possess fewer academic qualities than do teachers in low-poverty schools. At the same time, students in high-poverty schools consistently under-perform students in low-poverty schools. Therefore, it appears that the academic qualities of teachers are related to student achievement; however, researchers warn that we must be careful not to assume a direct causal link between teacher quality and student achievement without

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controlling for other factors (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2006; Boyd et al., 2008; Lankford et al., 2002). In the next section, I present research that explores the relationship between teacher qualities and student achievement.

Does an Increase in Teacher Quality Impact Student Achievement?

It is difficult to find agreement in the available literature regarding which teacher attributes - such as SAT scores, licensing exam scores, or overall academic ability - have a direct effect on student achievement (Boyd, Goldhaber, Lankford, & Wyckoff, 2007; Clotfelter et al., 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2000). Many teacher attributes are difficult to measure, such as motivation, relationships with students, creativity in lesson planning, ability to differentiate instruction, etc. However, as research presented earlier in this review shows, teachers in high-poverty schools tend to possess fewer academic qualities than do teacher in low-poverty schools. In this section, I present findings from two studies that are able to demonstrate that teachers' academic qualities do impact student achievement, and that when teacher quality increases in high-poverty schools, so too does student achievement. As Teach For America provides the context for this study, I also present research that shows that the qualities TFA teachers bring to high-poverty schools appear to positively impact student achievement.

Improved Teacher Quality and Student Achievement

In a study presented earlier in this review, researchers found that Illinois schools serving a high-poverty and high-minority student population tended to have a much lower Teacher Quality Index (TQI) than schools serving low-poverty and low-minority populations (Peske & Haycock, 2006). The TQI is a measure developed by the Illinois Education Research Council that describes how teachers within a school rate across five measures: average ACT composite scores, percentage of teachers who failed the Basic Skills Test on the first attempt, percentage of

teachers with emergency credentials, teachers' average undergraduate college competitiveness ranking, and percentage of teachers with three years or less of experience (Peske & Haycock, 2006; Presley et al., 2005). In an effort to understand whether or not an increase in TQI positively impacts student achievement, Presley, White, and Gong (2005) separated the population of Illinois schools into quartiles based on TQI. They then separated schools based on poverty-status (according to percentage of students receiving free-and-reduced lunch) and minority-status.

Based on poverty-status alone, the researchers found that the percentage of students who met or exceeded standards on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) increased as TQI increased. For example, for middle and elementary schools that were in the highest-poverty category (90-100% free-and-reduced lunch), an average of 31.4% of students in schools at the bottom TQI quartile met the state standard on the ISAT compared to 42.9% of students attending schools in the second-highest TQI quartile. Schools in the second-highest poverty category (50-89% free-and-reduced lunch) saw an increase from an average of 43.8% meeting the state standard in bottom TQI quartile schools to 56.4% in top TQI quartile schools. The effect was more dramatic at the high school level: an average of 13.7% of students in the highest-poverty schools in the bottom TQI quartile met state standards on the Prairie State Achievement Examination (PSAE) compared to 32.5% of students in the highest-poverty schools in the second-highest TQI quartile. Results were similar when schools were separated by minority status. Schools in the bottom TQI quartile serving the highest percentage of minority students had fewer students meeting state standards than did schools with similar minority populations in higher TQI quartiles.

The authors point out that most of the high-poverty schools in Illinois are also high-minority. Therefore, they grouped schools that were both high-poverty and high-minority together and compared them to schools that were both low-poverty and low-minority. In both groupings, student achievement increased between each TQI quartile; however, the effect was the largest in high-poverty/high-minority schools. At the high school level, an average of 11% of students in high-poverty/high-minority schools in the bottom TQI quartile met state standards on the PSAE compared to 25% of students in the second-highest TQI quartile. There were no schools in the high-poverty/high-minority category that had TQI's in the top quartile. After conducting a regression analysis on this data, the authors confirm that TQI is independently related to school achievement after taking both minority and poverty levels into account. Specifically, a 1.0 increase in TQI is related to a 5.9 percentage point increase in percent of students meeting state standards at the high school level. At the middle and elementary school levels, this improvement amounts to a 2.9 and a 1.3 percentage point increase respectively (Presley et al., 2005).

Presley et al.'s (2005) study demonstrates that schools with higher TQI's experience higher student achievement than schools with low TQI's, even when accounting for levels of poverty and minority status. While this supports the idea that teacher quality impacts student achievement, the authors were not able to observe how a particular school's achievement would change if teacher quality within that school increased. However, Boyd et al. (2008) observed that student achievement increased in high-poverty schools in New York City as teacher quality within those schools increased from 2000-2005. As discussed earlier in this review, Boyd et al. (2008) used data from the New York City and New York State Departments of Education and from the College Board to show that the teacher-quality gap between high- and low- poverty

schools had narrowed between 2000 and 2005. As the teacher-quality gap decreased, the researchers found that the student achievement gap between high- and low-poverty schools decreased as well. For example, in 2000, 73.7% of fourth-grade students in the highest-poverty schools failed to meet state proficiency standards in English Language Arts compared to only 29.6% in the lowest-poverty schools. In 2005, these percentages decreased to 50.5% in the highest-poverty schools and 18.1% in the lowest-poverty schools. In other words, the reduction in the gap between the highest- and lowest- poverty schools decreased from 44.2 to 32.4 percentage points in fourth-grade English Language Arts between 2000 and 2005. The effect was even more pronounced for fourth-grade Math achievement. Between 2000 and 2005, the reduction in the achievement gap between the highest- and the lowest-poverty schools decreased from 46.8 percentage points to 21.5 percentage points. Effects were similar, though not as dramatic, at the eighth-grade level.

The researchers in both of these studies used regression analyses to show that an increase in teacher quality accounts for significant increases in student achievement. Teacher quality was measured by years of experience and by a variety of academic indicators, such as licensure exam scores, SAT/ACT scores, and competitiveness of teachers' undergraduate institutions. Though neither study was able to isolate what particular quality accounted for the greatest increase in student achievement, the researchers conclude that teachers with higher academic qualities appear to positively impact student achievement in high-poverty schools (Boyd et al., 2008; Presley et al., 2005). As TFA places teachers possessing such qualities into high-poverty schools, many researchers have focused on this subpopulation of teachers in an effort to further understand how such teachers impact student achievement. In the next section, I provide a brief synthesis of this research.

TFA's Impact on Student Achievement

There is considerable debate regarding the impact TFA has on student achievement. In general, the studies that find that TFA teachers positively impact student achievement compare TFA teachers to the entire pool of non-TFA teachers in high poverty schools. On the other hand, studies that compare TFA teachers only to their fully-certified and experienced counterparts tend to find that TFA teachers have little or no impact on student achievement, with the exception of one Louisiana study (Noell & Gansle, 2009). In this section, I present the findings from these studies and discuss their implications for teacher quality in high-poverty schools.

An often-cited study by supporters of TFA is the "Mathematica Study." Decker, Mayer, and Glazerman (2006), conducted a multi-region study for Mathematica Policy Research that compared student achievement in TFA-taught classrooms to non-TFA classrooms. Schools were randomly selected in Baltimore, Chicago, Compton, Houston, New Orleans, and the Mississippi Delta that staffed both TFA and non-TFA teachers. Within each school, grade levels were selected that staffed at least one TFA and one non-TFA teacher, and students were randomly assigned to participating classrooms. TFA teachers included corps members in their first or second year of teaching and corps members who continued teaching in their schools beyond their two-year teaching commitment. The final sample included 17 schools, 37 grade-level "blocks," 100 classrooms, and nearly 1800 students across grades 1-5. The researchers administered the Iowa Test of Basic Skills to participating students in the fall and in the spring to measure student achievement growth.

The main focus of the study was to understand TFA's impact on student achievement relative to what would have happened in the absence of TFA (Decker et al., 2006). Therefore, TFA teachers were not just compared to fully-certified teachers; rather, they were compared to

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the entire pool of non-TFA teachers that would have been available to staff classrooms in the absence of TFA. The authors used the following teacher-comparison groups in measuring student achievement across classrooms: TFA teachers versus the entire pool of non-TFA teachers; TFA teachers versus novice non-TFA teachers; and TFA teachers versus certified non-TFA teachers. The authors note the certification status of the entire pool of non-TFA teachers. Of the novice group of non-TFA teachers (having three years or less of experience), only 38% were fully certified compared to 51% of the TFA teachers at the time of the study. In the entire pool of non-TFA teachers, only 67% were fully certified. These findings are consistent with evidence presented earlier regarding the qualifications of teachers that tend to teach in high-poverty schools alongside TFA teachers. Research consistently shows, and was presented earlier in this review, that fully-certified teachers are underrepresented in high-poverty schools in which TFA teachers are placed. This adds credibility to the researchers' decision not to compare TFA teachers solely to certified teachers.

The authors found that when comparing TFA teachers to the entire pool of non-TFA teachers, the students of TFA teachers had greater achievement gains than those of non-TFA teachers in math. Achievement gains between the two groups were about the same in reading. Findings were similar when comparing TFA teachers only to certified teachers, though not quite as robust. When comparing TFA teachers to the pool of novice teachers, the authors found that students of TFA teachers achieved gains significantly higher than non-TFA teachers in math and in reading. The authors warn that these findings should not be used as support against teacher preparation programs. TFA teachers were not compared to graduates of highly-selective teacher preparation programs because, in this case, teachers fitting this criterion did not exist in these schools. Instead, TFA teachers were compared to a pool of teachers that included many that

were poorly qualified. However, this pool of teachers is the reality in high-poverty schools. The authors conclude that, given the pool of teachers that were assigned to these schools in this case, students were better off in math and just as well off in reading to be assigned to a TFA teacher (Decker et al., 2006).

Xu, Hannaway, and Taylor (2011) obtained similar results using high school student data from 2000-01 through 2006-07 in 23 districts that employ TFA teachers in North Carolina. In North Carolina, students are given End of Course exams (EOCs) across multiple subjects in high school. The researchers linked student test scores on these exams to the course instructor using the North Carolina Education Research Data Center at Duke University. However, this presented a substantial limitation to the study. The North Carolina data links students to the proctor that administered the exam, and this person is not necessarily the students' instructor, though state officials claim that 90% of the time, the proctor is actually the instructor. In an effort to control for this limitation, the authors describe the process they undertook to ensure that the student-instructor match was as accurate as possible. A "successful" match was based on a matched teacher-proctor ID code and available classroom demographic information. If the teacher-proctor ID codes did not match, the data was not used. Though a successful match was made for 84% of students, the authors admit that there is some possibility, though statistically very small, that some students were not correctly matched to their instructor.

Xu et al. (2011) compared TFA teachers with several subgroups: the entire pool of non-TFA teachers, novice non-TFA teachers, non-TFA teachers holding standard licensure with less than three years of experience, and non-TFA teachers holding standard licensure with more than three years of experience. Across all subgroups and all subjects, the students of TFA teachers outperformed non-TFA teachers in terms of achievement gains, though the effects were largest in

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science, followed by math. The effects were greatest when TFA teachers were compared to all novice teachers and to novice teachers with standard licensure, similar to Decker et al's (2006) finding that TFA teachers posted significantly higher student achievement gains than new, non-TFA teachers.

While these findings bode well for TFA, Xu et al. (2011) notes, as did Decker et al. (2006), that it is important to take into account the fact that TFA teachers were compared to teachers in their own schools – schools which typically employ many poorly-qualified teachers. Still, the authors conclude that "TFA teachers are more effective than the teachers who would otherwise be in the classroom in their stead….Other things being equal, the findings suggest that disadvantaged students taught by TFA teachers are better off than they would be in the absence of TFA" (p. 465).

A study conducted in Louisiana revealed similar findings (Noell & Gansle, 2009). Student test data in grades 4 through 9 Reading, English-Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies were linked to teachers during the 2004-05, 2005-06, and 2006-07 school years. The researchers wanted to determine if students taught by TFA corps members exceeded, met, or failed to meet expectations in terms of growth from their prior year's test scores. They compared TFA teachers to non-TFA teachers as a whole, to new teachers with 1-2 years of experience, and to fully-certified, experienced teachers. Findings indicated that on average and across all subjects, the students of TFA teachers met or exceeded expectations. When comparing the achievement of students of TFA teachers to students of non-TFA new teachers, students of TFA teachers significantly outperformed students of new teachers, echoing findings reported earlier by Decker et al. (2006) and Xu et al. (2011). Student achievement gains were positive,

though not statistically significant, when the researchers compared TFA teachers to all non-TFA teachers and to non-TFA experienced teachers (Noell & Gansle, 2009).

The research synthesized above shows that TFA teachers have a positive impact on student achievement, especially when TFA teachers are compared to the pool of available teachers that tend to be employed in high-poverty schools. As research presented earlier in this review shows, this pool of teachers tends to lack the high academic qualities that TFA teachers bring to the profession. While this is promising, TFA teachers were not found to be more effective than traditionally certified and experienced teachers possessing similar academic qualifications; however, they were not even compared to these teachers because such teachers are not typically found in high-poverty schools. Although these studies show that TFA teachers have a positive impact on student achievement, other studies have come to less conclusive findings.

Two studies drawing from the same New York City database arrived at similar conclusions regarding the impact of TFA teachers on student achievement (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2006; Kane et al., 2008). Both studies investigated the effect of alternative pathways to teaching on student achievement in New York City and compared groups of teachers by certification status. The data consisted of demographic information and exam scores for students in grades 3-8 from 1998-99 through 2003-04. Students were linked to teacher demographic information drawn from New York State Education Department and New York City Department of Education databases. In both cases, the students of TFA and other alternatively certified teachers performed on average about the same as certified teachers when controlling for student demographic characteristics. Students of TFA teachers had larger gains in middle school math than in any other subject or grade level. However, one study did find that

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TFA teachers had a slightly negative effect on student achievement during the first year of teaching, but this effect disappeared as years of experience increased to three (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2006). Unfortunately, data beyond three years significantly lowered sample sizes due to the high attrition of TFA recruits, so conclusive results could not be drawn regarding TFA's impact on student achievement beyond three years. While both authors conceded that TFA teachers do not appear to hinder student achievement, neither study found that TFA teachers significantly outperformed fully-certified teachers.

Using data from Houston, Raymond and Fletcher (2002) and Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, and Heilig (2005) used similar datasets to arrive at very different conclusions. The Houston database matched teachers to student test scores on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). Raymond and Fletcher (2002) looked at data from 1996 – 2000 in grades 3-5, while Darling-Hammond et al. (2005) looked at data from 1996 – 2002 in grades 3-8. Raymond and Fletcher (2002) found that TFA teachers posted higher student achievement gains in reading as compared to other novice non-TFA teachers and about the same as the entire pool of non-TFA teachers. In mathematics, students of TFA teachers achieved significantly higher gains than novice non-TFA teachers. The difference in mathematics achievement gains between students of TFA teachers and the students of the entire pool of non-TFA teachers was positive, but not statistically significant. The researchers did not compare TFA teachers to certified non-TFA teachers because their analysis was "explicitly intended to assess Teach For America relative to all other sources of new teachers currently available to school districts like Houston" (p. 67). This reasoning is similar to that employed by Decker et al. (2006), Xu et al. (2011), Noell and Gansle (2009), and Nadareishvili (2008) in research presented earlier in this review.

Darling-Hammond et al. (2005), on the other hand, increased the sample to include two additional school years and two additional grade levels. The researchers separated the pool of non-TFA teachers by certification status and found that certified teachers consistently outperformed non-certified teachers regardless of TFA status. However, TFA teachers who had achieved standard certification (meaning they had completed Texas' certification process that includes coursework and successful teaching experience) performed similarly to other certified teachers. TFA teachers who had not yet achieved certification performed worse than TFA teachers who had achieved certification. It is not clear whether this is a result of the certification process or a result of the fact that teachers may improve with experience.

Both of these studies have implications for TFA's effect on student achievement. TFA teachers are placed in schools that tend to draw from a pool of potential teachers with lower qualifications who are less likely to be certified than teachers at suburban and low-poverty schools. Raymond and Fletcher's (2002) study compared TFA teachers to the other teachers that are likely to teach in these particular schools, and findings demonstrated that students of TFA teachers have positive returns to academic achievement. However, we cannot ignore Darling-Hammond et al.'s (2005) finding that certification and experience make teachers more effective when measuring student achievement. Given this finding, TFA teachers should become more effective with experience. Experience, coupled with their proven academic abilities, will have a profound impact on student achievement.

There is one parallel throughout the research on TFA's return to student achievement: when compared to the pool of teachers who would otherwise be assigned to the particular classrooms in which TFA teachers are placed, students are better off, or at least no worse off, by having a TFA teacher. The studies presented above have implications for the benefit of retaining

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TFA teachers in that all showed positive increases in effectiveness as both TFA and non-TFA teachers gained experience. Research shows that years of experience positively impact teacher effectiveness at least through the first five years (Clotfelter et al., 2010; Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005; Rockoff, 2004). Therefore, TFA and similarly-qualified teachers can further their impact on student achievement by staying in the profession for the long haul. In the next section of this review, I present findings from research on teacher resilience in high-poverty schools.

Resilience: Why Do Teachers Persist?

The research provides much information regarding reasons why teachers choose to leave high-poverty schools. These reasons include poor administrative support, poor school environment, lack-of-resources, poor student behavior and achievement, stress, overcrowded schools, and placement in teaching positions outside of a teacher's major (Boyd et al., 2011; Boyd et al., 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2001; Donaldson & Johnson, 2010; Ingersoll, 2002, 2007; Ingersoll & Merrill, 2010). Conversely, many studies provide insight into why teachers stay in the profession, citing external support factors such as induction and mentoring programs for new teachers, smaller schools, membership in professional learning communities, and, in general *better* working conditions (Anderson, 2010; Brown & Wynn, 2007; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Wynn, Carboni, & Patall, 2007). However, when we consider the concept of teacher "resilience," relatively few studies examine why teachers stay in the profession despite the presence of all of the obstacles reported above.

Conceptual Framework

Resilience, for the purposes of this study and supported by research presented here, is an internal, personal construct that refers to the ability of teachers to "maintain their commitment to

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teaching and their teaching practices despite challenging conditions and setbacks" (Brunetti, 2006, p. 813). This definition of resilience is pertinent to this study for two reasons. First, while some researchers have studied resilience of teachers in high-poverty schools, no study has targeted the particular subgroup of teachers that is the focus of this study: teachers with high academic-ability who have no background in education and initially only committed to teach for two years. For this group of teachers to have stayed in the profession, a transformation must have occurred at some point in time in which the teacher decided to stay in the profession, despite initially having plans to leave. This study seeks to understand how teachers' experiences led to this transformation, thus making them resilient despite the challenges associated with high-poverty schools.

Second, one of the intended outcomes of this study is to provide recommendations to TFA regarding how corps members can be supported and encouraged to persist in high-poverty schools. Studies of teacher attrition and retention commonly have implications for structural supports that schools and school districts have (or do not have) in place that impact a teacher's ability to persist. TFA has no control over the conditions present in such schools, and may therefore only affect teacher retention by helping recruits to be resilient "in the face of adversity" (Patterson et al., 2004, p. 3). While studies have linked self-efficacy and out-of-field teaching assignment as predictors of whether or not a TFA recruit will complete the two year commitment (Donaldson, 2008; Donaldson & Johnson, 2010; Klein, 2009; Swearingen, 2009), no study has looked at why TFA corps members persist beyond two years. Furthermore, no qualitative study has focused on intrinsic factors that have contributed to veteran TFA teachers' persistence in high-poverty schools beyond their commitment, despite adverse working conditions. Therefore, the present definition of resilience provides a new lens through which to view the persistence of

high-quality teachers. This section presents research that supports and further describes "resilience."

Though only a handful of studies examine why successful, veteran teachers persist in high-poverty schools despite challenging conditions, several common findings emerge from a synthesis of the available research. This section first presents findings that emerge from the research on veteran teacher resilience. I then discuss findings from studies on novice teachers' perceived resilience. Finally, I discuss how these studies hold implications for the present study on resilience of high-quality teacher in high-poverty schools.

Studies of Veteran Teachers' Resilience in High-Poverty Schools

Using a common methodology, researchers studying the resilience of teachers in high-poverty schools have arrived at similar findings. Five seminal studies show that these teachers are motivated by a love and commitment to their students, a belief in teaching as intellectual work, a sense of hope for their students, a commitment to social justice, and a deep understanding of their personal autobiographies.

Nieto's (2003) study is often cited by researchers for its focus on the question, "What keeps teachers going in spite of everything?" The researcher met with an inquiry group of eight teachers in the Boston Public School system over the course of one school year. The teachers were considered "excellent" by school and district personnel, and had anywhere from 3 to 25 years of experience. Nieto's findings are drawn from life-history interviews, focus groups, observations, and participant journals. From her findings, Nieto defined teaching as an intersection of seven metaphors described below.

1. Teaching as autobiography. When asked to reflect on what motivated them to enter the profession, the teachers were able to pinpoint certain life experiences or circumstance that

brought them to the profession. For example, teachers who came from similar high-poverty

backgrounds felt a sense of responsibility to help their students find a "way out" as they had.

Conversely, those that came from a more privileged background felt a need to "pay it forward."

All of the teachers identified positive and negative K12 experiences that served as powerful

motivators for their resilience. Some participants described painful encounters with former

teachers, and others described teachers who had supported, nurtured, and motivated them. These

memories were reminders to these teachers of the tremendous impact, both positive and negative,

that teachers have on their students. For these teachers, memories of painful encounters

motivated them to strive to make a positive difference in their students' lives.

2. Teaching as love. The teachers' love and commitment to students served as their

primary motivation for persisting in the classroom. According to Nieto (2003), "this means

having faith in young people and in their capacity and intelligence, in spite of conventional

images and messages to the contrary" (p. 52). These teachers have high expectations for their

students, believe in their students' abilities, and embrace their students' individuality. They

work to establish trust with their students, and they take responsibility for their success.

3. Teaching as hope and possibility. For these teachers, hope and possibility resided in

their belief in the promise of public education. In a journal entry, one teacher asserted, "That's

what keeps me going, the belief that public schools can work" (Nieto, 2003, p. 55). Another

teacher described how seeing students graduate and go to college rejuvenates him and gives him

hope for the next class of students while motivating him to persist another year. Some of the

teachers understand the promise of education because public schools offered them a path out of

poverty when they were students.

4. Teaching as anger and desperation. The teachers expressed typical frustrations regarding lack of supplies and poor administrative support, but they also acknowledged the motivating power of anger. One teacher asserted that, "Anger is one of the motivating factors in keeping you going, keeping that passion alive….it is anger at the injustice…Anger is what fuels you" (Nieto, 2003, p. 64). It is important to note that for these teachers, anger is not synonymous with "complaining." Rather, it is a catalyst that motivates resilient teachers to persist and to fight injustice.

5. Teaching as intellectual work. Nieto (2003) describes these teachers as "researchers." One teacher described the substantial amount of planning, research, and "theorizing" that went into a particular unit plan and then the vast amount of reflection that she undertook while putting her plan into action (pp. 82-84). A twenty-fifth year teacher referred to his craft as "mindful teaching" that is never fully mastered (p. 89). He felt that he frequently "gets it wrong" despite the effort he puts in to "get it right" (p. 90). In pursuing this intellectual work, these teachers often rely on their colleagues and feel that the communities they have established within their schools are essential to their success.

6. Teaching as democratic practice. The teachers understand the form that educational injustice takes for their students: they attend schools that lack proper resources, and they must learn a curriculum that largely ignores cultural differences and fails to celebrate contributions from other cultures. These teachers struggle to "teach for democracy." A good example of this comes from Nieto's observation of an English teacher. The students in this class were upset with how a local newspaper portrayed an African American athlete. As a collaborative class-assignment, the students wrote a letter to the editor voicing their concerns. In this lesson, the students learned how to collaborate, how to write a business letter, and how to write

persuasively. When the editor wrote back to them, they also learned that in a democracy, they could effectively use their voices to be heard. Embedded in the metaphor of "teaching as democratic practice" is a commitment to social justice. Though they may not articulate it as such, these teachers understand the concept of "institutionalized racism" (Nieto, 2003, p. 95), and they are aware of the impact of generational poverty on their students' lives. This awareness is part of what fuels their anger mentioned above.

7. Teaching as shaping futures. One participant reflected on her struggle to help a novice teacher find the "secret" to how teachers are able to persist against all odds. In a journal entry, she had a revelation, exclaiming, *"Teachers change lives forever"* (Nieto, 2003, p. 118). This sentiment is echoed in some way across every teacher resilience study, and resilient teachers use this knowledge of their "power" to change students' lives as motivation to persist.

Similar to Nieto's (2003) findings, Stanford (2001) found that teachers in high-poverty schools are primarily motivated by love for their students and by the knowledge that they can make a difference in their students' lives. Stanford worked with 10 elementary school teachers in Washington, DC who had 10 or more years of experience and were identified by district personnel to fit a "profile of high morale" despite working in "distressed" environments (p. 77). Through interviews, observations, a focus group, and ranking activities, the researcher found patterns that help explain why these experienced teachers persevered in the profession despite difficult circumstances. All of the teachers expressed a deep commitment and appreciation for their students and claimed a preference for teaching in high-poverty schools. They felt that these students needed them more than suburban students and felt a tremendous responsibility to help them achieve at a high level. Their professional satisfaction comes from watching their students learn and grow.

When asked what sources they draw on for support, the teachers indicated that their relationships with colleagues motivate them to persist, and they emphasized the importance of a "family atmosphere" in their schools (Stanford, 2001, p. 82). However, when placed in a school environment where such an atmosphere did not exist, these teachers both recognized its absence and understood its importance. When asked to describe the ideal school environment, teachers rated "familial and collegial" school climate to be of top importance, at the same time describing their current situation as a "prison, war, or business" (p. 83). This is similar to Nieto's (2003) finding that teachers rely on collaboration with colleagues to help them persist. One finding that stood out in Stanford's study that did not come up in Nieto's was that all of these teachers cited personal spirituality and membership in a church community as significant sources of support. Many described instances in which they relied on prayer to persist despite difficult circumstances.

A study of experienced teachers in Southern California yielded similar findings to both the Nieto (2003) and Stanford (2001) studies. Brunetti (2006), identified nine teachers with 12 or more years of experience in a high-poverty high school in Southern California through the use of a survey. Using life-history interviews over two or three sessions, the researcher identified three themes that explained the teachers' motivations to remain in the classroom: the students, professional and personal fulfillment, and support for teachers' work.

The teachers in Brunetti's (2006) study expressed a deep commitment, respect, and admiration for their students. In reflecting on what brings them to work each day, one teacher commented that she persists "to help them get to some point in their life where their life will be better because of our being together. That's why I come here" (Brunetti, 2006, p. 817). This is consistent with findings from both Nieto's (2003) and Stanford's (2001) studies which found that

teachers are motivated by the knowledge that they can change their students' lives. Just as in

Stanford's (2001) study, the teachers expressed a preference for teaching in high-poverty schools

because of the particular students that they teach. This is emphasized in one teacher's assertion

that a person's chosen profession should "make things better for the world…and for

me…[means] working and helping and giving tools to students that are parentally

disadvantaged" (Brunetti, 2006, p. 818). Recall that Nieto (2003) used the metaphor of

"teaching as autobiography" as one way to explain why resilient teacher persist. Teachers in

Brunetti's (2006) study also identified life experiences that motivated them to purse a teaching

career with high-poverty students. One teacher explained how his background as a military

sniper led him to teaching: "I took lives. This is my way to kind of pay back…It's a way for me

to help humanity" (p. 820).

Another source of fulfillment for these teachers is the knowledge that they are working

for "social justice" (p. 819). The teachers understood the obstacles that their students and their

school faced in the particular social and political context in which they were situated, and this

created some anger and frustration for them. One teacher expressed her anger at the bureaucratic

processes that seem to "keep certain people downtrodden," but maintained that it was her job to

"keep hope alive" and persist with her students (p. 819). Another teacher commented, "My

anger and frustration over what we've done as a country to…our students and to a large segment

of our population…I'm outraged half the time. So, this is what I can do [i.e., teach]" (p. 819).

This is similar to Nieto's (2003) finding that resilient teachers use their anger at educational

injustice as motivation to persist.

The teachers in Brunetti's study emphasized the importance of collaboration with

colleagues in building resilience. When ranking factors that contributed to their decision to stay

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in the classroom, the teachers ranked supportive leadership and positive relationships with colleagues to be of top importance. This finding is consistent with both Nieto's (2003) and Stanford's (2001) findings that collaboration among colleagues and a collegial, supportive atmosphere can motivate teachers to persist in the classroom.

Patterson, Collins, and Abbott's (2004) findings provide further proof that resilient teachers are motivated by their commitment to students, to social justice, and to each other. Patterson et al. identified 16 teachers in an unnamed urban district who had three or more years of experience and were nominated by Great City Schools and local staff as effective teachers. The researchers interviewed participants three times in the 2002-03 school year in an effort to understand their motivation to persist in the profession and to identify specific strategies that teachers use to cope with adversity. They found that resilient teachers have a set of personal values that guides their work, they value and actively seek-out professional development, they act as mentors to other teachers, and they are expert problem-solvers.

Just as teachers in the three studies described above were motivated by a commitment to social justice, so too were the teachers in Patterson et al.'s study. Some teachers described teaching high-poverty students as a "calling" or as their personal responsibility to society (p. 7). One teacher described his decision to leave the engineering profession to pursue a teaching career after witnessing how poor and minority students behaved on the bus he took to work each day: "I felt there is something wrong with a society that doesn't make kids learn and then sends them to prison, and I couldn't be an engineer anymore. I just had to try to do something. So, I made a really purposeful decision to be a teacher" (p. 6).

The teachers in Patterson et al.'s study actively sought out professional development, both formally and informally. They expressed that most of their learning resulted from

interactions with colleagues, underscoring the importance of a collegial and collaborative school atmosphere. This lends further credibility to the studies presented earlier, which found that collaboration with colleagues motivated teachers to persist. Patterson et al. also found that resilient teachers will seek opportunities for professional development outside of the school and school district if no opportunities can be found within. The teachers expressed a responsibility to each other. As one teacher stated, "Administrators will come and go, but the hard job of teaching, of educating children, will fall to those who stay and find ways to reach students" (p. 8). They understood the importance of mentoring new teachers and felt a responsibility to "bring them along." A feeling expressed by teachers across all of the teacher resilience studies was that by helping all teachers in the school to be successful, they were in turn helping students to be more successful, pointing again to the commitment resilient teachers feel towards their students.

Patterson et al. underscores the fact that resilient teachers are not threatened by obstacles, and do not allow barriers to interfere with their sense of hope for their students. When a problem arises, they take charge and seek solutions, even if the solution lies beyond school walls. Rather than count a moody, disrespectful student as lazy, one teacher sought help from the community, finally finding a program with the U.S. Navy that partnered the student with a young officer in a mentoring program. This teacher refused to give up on her student and committed herself to finding a way to help him reach his potential, even if it meant looking outside of the school. This teacher's persistence in solving this problem shows that "hope" also served as motivation for her resilience. This is consistent with Nieto's (2003) metaphor of "teaching as hope and possibility."

Finally, in an effort to understand how professional development may foster teacher resilience, Yonezawa, Jones, and Singer (2011) selected six teachers who had participated in the

National Writing Project (NWP) at some point in their 20+ year careers in urban schools. These participants were drawn from a much larger study that evaluated the impact of NWP on the teaching profession. The researchers wanted to understand how participation in NWP, a highly-collaborative professional development program, contributed to the resiliency of teachers in high-poverty schools. Though this study focuses on professional development in fostering resiliency rather than on internal factors that teachers bring to the table, this study's findings reinforce those of the studies described above. The researchers found that participation in NWP supported the teachers' resiliency by increasing their technical knowledge of their subject matter, by providing cultural support, and by developing their leadership capabilities.

Teachers in Yonezawa et al.'s study found that by participating in NWP, they were not only able to increase their technical knowledge of writing instruction, but they were also able to experience a sense of rejuvenation and renewed commitment by working closely with other teachers, something they were not always able to do at their own school sites. The teachers valued the time for reflection through writing that NWP provided, just as Nieto's (2003) participants used reflection as a means to foster resilience. Also important was the fact that NWP examined issues of race and gender, something that the teachers in Yonezawa et al.'s study felt was necessary to address the unique needs of their own students. The teachers also found that by collaborating with colleagues in other districts, they had more confidence to mentor teachers at their own school sites. The researchers concluded that professional development that is targeted at teachers in high-poverty schools must not be limited to technical knowledge. To be of value to teachers, it must help teachers grow as leaders, it must provide opportunities for teachers to learn from each other, and it must be based on the belief that all students can achieve, regardless of socioeconomic background. This finding is consistent with all of the studies

presented above: resilient teachers believe in their students, they collaborate and learn from each other, and they find opportunities to mentor others.

Summary of findings. A synthesis of the studies on veteran teacher resilience in high-poverty schools uncovered five common findings: resilient teachers are motivated by their love and commitment to students; resilient teachers view teaching as intellectual work that is fostered through collaboration and reflection with colleagues; resilient teachers maintain hope for their students' futures and believe in the promise of public education; resilient teachers are committed to social justice and channel anger and frustration into action; resilient teachers understand how their own autobiographies brought them to the profession. Two other themes emerged from two of the five studies, though not as prominently: resilient teachers rely on personal spirituality and support from an external network of family and friends; resilient teachers understand the positive effect of supportive leadership, but find ways to persist in its absence.

These findings reiterate the current study's definition of resilience as an internal construct that refers to the ability of teachers to "maintain their commitment to teaching and their teaching practices despite challenging conditions and setbacks" (Brunetti, p. 813). It is important to note that the findings from these studies do not point to external or structural supports, though certainly effective administration and positive working environments would make a teacher's job easier. Instead, these teachers were motivated by love, intellect, social justice, anger, and past experiences, all of which are developed internally. Though these motivators may be influenced by external factors, such as positive working conditions, teachers across all five studies affirmed that they can be fostered despite the absence of them.

Studies of Novice Teachers' Resilience

Some commonalities are found when comparing the findings from four seminal studies of novice teacher resilience. However, there are two limitations that must be taken into consideration. First, these studies do not draw samples across teaching disciplines; rather, they each focus on teachers within the same discipline and/or from the same teacher preparation program. Therefore, it is difficult to make generalizations to the larger population of novice teachers. Second, though the studies aim to identify whether or not a new teacher will be resilient based on certain factors, the researchers do not go on to correlate these factors with whether or not the teachers actually stayed in the profession. Despite these limitations, an examination of the common findings that arises from these four studies is important to this review because TFA teachers, who provide the context for this study, are only affiliated with TFA for two years, beyond which point they are considered alumni. As alumni, they are under no obligation to comply with any TFA directives or professional development. The studies presented here pertain to teachers in their first or second year of teaching, the two years that TFA may actually have an impact on the continued resilience of its recruits. Therefore, these studies may inform how TFA can structure programming in an effort to foster teacher resilience. Three common findings emerged from the studies: novice teachers foster resilience through problem solving and reflection; novice teachers foster resilience through collaboration with colleagues and positive relationships with mentors; novice teachers foster resilience by participating in ongoing learning and by seeking out professional development.

In an effort to understand what significant frustrations teachers face in their first year of teaching, McCann and Johannessen (2004) interviewed and observed 11 novice high school English teachers. The researchers conducted follow-up interviews one to two years later with six

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of the teachers in order to understand what factors contributed to their decision to remain in the profession. They found that novice teachers who were likely to persevere had several things in common. These teachers felt a sense of duty to help children and understood obstacles that their students faced. Rather than view school challenges, such as poverty, poor home life of students, and poor student achievement, as reasons to leave the profession, these teachers saw them as reasons to stay. Though all of the teachers acknowledged the tremendous amount of stress they felt each day, resilient novice teachers recognized how they had grown throughout the school year, and their confidence increased as they learned effective ways to solve problems. They were interested in developing their skills as teachers and believed that poor student achievement meant that teachers were not performing adequately.

Though mentorship is often offered as an essential component to new teacher development (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Wilkinson, 2009), the teachers in McCann and Johannessen's (2004) study had mixed feelings about mentorship programs. One teacher described her negative experience with her school-assigned mentor: "The mentoring program is such a sham….It would actually drive people out of teaching…My mentor did not want to be a mentor" (p. 144). Such comments reflect that the quality of mentorship programs is important. In this teacher's case, she benefitted more from "mentor" relationships that she sought out on her own. The researchers posit that "it is crucial that novice teachers have frequent contact with peers, who can seem less threatening and more empathetic to their difficulties [than experienced mentor teachers]" (p. 144). The new teachers often served as mentors to others; they felt satisfaction when they were able to help each other succeed in the classroom and felt compelled to reach out to other new teachers in the school.

Similar to findings in McCann and Johannessen's (2004) study, teachers in Yost's (2006) study had mixed feelings about professional development and mentorship programs. Yost conducted interviews and observations of 10 dually-certified elementary and special education teachers to understand how a teacher preparation program affected self-perceived success and resilience. The teachers worked across a variety of settings, including urban, rural, and suburban contexts, and were in their second year of teaching. Yost found that while novice teachers appreciated opportunities to collaborate with experienced teachers, they tended to designate their own mentors rather than rely on officially-assigned mentors.

Teachers who felt successful demonstrated a belief in themselves (Yost, 2006). They made an effort to understand the population they were teaching, and they led their classroom with patience, consistency, and enthusiasm. When faced with challenges, teachers frequently engaged in "critical reflection," a concept that participants had learned in their teacher preparation program. They were not likely to view common problems such as classroom management as a "student" issue but rather as a teaching issue that needed to be solved. One teacher described her struggle to build trust with a particularly difficult student, asserting that by understanding his background, she would be better able to address his behavioral issues.

Yost used a follow-up survey five years later to determine whether or not study participants were still teaching, finding that six of the original ten teachers remained in the profession. While this is useful information, the researcher does not indicate which teachers persisted and which did not. Therefore, we have no way of identifying which, if any, of her findings regarding novice teacher resilience actually contribute to a teacher's persistence in the classroom.

A similar limitation is noted in Huisman, Singer, and Catapan's (2010) study. Using in-depth interviews, Huisman et al. sought to understand why first and second year urban teachers persist in the classroom. The 12 teachers were identified through their participation in a university-sponsored mentorship program. Specifically, the researchers wanted to understand what characteristics and supports novice teachers perceived to be important to their own resilience. Findings were divided into seven themes that contributed to novice teacher resiliency: significant adult relationships, mentoring others, problem-solving, hope, high expectations, sociocultural awareness, and professional development. As of 2010, the researchers found that 67% of the study participants remained in teaching. However, just as in Yost's (2006) study, we have no way of knowing which, if any, of the findings listed above contributed to the resilience of these teachers.

The first two findings regarding adult relationships and mentoring echo the findings presented earlier. Some of the teachers identified their university-assigned mentor as their most significant adult relationships, while others reported negative experiences with their mentor (Huisman et al., 2010). In the absence of effective mentor-relationships, the novice teachers identified other teachers in the school as significant sources of support. The new teachers in this study felt fulfillment in mentoring other new teachers. Just as in McCann and Johannessen's (2004) study, these teachers felt compelled to reach out to other new teachers in the school as a way to build a supportive school community. The teachers actively sought out professional development formally and informally, and often observed teachers that they considered to be experts in their craft (Huisman et al., 2010). One teacher took personal leave days to observe teachers in a different district. The teachers routinely used reflection to understand how their teaching impacted student achievement. Similar to the teachers in Yost's (2006) study, these

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teachers tried to understand the context of student behavior by looking into their student's background. This helped the new teachers develop a sociocultural awareness which impacted the way they delivered instruction. Though they maintained high expectations for their students, they focused on their own teaching rather than blame the student for poor achievement.

Finally, Castro, Kelly, and Shih (2010) interviewed 15 beginning teachers employed in high-poverty urban and rural areas. The intent of the study was to understand what strategies teachers used in adverse situations and what resources they relied on to overcome challenges. The researchers postulate that findings in these areas may help define new teacher resilience. They identified strategies that new teachers use to develop resilience: help seeking, problem solving, managing difficult relationships, and seeking rejuvenation and renewal. While this study names specific strategies that new teachers may use, it is not able to describe how effective use of these strategies contributes to teacher resilience. However, this study shared a similarity with the three other studies of novice teacher resilience in its finding regarding mentorship programs. The researchers found that new teachers did not always rely on an assigned mentor for support. Instead, new teachers tended to find their own mentors by reaching out to more experienced teachers both within and outside of their own school. This finding is echoed across all of the studies of novice teacher resilience. While mentoring programs may be effective when the mentor-mentee relationship is a positive one, negative relationships may hinder new teacher development.

Summary of findings. A synthesis of the studies on novice teacher resilience uncovered three common themes: novice teachers foster resilience through problem solving and reflection; novice teachers foster their resilience through collaboration with colleagues and positive relationships with mentors; novice teachers foster resilience by participating in ongoing learning

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and by seeking out professional development. Two other themes emerged from the studies, though not as prominently: novice teachers foster their resilience through their love and commitment to students; novice teachers foster their resilience through a commitment to social justice. This is contrary to what the studies of veteran teacher resilience revealed. Unlike novice teachers, experienced teachers in high-poverty schools persist in large part due to their love for students and their commitment to social justice. Though resilient novice teachers demonstrate a commitment to their students and to social justice, it seems that their first two years of teaching are largely focused on pedagogy, reflection, and collaboration.

Conclusion

Recent data indicates that teacher-turnover is exceptionally high in high-poverty schools (Ingersoll, 2007; Ingersoll & Merrill, 2010), and that teachers who enter the profession with qualities such as academic ability and high test scores tend to sort away from high-poverty schools (Ascher & Fruchter, 2001; Bacolod, 2007; Boyd et al., 2008; Lankford et al., 2002; Peske & Haycock, 2006). Studies in Illinois and New York have shown that the academic qualities of teachers contribute to student achievement in high-poverty schools; as teacher quality increases, so too does student achievement (Boyd et al., 2008; Presley et al., 2005). Furthermore, researchers have found that TFA teachers post student achievement gains that are better than, or at least equal to, non-TFA teachers, especially when comparing TFA teachers to the pool of under-qualified teachers that are commonly assigned to high-poverty schools. (Decker et al., 2006; Nadareishvili, 2008; Noell & Gansle, 2009; Xu et al., 2011). The purpose of this study is to understand why some high-quality teachers are resilient and choose to remain in the profession, thereby increasing their impact on student achievement in high-poverty schools. By focusing on how teachers develop resilience, a personal construct that refers to the

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ability of teachers to "maintain their commitment to teaching and their teaching practices despite challenging conditions and setbacks" (Brunetti, 2006, p. 813), I am able to provide recommendations to TFA and to school districts that serve high-poverty student populations so that they may be able to foster resiliency in their teachers.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

This study investigated how teachers who began their career through Teach For America (TFA), an organization that recruits high-ability college graduates into the teaching profession, became resilient, despite being assigned to challenging, high-poverty schools. By understanding how to foster resilience in their corps members so that they consider staying in the teaching profession and in high-poverty schools beyond two years, TFA can increase its potential impact on student achievement. Furthermore, school and district leaders at large can learn how to support similarly-qualified teachers to help them persist despite challenging conditions.

For the purposes of this study, resilience is an internal, personal construct that refers to the ability of teachers to "maintain their commitment to teaching and their teaching practices despite challenging conditions and setbacks" (Brunetti, 2006, p. 813). This qualitative study was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, I surveyed former TFA corps members who were affiliated with TFA – Los Angeles. Survey results informed the second phase of the study, in which I interviewed 23 former TFA corps members in an effort to understand how and why some teachers were able to develop resilience. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What do TFA teachers who have stayed in the profession beyond three years say are their reasons for staying in teaching beyond their two-year commitment?

   a. How, if at all, have the early teaching experiences of these teachers contributed to their resiliency?

   b. Do these teachers cite a particular event or turning point in their teaching career that served as a catalyst in their decision to stay in the profession, and if so, what?

2. What do TFA teachers who have stayed in the profession beyond three years cite as significant challenges they had to overcome in order to stay in the profession?

   a. How, if at all, did these challenges contribute to their resiliency?

3. What forms of external support do TFA teachers who have stayed in the profession beyond three years cite as having a significant impact on their resiliency?

4. How, if at all, do the early teaching experiences of TFA teachers who have stayed in the profession beyond three years differ from the teaching experiences of TFA former teachers who left the profession after their two-year commitment?

   a. How, if at all, do the teachers and former teachers differ in terms of what they say motivated their decision to enter the teaching profession?

   b. How, if at all, do the teachers and former teachers differ in terms of what they cite as significant challenges they encountered while fulfilling their two-year teaching commitment?

   c. How, if at all, do the teachers and former teachers differ in terms of what type of external support they relied upon during their two-year teaching commitment?

Research Design

A qualitative approach is appropriate when a study's goals include an understanding of what Maxwell (2005) calls the "meaning…of the events, situations, experiences, and actions [participants] are involved with or engaged in" and the "understanding [of] the particular context within which participants act, and the influence that context has on their actions" (p. 22). The goal of this study was to understand how participants lived experiences as teachers in high-poverty schools have contributed to their resilience. In this sense, my intent is to understand the reality of being a teacher in a high-poverty school and how this reality shapes resilience in ways

that may be unique to each participant. The focus on participants' interpretation of their own experiences makes this study conducive to a qualitative approach (Merriam, 2009).

According to Creswell (2009), when studying a phenomenon of which little research has been previously conducted, a qualitative approach is appropriate due to its "exploratory" nature (p. 18). My conceptual framework draws on studies of teacher resilience in high-poverty schools; however, there is little research regarding why teachers with high-academic abilities, who initially only agree to teach for two years, would choose to stay in a profession for which they have little background or preparation. Using a large-scale survey of a national sample of TFA alumni, Donaldson (2008) found that TFA corps members who have an academic background in education were more likely to stay beyond their two-year commitment. While this shows a correlation between two factors, it does not capture a TFA corps member's perception of how their own experiences contributed to their resilience. This information can only come from qualitative data which emphasizes the perspectives of study participants (Maxwell, 2005).

This study fits a social constructivist worldview which further justifies a qualitative approach (Creswell, 2009). The social constructivist assumes that individuals develop meaning from their life experiences and that these meanings vary between individuals. Rather than "limit" meanings into predetermined categories, a social constructivist researcher seeks to understand the "complexity of views" through an understanding of the "specific contexts in which people live and work" (p. 8). My study fits this worldview in that I want to understand how certain life and work experiences have contributed to participants' resilience in the teaching profession. I believe that this information is personal to each participant and that my data will uncover multiple and varying perspectives from which I will recognize certain commonalities or

patterns. While studies of urban teacher resilience have shaped my conceptual framework, I did not have predetermined categories into which I expected participants to fit. This inductive approach to data analysis is characteristic of qualitative studies.

Methods

This study consisted of two phases. During Phase One, 72 former TFA corps members participated in a self-administered, online survey that was created and posted through Qualtrics.com. During Phase Two, I selected and interviewed 23 participants based on survey responses. While a survey is often used in quantitative studies, its purpose in this study was descriptive in nature and served as a means to identify interview participants and to triangulate qualitative findings resulting from Phase Two interviews. The dominant findings in this study resulted from an analysis of qualitative interview data. Survey and interview protocols are provided in Appendices A, B, and C.

Interviews were semi-structured because I was eliciting retrospective information and perspectives that I could not directly observe. According to Merriam (2009), interviews should be used in circumstances where the phenomena of interest rely on participants' feelings and interpretations of "the world around them," and when we are interested in "past events that are impossible to replicate" (p. 88). My research questions are focused on perceived challenges and supports and on lived-experiences that TFA teachers say had an impact on their resilience. While other methods, such as the survey, can collect quantifiable data regarding the impact of certain, researcher-defined supports and barriers, it does not allow participants to define what they perceived to be barriers or supports, nor does it allow the researcher to fully understand why such barriers and supports were identified. This data can best be obtained by asking participants to describe their feelings and experiences in their own words through an interview.

Site and Population

My study was constrained to former TFA corps members who are affiliated with TFA-Los Angeles, either because they currently live in the Los Angeles area or because they fulfilled their two-year teaching commitment in Los Angeles. This geographical boundary is appropriate for my study because Los Angeles employs about 250 new TFA recruits per year in over 100 high-poverty schools, and more than 300 former TFA corps members (alumni) remain teaching in the area. This gave me a substantial pool of teachers from whom to draw data.

Though the focus of this study is to understand resilience of teachers who have stayed in the teaching profession, the decision to also collect data from teachers who have left the profession was an important one. As the entire pool of participants began their careers through TFA, they share similar backgrounds and academic qualities that set them apart from teachers typically found in high-poverty schools, and they all began their careers in schools facing similar challenges due to the high-poverty populations that they serve. However, some of these participants decided to stay in the profession, while the majority decided to leave. By collecting data from both groups, I hoped to determine if survey responses and experiences relayed in the interviews made the teachers unique from the former teachers, given that they come from similar backgrounds.

Phase One: Survey

Recruitment and selection. TFA-Los Angeles allowed me to recruit participants through its monthly Alumni Bulletin. I provided TFA-Los Angeles with the link to an Internet survey that was created and posted through Qualtrics.com. This link, along with a short study description, was posted in their November 2012, December 2012, and January 2013 Alumni Bulletins. In order to initially attract participants to the survey link, I offered to randomly select

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one participant to receive a $100 Visa Gift card. The Alumni Bulletin did not elicit many

respondents. TFA-Los Angeles then agreed to send my link directly to TFA alumni that

remained involved with the organization and whom they felt would be likely to participate in the

study. They sent the link directly to 40 TFA alumni, 25 of whom were teachers and 15 of whom

were former teachers.

In order to elicit more survey respondents, I employed snowball sampling by sending the

link to the survey to my former colleagues and to my peers in my UCLA cohort who work within

public education. I asked that they distribute the link to any TFA teachers and former teachers

with whom they were acquainted who may be interested in participating. I monitored survey

responses daily so that I could contact interview participants concurrently (based on criteria

defined below). As participants were contacted for interviews, I asked that they send the link to

the survey to any TFA alumni that they thought might be interested in participating. These

efforts resulted in 72 survey respondents. However, as the purpose of the study was to

understand resilience of teachers in high-poverty public schools, I eliminated from analysis

anyone who indicated that they were currently private school teachers or school and district level

administrators. Therefore, the final sample included 63 participants, 39 of whom were public

school teachers, and 24 of whom no longer worked in K12 public education. Table 1 displays

survey participant characteristics.

Data collection and analysis. The survey data was collected through Qualtrics.com and

was organized and displayed using SPSS. The survey questions were descriptive in nature and

were used to sort participants according to characteristics that identified them as potential

interview participants. Depending on how participants answered questions, they were taken to

different questions on the survey. For example, if participants indicated that they were no longer

working within education, they were directed to questions pertaining to their decision to leave

the profession, while those that remained in teaching were directed to questions pertaining to

their decision to stay in the profession. There were some questions that were common to all

participants, such as those pertaining to their early teaching experiences. The full survey

protocol, including the different question paths, is provided in Appendix A. Descriptive survey

data was also used to substantiate qualitative findings.

Table 1
Survey Participant Characteristics

Cohort	Teachers	Non-Teachers	Total	Teaching Experience	Teachers	Non-Teachers	Total
1990	0	1	1	2 years	6	9	15
1992	1	0	1	3 years	7	4	11
1994	1	0	1	4 years	1	3	4
1995	0	1	1	5 years	2	5	7
1997	3	0	3	6 years	4	1	5
1998	0	1	1	7 years	6	0	6
1999	1	1	2	8 years	2	0	2
2000	0	1	1	9 years	1	1	2
2001	2	0	2	10 years	2	0	2
2002	2	1	3	10+ years	8	1	9
2003	1	2	3	Total	39	24	63
2004	4	2	6				
2005	5	3	8	**Gender**			
2006	4	5	9	Male	16	9	25
2007	3	1	4	Female	23	15	38
2009	3	0	3	Total	39	24	63
2010	8	2	10				
Total	38	21	59				

Phase Two: Interviews

Selection. Based on survey data, those who remained in teaching positions were selected

for an interview in Phase Two using four criteria: they were willing to be interviewed; they did

not major or minor in education; they had taught for more than three years; and they intend to

remain in education for the foreseeable future. Participants who were no longer teaching were

selected for an interview based on three criteria: they were willing to be interviewed; they did

not major or minor in education; and they did not have initial expectations to leave the teaching profession immediately following their two-year commitment to TFA. Interview participants were given a $10 Starbucks e-gift card and were placed in a drawing for a $50 Visa gift card. Participants included 23 former TFA corps members from cohorts 1997-2009, 14 of whom are still teaching. Table 2 and Table 3 display interview participant characteristics. Unless otherwise specified, participants were initially placed in Los Angeles-area schools.

Table 2

Interview Participant Characteristics – Teachers

	Cohort	Years of Experience	Initial TFA Placement (Subject and Type of School)	Current Role (*remains at initial placement)
Carol	2006	6	8th Grade Science Traditional Public School	*Instructional Coach, Saturday Lab Traditional Public School
Cathy	2002	10	1st Grade Traditional Public School	*5th Grade Traditional Public School
Charles	1997	15	8th Grade Science Traditional Public School	7th Grade Science, Health Small Public School
Damien	2007	5	7th Grade Humanities Charter School	*7th Grade Humanities Charter School
Emma	1997	15	8th Grade History and English Traditional Public School (Bay Area)	6th Grade Science Traditional Public School
Hugo	2006	6	8th Grade Science Traditional Public School	*Instructional Coach, AVID Elective Traditional Public School
Ivy	2006	6	6th Grade Science, Math, History Traditional Public School	5th Grade Science, History Charter School
Lance	2005	7	6-8 Special Education Traditional Public School	*Teacher on Special Assignment (Bridge Coordinator) Traditional Public School
Maria	2005	7	6-7 Science Traditional Public School	5th Grade Science Charter School
Portia	2007	3	6th Grade English, History, ESL Traditional Public School	8th Grade English, History Charter School
Raul	2001	11	7th Grade Science Traditional Public School	9-12 Science Traditional Public School
Richard	2004	8	7th Grade English Traditional Public School	7th Grade English, 8th Grade Journalism Charter School
Robin	2009	3	6-8 Special Education Traditional Public School	9-12 Special Education/Resource Charter School
Samuel	1997	15	6-8 Science Traditional Public School	9-12 Science Traditional Public School

Table 3

Interview Participant Characteristics – Former Teachers

	Cohort	Years of Experience	Initial TFA Placement (Subject and Type of School)	Other Teaching Placements	Current Occupation
Anna	2004	3	6-8 English and Social Science Traditional Public School		Corporate litigator
Gia	2006	5	9-12 Special Education Traditional Public School		Part-time fitness instructor; Part-time consultant
Lori	2005	6	8th Grade Science Traditional Public School	7-8 Science Charter School	Program manager and co-founder of educational non-profit
Nancy	2007	2	3rd Grade Traditional Public School (Las Vegas)		Provides training to low-income childcare providers
Nick	2006	5	9-12 English Traditional Public School	AVID elective at placement school	School partnership manager for educational non-profit
Nora	2006	4	6-8 Special Education Traditional Public School	9-12 Special Education Traditional Public School	Law student
Rebecca	2006	5	9-12 Special Education Traditional Public School	9-12 Special Education Traditional Public School (not initial placement)	Works for a university pre-college program for disadvantaged students
Tara	2003	5	6-8 Language Arts Traditional Public School		Professional development coach for educational corporation
Thomas	2005	3	4th Grade Traditional Public School (Rio Grande Valley)	5-6 Science Charter School	Construction project engineer

I deliberately selected teachers who had more than three years of teaching experience for two reasons: I wanted to ensure that all teachers had achieved standard certification (otherwise, they would not be teaching in public schools), and I wanted to lower the likelihood that they remain in the profession "for now." This is consistent with research that has found that TFA teachers are most likely to leave the profession by year three and that TFA teachers become more effective after achieving standard certification (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; Decker et al., 2006; Donaldson, 2008; Heilig & Jez, 2010; MacIver & Vaughn, 2007). I made the decision to speak with teachers who did not major or minor in education based on Donaldson's (2008)

research which found that TFA teachers are more likely to stay in the profession beyond their two year commitment if they have a background in education. This study adds to the literature by focusing on TFA teachers who do not have an academic background in education. The full interview protocols are provided in Appendices B and C.

Data collection and analysis. Participants who fit the criteria outlined above were contacted via phone or email beginning in December 2012. Twenty-eight participants were contacted and 23 responded that they were willing to be interviewed. Interviews took place between December 2012 and February 2013 via Skype's landline and mobile calling service. Audio from the Skype calls was recorded using Evaer Skype recorder. The interviews ranged in length between 60 and 90 minutes. I created pseudonyms for each participant and used this pseudonym in all notes and transcripts from the point of the interview forward. Within 48 hours of each interview, I replayed the audio file while noting anything significant that seemed to stand out in the participant's responses. I then wrote a summary of the interview and emailed this to the participant, asking that he or she verify that my summary was an accurate portrayal of his or her experience. Thirteen participants replied to this follow up email, and their responses were included with the transcript analysis.

I transcribed half of the interviews, and a professional transcriptionist transcribed the other half. Audio files were transferred to the transcriptionist via Dropbox. No names or identifying information was transferred with the audio file. Once every interview had been transcribed, I separated the transcripts by teaching status. I used the summaries to develop preliminary coding categories, such as "Systemic Challenges" and "Student Impact." I used these categories to code the interview transcripts, adding new codes as the data required it. The transcripts were then cut-and-pasted by code into separate Word documents. Within each of

these documents, the data was coded by sub-category. For example, in the "Systemic Challenges" document, data was further coded into "navigating bureaucracy," "fiscal issues," "shifting priorities," etc. Once coding was complete, I compared the qualitative findings to the survey data to ensure that what stood out as a challenge in the qualitative data also stood out as a challenge in the survey data. I then examined how the data from the teachers compared to the data from the former teachers.

Ethical Issues

I took careful measures to account for any potential ethical issues that may have arisen as a result of my study. Participants were made aware of the intent and purpose of my study through the Study Information Sheet that was provided as the first page of the online survey. Interview participants were asked to sign a consent form which reiterated study information and informed them of their right to have access to the audio file and interview transcript. In my follow up email to participants, I reminded them that they could request the audio file and the transcript at any time. Two participants asked for their transcript, which I provided to them.

Participants were teachers or working professionals; they are not employed by TFA and are not held accountable in any way by TFA, so their jobs were not in jeopardy by disclosing information regarding the program. However, identifying participant information was not disclosed to TFA at any point. Though TFA-Los Angeles directly reached out to potential participants by sending them my survey link, I did not disclose to TFA which participants actually participated, and I did not provide TFA with any data that included identifying information. Confidentiality was further protected through the use of pseudonyms. All audio and transcription files were saved on my computer with password protection. The only file that contained actual participant names was password protected and will be destroyed after I contact

participants at the conclusion of the study to inform them of their right to read the study findings. The only file that linked participants to their pseudonyms was destroyed after the audio files were transcribed.

Credibility

The methods that I have chosen for this study enhanced the credibility of my findings. By using two different data collection methods, I was able to examine evidence from two different sources that further justified the themes that I found. The focused, semi-structured interviews drew out the perceptions and experiences of TFA teachers and former teachers, information that is best obtained through self-reported, qualitative data. While survey and interview questions were designed to draw specific information out, they were not worded in such a way as to lead participants to specific responses. In order to limit any potential bias on my part, I emailed participants within 48 hours after our interview with a brief summary of the meaning that I took away from our conversation, and I asked them if there was anything they wanted to clarify or add. Thirteen participants responded, indicating that I had accurately captured their perspective with a handful of minor corrections. By emphasizing that responses may serve to help other teachers and TFA corps members develop resilience, my hope was that participants would be encouraged to share their honest perspectives.

I modeled protocols after measures that have already been tested and used by other researchers. The survey and interview protocols were field-tested with other educators before being used with study participants in an effort to ensure that questions were worded and formatted appropriately. I re-read all interview transcripts to correct any errors that were made in the transcription process, and I listened to each audio file at least twice – once to write the summary, once to check the reliability of the transcript.

Threats to Credibility

Considering that there are more than 30,000 TFA alumni in the nation, 1,500 of whom are in Los Angeles, I had a very low response rate on the survey which resulted in a small sample from which to draw interview participants. This limits my ability to generalize to the larger population of TFA teachers who remain in the profession beyond two years. I attempted to accommodate for this by conducting focused, in-depth interviews that drew out rich, detailed descriptions of participants' backgrounds, perceptions, and experiences. I also used survey data to triangulate findings generated from the qualitative data. Findings from the few previous studies of veteran teacher resilience supported the findings from my study.

Most of the participants in my study worked in high-poverty, urban schools, with the exception of one former teacher who taught in South Texas. TFA placed teachers in both urban and rural high-poverty schools. The issues that plague high-poverty schools in general may be similar, but there is likely to be variation between the specific issues that impact urban high-poverty schools and rural high-poverty schools. Therefore, the ways in which teachers in these schools become resilient may depend on situations that are unique to each type of school. I tried to minimize the impact of this limitation by analyzing themes that emerged from the interview data within the construct of my conceptual framework. For the purposes of this study, resilience is an internal construct that refers to the ability of teachers to "maintain their commitment to teaching and their teaching practices despite challenging conditions and setbacks" (Brunetti, 2006, p. 813). The research on resilience points to several internal factors that cause teachers to persist in high-poverty schools. My interview protocol focused primarily on internal factors that contribute to resilience, such as love and commitment to students, hope, and teacher background experiences, with less emphasis on external factors such as school environment. By doing this, I

was able to focus on resilience as an internal construct, regardless of varying external factors between urban and rural schools that contribute to teacher retention.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to understand how teachers become resilient, despite their placement in high-poverty schools that typically experience high-turnover and poor working conditions, and despite having no prior background in education. The initial survey helped me to identify interview participants and served as a means to triangulate qualitative data from the interviews. The interview process allowed me to understand how teachers' lived experiences as teachers, including their personal and professional backgrounds, have contributed to their resiliency. By understanding how teachers become resilient, TFA will be able to support and encourage corps members to stay in the profession beyond their two-year commitment.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The overarching purpose of this study was to understand how and why high-quality teachers, as represented by teachers who began their career through Teach For America, become resilient while teaching in high-poverty schools. As the primary goal in this study is to understand how these teachers develop resilience, the majority of this chapter presents findings resulting from the survey and interview data of participants who remain in the teaching profession. First, I present the reasons these teachers give for persisting in the profession as long as they have. This is followed by a discussion of the teachers' early teaching experiences and how these experiences led to their decision to remain in the profession, despite having only committed to teach for two-years through TFA. I then present challenges that teachers cited as having an impact on their resilience, followed by what resources they draw on for support.

As my fourth research question pertains to how "stayers" and "leavers" differ, the fifth section of this chapter discusses how the teachers compared to the non-teachers in terms of their early teaching experiences, the challenges that they faced, and the types of support they relied upon. This section includes a discussion of factors that impacted participants' decision to leave the profession. Finally, this chapter ends with findings uncovered during the interview process that pertain to the criticism of TFA prevalent in the literature.

Where appropriate, survey data is presented alongside the qualitative data that resulted from the interviews. A full breakdown of participant survey responses is provided in Appendices D and E.

Why Teachers Persist

In describing how and why these teachers became resilient, this section focuses on the factors that were uncovered during the interview process that appear to keep teachers rooted to

the profession for the time being. These factors include the teachers' understanding of the impact they have on students, their ability to change roles within the profession, and their ability to come to terms with the notion that they are "just a teacher."

Student Impact

Table 4 shows the top five responses given by the full group of 39 surveyed teachers to the question, "Which, if any of these factors or experiences contributed to your decision to remain in the teaching profession?" Note that the top two responses pertain to student impact and student relationships.

Table 4
Factors that Contributed to Decision to Stay in Teaching

Which, if any, of these factors or experiences contributed to your decision to stay in the teaching profession beyond your two-year commitment to Teach For America? You may choose up to THREE.			
	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
I really enjoy working with students.	27	26.7%	69.2%
I could see the difference I was making in students' lives and wanted to continue this impact.	26	25.7%	66.7%
I wanted to make positive changes within my school or within the local community.	22	21.8%	56.4%
I have formed many positive relationships with my colleagues.	8	7.9%	20.5%
I really enjoy the curriculum that I teach.	7	6.9%	17.9%

Likewise, the interviewed teachers shared a deep appreciation and understanding of the impact that teachers can have on their students. When reflecting on the rewards of their profession, every one of the 14 teachers interviewed made clear and distinct references to their students. That is not to say that the students do not present the teachers with challenges; rather, student-centered challenges did not seem to impact the resilience of these particular teachers. When

discussing student challenges, the teachers simply stated that these challenges exist in the form

of student apathy, disrespect, a history of low achievement, or simply the reality of teaching in a

high-poverty context. Samuel's statement describes the nature of such challenges:

> As much as I'd like to say that I fully understood the culture of poverty, until you're
> actually in it, nobody really understands. There's nothing that prepares you for the fact
> that when a child comes to school on Monday morning, they have not eaten anything
> since they left school on Friday.

Lance described his constant struggle with "despair:"

> There's a lot of despair in a high-poverty school, and that's probably what I struggle with
> the most to this day is looking at a student who's living in a foster facility because his
> mom is addicted to drugs, and she sets him off and puts him in bad situations, so he's
> having to live in this extreme poverty. That's really, really tough to deal with on a daily
> basis.

Lance and Samuel speak to the emotional toll of teaching high-poverty students. However, the

challenges that the students bring to the classroom allow the teachers to see more profoundly the

positive impact that they can have by remaining in the profession. Though the challenges that

students bring are frustrating, and at times heartbreaking, the teachers did not say that such

challenges affected their resolve to teach. In reflecting on why he remains in the profession,

Samuel offered, "The kids are the reason I do the job…that's sort of the barometer for whether or

not you should be in education, isn't it?" The teachers see their impact through the relationships

they build with their students and by witnessing student success.

Building student relationships. All of the interviewed teachers relayed that they are

motivated by their relationships to their students. Carol expressed a sentiment similar to that of

Lance and Samuel, but described how the emotional toll of teaching in a high-poverty context

actually leads to the fulfillment she receives through forming deep relationships with her

students:

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Even though it opens the door for more disappointment and sad moments…you build relationships with the students, and knowing that you at least took the time, it's a weird little therapy all in itself…the more I can talk about the future and push them to dream, the more I do that and plant those seeds, it helps.

Carol's desire to form deep relationships with her students was echoed, in some form, by all of the interviewed teachers. In describing the challenges he faced at a particularly dysfunctional school site, Richard reflected on the main factor that kept him anchored to his classroom: "It was the kids – I would get up and go because I knew that 30 kids were expecting me to open the locker room for practice."

The teachers acknowledged the difficulty in forming these relationships, and six of the 14 teachers described situations in which they did not realize their impact until after the student was no longer in their class. Raul's story reflects this well:

The phenomena of my most difficult students, the students who required the most management, those were the ones who kept coming back to visit me. The ones I was giving detentions to, those are the ones that tended to come back and say, "hi." Not always, but when I look back on all the students who ever came back and said, "hi," when I look back on all those students, whoever I tried to establish a connection with, most of the time it is those lower achieving, challenging students who do so. [That's] validation. Putting up with all their b.s., putting up with all their difficulties, actually meant something.

Both Cathy and Samuel described the relationships they try to form with the "difficult" student. Cathy felt true rewards by reaching out to the "hard kids," the ones who were constantly in trouble in school: "I think it's just the satisfaction I get, and I think I'm really…just interested in them. There's something about them that I really like." Likewise, Samuel often reflects on words he heard from a fellow teacher early in his profession: "Never forget that the kid in your class who is the most difficult to love is probably the one who needs your love the most."

When explaining factors that keep them rooted to the profession, every teacher included statements centered on student relationships. For example, Lance described how student

relationships help him to persist, "The output from the students also is something that will keep you coming back, I think, forever, because they do value you even though it's hard to see sometimes." Whether it was a simple statement, such as Damien's "I care immensely about these students," or Emma's, "I love my kids, I have 180 students, and I really do love them," or a more complicated narrative, such as Raul's describing the satisfaction of seeing difficult students come back to say, "hi," these teachers feel a deep connection to their students, and find joy in building relationships with them.

Student success and affirmation. Each of the 14 teachers described instances where they were motivated by the success of their students. The relationships that the teachers form with their students allows them multiple opportunities to see the impact they are making on students' lives. Though all of the teachers spoke directly about their impact on student success, some teachers indicated that just the knowledge of how they can potentially shape their students' futures motivates them to persist. Portia explained how humbled she feels in helping students apply to different Los Angeles high schools:

> I am potentially shaping my students' academic lives right now, just in terms of some of the schools that you get into can really determine your college potential, and so that's been almost an addicting feeling…just knowing that there's some seriously long-lasting impacts that I think can happen this year for my students.

Similarly, Samuel's work with helping his students apply to college is a source of fulfillment for him. In Robin's role as a special education teacher, she sees how the services she can offer students will help them move in the "right direction." Cathy continually asks herself, "What can I do to change your path?" when working with her fifth grade students. These teachers may never directly see the fruits of their labor, but they take pride in knowing that they potentially play a part in shaping their students' futures. Hugo's description of this impact captures this sentiment:

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You always hear about that anecdote, that one teacher who made an impact. It's appreciating that role, that at any time at any day, you can make a significant impact on a student's life without even knowing it…Being aware of that really grounds me.

The interviewed teachers are acutely aware of their potential impact. Damien explained that knowing the role you play in shaping a student's future is "a really tough perk to compete with."

The teachers also described instances where they could witness firsthand the impact they have on their students. For example, Charles described the transformation he sees in his students from the first day of school to the last: "First semester, the kids are kind of a mess. And one thing I know that I can do is turn them around to not be such a mess." He also described several students whose attitudes toward school changed throughout the school year. Maria is motivated by witnessing her students finally "put two and two together and understand something," and she described a student who couldn't wait to see his score on a test that he knew he had aced. Similarly, Portia described the "tangible way" she is able to witness student learning:

Seeing them be really successful with reading and writing and understanding history…it's just really awesome when you know the kids have never learned it before… and now you're, like, oh my gosh, you know that because I taught you that!

This theme of feeling rewarded by witnessing student success was common to all of the interviewed teachers, and 12 teachers directly referenced this success as motivation to persist in teaching. For example, Ivy stated:

Teaching them something, watching them learn and understand something, it's a big reason…I think there's so much possibility with students that I just really like being a part of how they can shape their perspectives and their ideas and really become something that…I guess I just really like being that teacher or mentor figure in their lives.

In a similar vein, eight of the 14 teachers referred to the specific population of students that they teach in high-poverty schools. Lance explained:

I don't feel called to devote my energy and expertise to students who would probably succeed without me anyway, and I want to be able to focus my energy on those who would benefit from it and wouldn't necessarily succeed despite me.

Lance's statement describes the sentiment expressed by seven of the other teachers: they feel motivated and fulfilled by working with the high-poverty population of students that they serve. They feel that they can witness their impact first-hand by working with students who are at an acute disadvantage.

In sum, all 14 of the interviewed teachers are motivated by student success, and 12 of the 14 teachers referenced this as a primary influence in their persistence in the profession. As Robin described, "Just seeing the kids grow, that's awesome. That's why we come every day, the kids are there and they need us to be there every day doing our jobs."

Changing Roles Within Education

The interview process uncovered that the primary reason that these teachers have stayed in the profession is related to the positive impact they have on their students. However, ten of the 14 teachers felt that their resilience is also influenced by the fact that they are able to take on multiple roles within education. Six of the teachers explained that they could not see themselves "only doing this" for the remainder of their career. For example, Richard acknowledged, "I don't want my identity to be 29 years doing [the same thing] – no, that's not what I want. Whatever career I'm in…that's not what I want." This is not to say that Richard, nor any of the other teachers, have immediate plans to leave the profession. Rather, they do not want their entire career to consist of teaching one curriculum in one classroom without ever experiencing something new. Therefore, they take on new roles and they look for opportunities for professional advancement.

Taking on new roles. Six of the teachers described the different roles they have taken on in their schools, a variety that helps them to feel anchored to their school site while keeping them from getting "bored" or "complacent." Richard described this quest for variety as "one

project at a time." By working with a group of students to train for the LA Marathon, he felt that he was able to find a different identity in the school, one that was separate from that of a classroom teacher. "I guess if there was an answer to why I'm still where I'm at, it's [because] I keep finding other things to do." For this reason, he stayed at a dysfunctional school because he felt like he still "had work to do."

Lance's experience builds on Richard's sentiment. He was able to transition from being a special day teacher to a resource teacher and eventually to a Bridge Coordinator. "Every couple of years, I'd change things up…[which is] important, or at least it meshes well with my personality." Similarly, Carol explained that by taking on new roles, such as AVID teacher and coordinator, and most recently, instructional coach, she becomes even more deeply invested in her school community.

Charles explained that in order to "persist and be good," you have to take on new roles so that you don't get too comfortable and "just skate by." In order to avoid getting "too comfortable," Charles not only took on new roles within the school, he also changed school locations when he felt that he was no longer able to make an impact on students due to particularly chaotic circumstances. Similarly, Raul felt he had "exhausted all opportunities for growth" at his first school assignment. Having taken on multiple roles at the middle school, he felt that he needed a new challenge: "After five years of junior high teaching, I wanted to do something different, so I went to high school." Raul started teaching a new curriculum, which he said has "reinvigorated my teaching."

Finding opportunities for advancement. In addition to taking on new roles in the school, six of the teachers have looked for opportunities to grow professionally, whether by

taking on leadership roles within the school or by continuing their education. Charles appreciates that his current principal has allowed him to play a leadership role in the school:

> You're able to see more closely what's involved in the running of the school, the functioning of the school, and how to get staff on board. All those things you can be more deeply involved in, and I like that. So I feel like I'm learning again…So, it's doing the teaching, but then being able to have other challenges, something that I've never done before…then you can have more of an impact. I don't want to stop teaching, but I want to have more of an impact.

Five other teachers felt that their ability to take on leadership roles within the school helped them to feel fulfilled by allowing them to broaden the impact they could have on the school. Carol expressed that her commitment to her school and to the community she serves inspires her to take on leadership roles. In moving into the instructional coach position, "I moved into this position…[to] try to make a bigger impact."

Six teachers expressed an interest in moving into an administrative position, four of whom have earned or are in the process of earning their administrative credentials. For Hugo, understanding that he could take on leadership roles outside of the classroom helped to cement his decision to remain in the teaching profession:

> I [realized] that I'm limiting my worldview of education as just being in the classroom…the avenues that I found during my inquiry process with colleagues and what-not was that you can make a viable career out of it, but obviously you need to put in the work that needs to be done and build a network….you can have a viable career in education and still have an impact on student achievement. And I think that realization was valuable and cemented my decision to stay in education.

Though Hugo needed to understand that there were professional paths he could choose that would lead him outside of the classroom, he also emphasized in the interview that he does not feel particularly compelled to follow them at the moment. He enjoys and feels great fulfillment in working with students at the ground level, but he needed to know that he had other options as well. Likewise, Lance said that by earning his administrative credential, "that gives me reason to

look forward" instead of assuming that he would always remain in the same teaching role, a possibility that "would maybe scare me a little bit."

Ivy and Lance realized that they could take on leadership roles from within their schools through their involvement with a Los Angeles-based fellowship that helps teachers become involved with educational policy. According to Ivy, her involvement with the fellowship, "let me see a new part of teaching that I didn't see before, let me feel like there are other opportunities and other ways I can grow still." Involvement with such fellowships and participation in master's and credentialing programs were cited by several teachers as important outlets that help them to grow both professionally and intellectually.

Coming to Terms with Being "Just a Teacher"

Nine of the 14 teachers described how they have come to terms with the idea that they have chosen an occupation that is poorly compensated and is not viewed by society as a prestigious endeavor. The idea that they are "just a teacher" is a source of frustration for these teachers, but they did not cite it as a challenge; rather, they understand what their role as a teacher means in terms of their lifestyle, and they accept that.

Six teachers spoke directly about compensation. Robin's comment is typical: "Doing a cost-benefit analysis, you're putting up with a lot, you're not getting the support, and you're not getting paid accordingly. Well, there's other jobs…I could see why [people leave], I don't blame them." Robin is able to accept the low salary because she is part of a two-income family, and her husband's income supplements her own. However, Samuel explained how his salary has meant long-term, financial consequences:

> I've been teaching for 15 years and I still have 40 grand in undergrad debt because when I acquired that…I willingly acquired that private school, liberal arts debt because I was looking at making six figures [as a doctor] for the rest of my life. When I started [teaching], I made $26,000 a year.

Ultimately, Samuel made the decision to stay in the profession because he could not see himself "loving being a doctor more" than he loved being a teacher. But, when he made the decision to stay in teaching, he had to understand "what that meant" financially.

Raul knows that he can take his science degree and earn more money in the private sector, but maintained that this "unrewarded" profession allows him to see the positive impact he makes every day. Hugo also knows that he could make more money by going back to the pre-med path he used to be on, and for some time, he considered leaving the profession because he wants to be financially secure and provide for his family. However, after about a year's worth of soul-searching, advice-seeking, and reflection, Hugo decided that he could make education his long-term career. By taking on new roles and by advancing his career through graduate school and networking, Hugo realized that he could stay in education while making more money. This notion of taking on new roles as a resilience strategy was discussed in an earlier section. For Hugo, his desire to take on new roles is motivated, in part, by money, though his desire to increase student achievement is still very real.

Four teachers explained how society's negative perception of teachers has affected their desire to remain in the classroom. As an undergrad, Charles initially thought he wanted to be a doctor, even though he had always been drawn to teaching, "Teaching is not as good as being a doctor. Isn't that what people tell you?...Being a doctor is better than being a teacher because doctors are smart. Anyone can teach." Charles is often frustrated that society views teaching as something anyone can do, especially considering how hard he works and how much he feels he can still improve. But, he stays because, "It is what I love." Lance grew up surrounded by high-achieving, motivated peers who went on to do "incredible things with their lives." When Lance realized that he wanted to stay in the teaching profession, "I was unsure whether the label of

teacher would be sufficient for me." It was only when Lance saw some of his peers and fellow

TFA corps members stay in the profession that he became comfortable with his label of

"teacher." However Lance, like Hugo, also has aspirations to eventually move into other roles in

education. Knowing that he can move beyond the classroom helps Lance to be comfortable with

the fact that for now, he is a teacher, which is a role that he says he truly loves.

Samuel's experience builds on Lance's story. Samuel had a family who expected great

things from him:

> Based on your educational background and what your family expectations are, you have
> these expectations for yourself….you feel like certain jobs are beneath you. It shocked
> the heck out of my family when I decided to stay in education, they were furious when I
> didn't go to medical school.

Samuel's story demonstrates how his family's expectations, in addition to his family's

investment in his life-long, private-school education, did not match with Samuel's ultimate

desire to be a teacher. However, as noted earlier, once Samuel started teaching, he could not see

loving any other profession more. Three other teachers explained how their families or peers

make them feel like being a teacher is "not enough." Charles said that with his TFA

involvement, "There is sort of this idea that people move on to other things…so even when you

stay behind to teach, you feel like you're not keeping up." Ivy described this well:

> Out of my friends or people I know, if they stay in education, they either want to pursue a
> doctorate or they want to be an administrator. Because it's kind of like, "oh, well you've
> mastered what it's like to be a teacher, now it's time to see if you can make another
> impact and see if you can make more money"… My dream is that I can be a part of the
> teaching force that is as respected as a lawyer and as a doctor, and not just like, "oh,
> that's nice." I guess that's what motivates me to continue to teach…how I can be a part
> of making the whole profession better.

Ivy understands that society, and even some of her peers, view her decision to stay at the

classroom level as something that is less ambitious than moving onto administration or another

leadership role. However, Ivy feels comfortable with her decision to remain in the classroom,

and instead hopes to be a part of a movement that "elevates" the current status of "teacher" to be on par with that of a doctor or a lawyer.

Despite their frustration with compensation and with society's perception that they are "just" teachers, these educators remain in the profession because they feel that they are doing what they love and they see their impact every day, as described in an earlier section. Whether they had to just come to terms with the salary, like Samuel did, or if they needed the understanding that they could eventually move out of the classroom if they chose to, all of the teachers feel committed to the path that they have taken.

Early Teaching Experiences

The teachers in this study all entered the profession through Teach For America, an organization that recruits high-achieving college graduates and asks them to commit to teaching for two years in high-poverty schools. None of the 14 teachers entered college with the expectation that they would become career educators, and they did not major nor minor in education. The teachers were asked to describe their early career experiences in order to understand how they came to be resilient and why they have persisted as long as they have, despite having initially committed to only two years in the classroom. This section presents findings resulting from the survey and from the interview process that pertain to the teachers' initial motivation to enter the profession, their experiences during their initial two-year commitment to TFA, and their decisions to come back to the profession beyond their two-year commitment.

Motivation to Apply to Teach For America

Seven of the 14 teachers indicated on the survey that they applied to Teach For America because they were inspired by TFA's mission. Though none of the interviewed teachers majored

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or minored in education, four teachers indicated that they applied to TFA because they were always interested in the possibility of becoming a teacher, and TFA provided an opportunity to "try it out." Two teachers indicated that they applied to TFA because they were not ready for graduate school, and one indicated that he applied because he thought the two-year experience with TFA would enhance his future job prospects. Six teachers indicated that they only expected to stay in the profession for the duration of their two year commitment to TFA, and six indicated that though they knew they would stay in the profession for their two year commitment to TFA, they were initially unsure if they would stay in the profession beyond that and for how long. Only two of the 14 teachers indicated that they had initial expectations to stay in the profession beyond their two-year commitment to TFA; both indicated that they initially expected to stay for at least four or five years.

After interviewing the teachers, their motivation to enter the teaching profession reflected a much more nuanced, inter-connected pattern. Thirteen of the 14 teachers indicated during the interview that TFA's mission was an important factor that influenced their decision to apply to the program. For example, Raul, who indicated on the survey that he initially applied to TFA because he was not ready for graduate school, described how his interest in TFA evolved:

> I thought Teach For America would look good on a med school application. However, besides that, I was a political science major, social justice issues were always, not only part of my undergraduate studies, but it was part of my upbringing. Definitely, the mission, the purposes, everything about TFA appealed to me.

Similarly, Hugo, who initially hoped that his experience with TFA would make him an attractive candidate for medical school, explained how a presentation by a TFA representative inspired him to begin the application process. Furthermore, his own personal experience played a part in his decision:

I come from very humble beginnings, and I knew that I am where I am now because of the educational path that I took….I guess for me, I believe so much that part of where I am, and I consider myself to be very fortunate in life, I attribute that to education.

Four other teachers also described how their personal experiences played a part in their decision to apply to TFA. Richard always thought that he might like to be a teacher after witnessing how educational opportunities were divided by racial lines in his Midwestern upbringing:

Even going through the same school and the same situation, even though it was a very mixed community and mixed school, black students were not as successful and didn't end up in a lot of the same places [that I did]. So thinking about that was kind of, as an undergrad, I guess what I was trying to get answered, and it led me into a lot of public policy classes trying to understand that. It was through those classes that I was exposed to Teach For America.

In addition to Richard, five other teachers indicated in the interviews that they were always interested in teaching, even though they did not declare education majors or minors. Even though these teachers were interested in the profession early on, only two knew that they would stay in the profession beyond their two year commitment. The others, like Maria, were open to the possibility of making teaching a career, but delayed making that decision until they were in the midst of their two-year commitment:

I felt like, oh my gosh, I have to choose my career? What if you choose wrong? And Teach For America gave me a really safe way to try this thing that I thought I might want to be my career and do it in a way that if I ended up hating it, it was ok to move on. So I was like, I'm going to go and I'm going to do this for two years. And if I like it, and I'm good at it, then I'll keep going.

Six of the 14 teachers indicated on the survey that they thought they would only stay in the profession for two years when they first applied to TFA. Whether they had been motivated to apply because of TFA's mission, by personal experience, or by the thought that their involvement with TFA would enhance their future job prospects, these teachers, like Samuel, felt that they would "move on" when their two-year commitment was over: "I thought it would be two years, and then I would get back to medical school."

Overall, the primary influencing factor that impacted the teachers' decision to apply to Teach For America was TFA's mission, which was seen as social-justice oriented in its endeavor to place high-quality people in high-poverty schools. This coincides with the finding presented earlier that teachers are motivated by witnessing the positive impact they have on their students. Personal experiences played a part in this decision as well, and for three of the teachers, the idea that TFA could enhance their job prospects or graduate school applications was a strong motivator. This is consistent with data from the full group of 39 teachers who took the survey. When asked what motivated their decision to apply to TFA, the top three responses were, "I was inspired by TFA's mission," "I always thought I might like to be a teacher," and "I wanted to make a difference in the lives of students."

Challenging First Year

Twenty-four of the 39 teachers who participated in the survey cited "exhaustion or general feeling of being overwhelmed," as the most difficult aspect of teaching during their initial two-year commitment. This was reiterated by the interview participants. When asked to describe their first two years of teaching, every teacher described his or her first year as an incredibly exhausting, overwhelming, and challenging experience. When asked what they found particularly challenging about their first year on the job, typical responses included, "Everything," "What wasn't challenging?" and "How long do you want this interview to last?" When asked what they found to be rewarding during their first year, four teachers said that there wasn't anything rewarding about their first year, and one said, "Knowing that I didn't actually die." On the survey, 12 of the 14 interviewed teachers indicated that their first year teaching was harder than they expected it to be, and two teachers said that it was about as easy/hard as they had expected. In the interview, both of these teachers clarified that their first year was still

enormously challenging; however, they felt that TFA did not sugarcoat the challenges that they

could expect to face. According to Maria:

> There were no illusions about the fact that it was going to be really hard. And the fact
> that you are being placed in the school you are placed in was because it was a really hard
> school to teach in as well. I felt prepared for that. But there were still some things I
> wasn't prepared for.

Teaching is exhausting and multifaceted. All of the 14 teachers interviewed

commented on the sheer exhaustion they experienced during their first year in the profession.

No one, even the two teachers who felt that TFA did not "sugarcoat" the challenges, felt

prepared for the intense workload of first year teachers. Carol's comment is typical:

> Coming home on a Friday night, by the time I got home, it would be like 6:00, I would go
> to sleep and I could sleep all night. And then wake up and grade all weekend. I knew it
> was going to be hard, of course, but never thought, I mean, I worked a lot in college. I
> took a lot of classes, I worked two or three jobs, and it's just, that exhaustion level is
> something very, very different.

During their first two years on the job, TFA teachers begin working towards earning their

credentials; after the passage of No Child Left Behind, this became mandatory in order for them

to remain in the profession, even if they intended to leave after two years. Therefore, these

teachers were not only experiencing the typical challenges of first year teaching, they were also

juggling coursework from their graduate or credentialing programs. Hugo described how this

impacted his stress level. Even though he enjoyed his graduate school courses and felt proud of

the work he was doing with his students, he felt that he could never give quite enough:

> For me, it was more the perception that, my gosh, there is just so much I need to do. I
> would stress myself out over it, over a lot of things. I just felt like, I'm just one person,
> and I'm doing everything that I can. It just never was enough.

In addition to being surprised by the level of sheer exhaustion they were feeling, 12 of the

14 teachers described how taken-aback they were by the "scope" of teaching. Cathy explains

that there were so many more "pieces" to teaching than she ever expected:

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I honestly just had no clue. I had all these creative ideas before I got into teaching and thought about all these things that when I'm a teacher, I'm going to do…and then reality was like, you have to have so many parts in place before you can just be creative.

The overwhelming feelings of exhaustion and stress, in addition to the surprise the teachers felt at the multifaceted nature of being a classroom teacher, contributed to their overall sentiment that their first year of teaching was, according to Ivy, "tumultuous."

Initial feelings of not being successful. Ten of the 14 teachers described their first year as a series of mishaps and "failures," and acknowledged how ill-prepared they felt to handle a classroom. Having graduated from top-universities with a history of academic achievement, many of these teachers did not feel prepared for how difficult it would be to see success as a teacher. A typical statement comes from Cathy:

> I always did well, so this was the first time I was failing. I mean *failing* [emphasis added]. I'm not just saying that to be hard on myself. I really, truly failed my first year in teaching.

Similarly, Richard stated:

> I guess common to TFA folks where there's like, [you] kind of expect, rightfully or not, that if you work really hard, then things will work out….[I'm] not so used to failing miserably and not knowing how to dig myself out.

The "failure" that Cathy and Richard described covers a wide-spectrum of challenges that the teachers faced during their first year teaching. Eleven of the 14 teachers described the difficulty they had with classroom management and with student behavioral issues. Charles described his constant struggle with classroom management during his first year: "It wasn't knowing what to teach or how to teach, it was like, how to manage 36 kids in a classroom. I had no idea what to do and it was just falling apart." Similarly, Damien described how he struggled to establish a positive classroom environment during his first year, "I had things happen in my

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classroom that were terrible. It was a lot of just making it a safe, comfortable place that didn't happen my first year."

Though all of the teachers described challenges they encountered with students during their first year of teaching, 11 of the teachers described their struggle to understand their students' backgrounds, as their own backgrounds were much different. This is reflected in Emma's statement, "I had never been around kids like the kids I taught. The level of disrespect really surprised me." Ivy described a similar sentiment:

> There were just so many social things I felt like I had to address that my students had to deal with, that I had to figure out how to deal with as well…I didn't grow up with any of those experiences, so I didn't really know what that would be like.

Though several teachers claimed that they did not find their first year to be rewarding, all of the teachers acknowledged that they did begin to see some areas of success by the end of the year. Maria's statement reflects this, "Yes, that kid in sixth period threw a bottle, but the kids in second period did a lab and liked it and learned something." Similarly, Lance stated

> Certainly there was a lot of failure….but when you look at it from a broad perspective, you were doing more good than harm, and that was an important kind of revelation that, okay, I'm going to do well, I can do well. I can improve.

Ultimately, these glimmers of success, in addition to what Richard terms as "stubbornness," motivated these teachers to persist to the end of their two year commitment to TFA.

Successful Second Year

Unequivocally, every teacher interviewed described a second year that felt much more successful than their first. Damien explained how his stumbles during his first year helped him understand both his curriculum and his students better the second year:

> Two things were very different about the second year, one was that I was familiar with the content much more, and more importantly, I was much more familiar with what seventh grade students were capable of, what they were interested in, what kind of

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misconceptions they would have about the material, or…the way I could frame the curriculum in order to invest and interest them.

Emma described her second year as being "a lot more fun" as a result of teaching a different subject that she felt more prepared to teach, and Hugo reported that "my ability in classroom management, lesson planning, instructional leadership, it grew exponentially from year one to year two."

By witnessing their own success, the teachers were motivated to improve even more during their second year. After realizing in her first year how difficult it is to succeed as a teacher, Cathy explained that "to succeed in something that is so, so, so hard is awesome, you know?" After witnessing "positive stirs" in her students, Ivy felt that she could reflect on her early teaching experiences in order to understand what she could change about her approach. Ultimately, she felt that, "I had the worst case scenario, but that's exactly what I signed up for, and I needed to do better for the students. I needed to try again." Similarly, Charles described how each small success became addictive:

> Second year was so drastically different. Where, you could feel some success, and then it becomes addictive. Like, ooh, I got them to listen. Then these little things happen, and then before you know it, you're doing it, and then each day you're doing it progressively better, so then you don't want it to stop.

Charles' statement touches on a force that propelled many of the 14 teachers into a third year of teaching, even though they had fulfilled their commitment to TFA. With the success they witnessed in their second year, the teachers felt that they could grow and improve even more by staying a third year.

Back for Year Three

It is important to note the transition from second to third year teacher due to the unique circumstances in which these particular teachers entered the profession. The teachers had

committed to teach for two years and, according to survey responses, only two of the 14 teachers knew upon acceptance by TFA that they definitely wanted to stay in the profession for more than two years (both teachers indicated that they had initial intentions to stay for 4-5 years). Instead, six teachers said they initially expected to leave the profession after their second year, and six said that they were initially unsure if they would stay beyond their second year. Due to the two-year commitment for which TFA corps members sign up, the fact that these teachers came back to the profession for a third year implies that a conscious decision was made to do so. For this reason, interview participants were asked what factors precipitated their decision to return to the classroom for year three.

After experiencing a much more successful second year, 11 of the 14 teachers said that they returned to the classroom for year three because they wanted to continue to improve. Carol described how her new role as an AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) elective teacher reinvigorated her passion for teaching and led to her decision to teach for another year:

> My first year of science teaching, I was like, I'm excited for a second year because I have something I've started with, and now I can make it better. And so with the first year of AVID, it was my second year teaching, so my third year was going to be my second year of AVID. [And I thought] oh, I'm going to be such a better AVID teacher next year.

Hugo, who always assumed that he would go to medical school after he taught for two years, realized that he wanted to give teaching another year:

> Although there were significant gains on my part, as an educator, and I felt a significant impact with my students, I felt that I could have done more if I went another year. A third year.

Similarly, after feeling much more successful by the end of her second year, Maria knew that in year three, she could really "knock this out of the park." Three of the teachers stated that they felt their third year would be even better because they had finished their master's or credentialing programs, and they felt that their stress level would therefore be less.

Six of the 14 teachers stated explicitly that their decision to come back for a third year was influenced by their connection or investment with their school and their colleagues. For example, Charles described how he slowly became more invested with his school community:

> People start asking you to do stuff….and so you become more invested in what is happening in the school, you become a part of the community. So then you feel that, I can't leave now. We just planned a thing that's going to be for next year, so you want to see it through. So, you kind of get hooked in like that, you become part of that community.

Ultimately, the teachers came back for a third year primarily because they could see how their own practice was improving, though some felt that as they became more involved in other aspects of the school and community, it became harder to leave. However, all of the teachers say that their decision to become career-teachers came about gradually.

Gradual Decision to Make Teaching a Career

Though all of these teachers made a conscious decision to come back for a third year, none of the 14 teachers interviewed could recall a "turning-point" that solidified their intentions to make teaching a career beyond year three. The decision to make teaching a career came about gradually, whether this gradual realization occurred early in their teaching career or later.

Eight of the 14 teachers said on the survey that they knew during their second year of teaching that they wanted to stay in the profession beyond their two-year commitment to TFA, and two teachers indicated that they made this decision in their first year of teaching. One teacher felt he always knew he would stay in the profession for longer than two years, and two teachers said that they made the decision at some point beyond their third year of teaching. The qualitative data resulting from the interviews demonstrates that the decision to remain in the teaching profession was impacted by an interplay of factors, and in many cases, the decision to remain in the profession is one that is evolving and is continually re-evaluated. As presented

above, the idea that they may someday move beyond the classroom to positions in leadership or policy keeps four of the teachers rooted to the profession for the time being. Apart from this, eight teachers described instances of doubt, and four actually left the classroom at one point, only to return within one or two years.

Four of the teachers say that their decision to become a career teacher came about in much the same way as their decision to come back for year three: they felt that they could get even better by giving it one more year. Raul joked, "It's basically next year, next year, next year, and here I am 11 years later still doing it." Ivy called it an "addiction of 'one more year, one more year,'" until she eventually stopped doubting whether or not she would stay.

Eight teachers admitted that there have been times they have doubted their decision to remain in the classroom. Carol explained that when she began to doubt whether she wanted to stay, she would start thinking about returning to her prior ambition to go to law school. Then a new project or new role would come up at her school that would pull her back in. Eventually, she went back to school to earn her administrative credential, which she said "solidified" her decision to remain in education. Four of the teachers actually left the classroom for some time. After having her first son, Emma job shared and worked three days a week, eventually moving into a shared role as an assistant principal. The experience made her realize that she wanted to go back to her classroom:

> As soon as that year was over, I said I am going back to my classroom and I don't think I am ever leaving again. It was good that I did it and I liked it and it was interesting because it was at my same school. But I really missed my classroom.

After being laid off due to budget cuts after her second year in teaching, Portia transferred to a charter school. Her experience there was so negative that she decided to leave after one year to work as a program director for TFA. However, she missed being in the

classroom and used her two years as a program director to "school shop." She eventually went

back to teaching after finding a school that was a better fit. Charles also took two years away

from the classroom, though he did not leave because he was dissatisfied with his school. Instead,

he was worried that he was becoming stagnant. After an assistant principal told him that

"You're there," meaning, 'you have become a really good teacher,' Charles' reaction was:

> That's it? This is what you do? I'm still kind of young, I can't imagine just having this.
> I need to grow, I need to do something to become better, stronger, whatever, experience
> something. So it was that following year that I decided, ok, I need to leave. I'm going to
> join Peace Corps because that would allow me to grow in different ways that this is not
> going to allow me to grow.

Even though Charles left for two years, he came back to the classroom, and even to the same

school, after his Peace Corps experience. Recall from an earlier section, Charles also switched to

a new school after feeling as though he had done all he could at his present school site. For

Charles, personal growth and improvement are important. He never made a conscious choice to

become a career teacher, but as long as he feels he is growing, he keeps making the decision to

stay (or to come back).

Two of the interviewed teachers are still not sure that they will remain in the profession

for the remainder of their career, but they have no immediate desire to leave. Damien stated, "I

have a hard time wrapping my mind around the notion of a career being defined by one job or

one type of position." He repeatedly expressed his commitment to public education throughout

the interview, but he could not say for certain that he would remain in the profession for the long

term. However, he is not actively seeking to leave. The same is true for Richard. He is happy at

his current school, and he is not looking for a new job. However, like Damien, he could not say

for certain that he would remain in the profession for the long term.

Regardless of how the decision was made, all of the interviewed teachers gradually became committed to a career in teaching. There was no turning-point and no conscious decision was ever made; rather, the teachers come back every year because they continue to feel fulfilled by what they do.

Challenges That Impact Resilience

When speaking of challenges that make their chosen career difficult, the teachers pointed to the adults rather than to the students. Common statements included Portia's:

> A lot of people that I know, it's not ever children that caused them to leave the campus, it's what other adults are doing…Adults are at the top of the problem…Most problems I can think of, ultimately another adult didn't make a good decision at some point.

Hugo also asserted that "The kids are not the problem…the kids are amazing," and Richard agreed that many of the challenges he's faced have to do with the "crazy adults" in the building, not his students. Portia, Hugo, and Richard are not alone in this sentiment. This belief that the problems in education lie with the adults was echoed by every interview participant. This makes sense, as every teacher interviewed also maintained that they stay in the profession for the students, as discussed earlier.

The challenges that adults bring to the profession come in many forms. A frequently identified challenge was the negative impact of ineffective or "unprofessional" teachers. Also prevalent was the impact of the current fiscal crisis in public education that manifests itself in the form of overcrowded classrooms, poor access to resources, and constant threats of layoffs. The teachers also pointed to the impact of ineffective or absent school administration. Finally, many of the teachers felt that the district bureaucracy and its constantly-shifting priorities often interfered with their ability to effectively reach their students.

Unprofessional Teachers

Twelve of the 14 teachers indicated that a constant source of frustration is what they view as unprofessional teachers. The teachers described this problem primarily in two contexts. Though the teachers were frustrated with colleagues exhibiting unprofessional behavior at their own school sites, they also expressed frustration with the teachers' union, which was blamed by 10 of the participants for protecting ineffective teachers.

Carol described a frequently-occurring situation at her school site, in which teachers "disappear:"

> I would see the office have to scramble and have to find a sub for a class that the teacher just didn't show up, didn't call, didn't leave anything in preparation…and it's just one of those things that was just baffling. If I did a no-call, no-show at Subway, I would expect to be fired.

Carol's belief is that teachers contribute to the idea that teaching is an "unprofessional profession" by exhibiting such behaviors. Robin often heard teachers "berating kids, telling them, 'you're stupid, you're not going anywhere.'" Other teachers described the difficulty they would face with classroom management when students came from another teacher's classroom exhibiting undesirable behaviors, because that teacher, "is just a babysitter," or "sits at his desk all day." One of Lance's biggest surprises upon entering the teaching profession was witnessing "the level of ineptitude that I would see on a regular basis."

More frustrating than the fact that teachers exhibited such behaviors is the fact that the teacher's union, according to Raul "exists to protect teachers…they allow bad teachers to persist in the classroom." This notion is a source of anger for the teachers. Damien described the teacher's union as an "impediment to progress." Lance described how the union lends itself to the idea, as Carol stated above, that teaching is an "unprofessional profession:"

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I think the union has done an incredible disservice to the teaching profession. I would love to be in a union where it meant something to be a member, where you had to prove you were worthy of the title of teacher…A carpenter wouldn't want somebody in their union if they didn't know how to cut a board properly or use a saw…I feel like there are some incredibly bad teachers who are able to bring down the profession as a whole, and it allows people to just point and say, how is this a legit profession if these people are allowed to still be collecting a paycheck and be affecting these kids?

The same teachers who complained about the unprofessional or ineffective teachers also acknowledged their appreciation of the huge number of hard-working, passionate educators that are also present at their school sites. Their frustration, however, is rooted in the notion that the number of poor teachers whom the union exists to protect has a negative impact on the esteem of the rest of profession.

Fiscal Impact

Though the teachers did not say that they were tempted to leave their profession due to budgetary constraints, 10 of the 14 teachers cited public education's fiscal crisis of the past few years as an impediment to their ability to effectively do their jobs. Two of the teachers were directly impacted by layoffs, and three others described how RIF's (reduction-in-forces) has resulted in the loss of many young and innovative new teachers. Five teachers feel that they do not have the proper resources to effectively teach their students, and five cited overcrowded classrooms as a negative impact of budget cuts.

Both Ivy and Portia were laid off from their placement schools, both of which were traditional, large, public middle schools serving extremely high-poverty populations. Though they are both happy with their current placements in LA charter schools, both feel that they would have stayed at their placement schools "forever," according to Portia, had they not been laid off. However, as they were committed to staying in the profession, Ivy and Portia quickly found new teaching positions. Charles, Carol, and Emma explained how recent layoffs have

pushed many young teachers out of the profession and lends to a feeling of "instability"

concerning job security. As a science teacher with seniority, Charles was safe from layoffs, but

he feels that reduction-in-forces has changed the shape of the faculty at his placement school:

> All of the teachers that you became friends with were beginning to get laid off and RIF'd. And so, because all of these decisions are made by seniority, it began to turn into like, now I'm just left with the people I never talk to anyway. Like, I don't like you, you're not a good teacher, I don't want to be around you, I never connected with you, but now I'm stuck with you because our seniority numbers are similar.

> Charles ultimately switched to a smaller school that served a similar student population

but employed younger teachers with a similar mindset to his. However, at his new school,

Charles can see how a small school budget leads to other problems:

> They've cut the janitorial staff so much. I have the kids sweep, and I have loads of brooms, but then we're kicking that dirt all around, and it's getting in our eyes, I've scratched my cornea multiple times because the room is so dusty. We can't breathe, it's so filthy. I'm trying to laugh at it because it's so ridiculous. I work in America, so you would not think that I would feel the crunch of dirt under my feet while I teach, but I do…I'm pretty sure people in other sectors are not dealing with these issues, and yet we're expected to be working at these really high levels.

Similarly, Cathy described how she has not had a working printer for years, and laments that her

sister, who works in finance, "never has to run around and look for a printer." Yet, as a teacher

who is responsible for the education of 33 fifth graders, Cathy's school does not have the money

to provide her with a working printer. Robin and Emma described how their schools did not

have enough money for textbooks, yet because of the Williams Act, every student has to have a

textbook. Robin described this scenario at her first school site:

> Once a year, the school would give a fake book to the kids, and when we knew the Williams people would come up, they'd be like, "Hold up your books." And it would look like we had the books, but once those people were gone, so were the books.

Considering the current fiscal state, Emma stated, "Any other business, if they had the same cuts,

there's no way they could survive. We just have to."

In addition to working with inadequate funding for necessary resources, five of the teachers described how budget cuts have led to over-crowded classrooms. Hugo's comment is typical:

> If I have 40 students in my classroom, and there's reduced personnel at the school site, in terms of deans, counselors…you're gonna reach students, but you're not reaching them maximally. That's just the reality…The current situation in our school is that it's becoming very challenging to reach many more students because of these fiscal issues.

Hugo's resolve to teach and to reach out to his students has not diminished; yet he admitted that he wonders how much bigger his classes could get before he would feel that he could no longer do his job. Samuel's high school classes are routinely filled with 40-50 students, and when 95% of his students do not come from English-speaking or educated households, he feels that his job is almost made impossible:

> Then you turn on the news and listen to a politician saying that you might not be an effective teacher because your students' test scores are low. And you're just sitting here going, gosh, give us a break…If you think you can do a better job, you try it…because it's not like there's a line of people behind us, waiting for our job, not with the climate the way it is right now in our country. It's really tough.

Samuel's frustration stems from the fact that, despite overcrowded classes and inadequate resources, he is expected to reach achievement levels that are already made difficult by the particular circumstances that affect this student population.

The fiscal issues referenced by the teachers do not make them doubt their decision to remain in the profession. However, they acknowledge that such issues make their jobs difficult and may act as a deterrent to keeping high-quality teachers in the profession.

Effect of Administration

Ten of the 14 teachers acknowledged the negative impact of a poor administration and the positive impact of an effective administration. Some teachers, like Richard, had experienced terrible administration at one school and effective administration at another. Prior to working at

his current school, Richard worked at two different school sites with administrators that were either "screaming, raving tyrants," or were afflicted with what was assumed to be early-onset Alzheimer's disease. At his current school site, he feels that the supportive administration makes his job less stressful and allows him to grow in many ways.

Portia described how her first school lacked visionary leadership, something that did not become apparent to her until she began working at a school with effective and involved administrators: "Just having that stark contrast in my experience, realizing how neat it can be if you have a really great leader even if we didn't have an excess of funding." Similarly, administration at Maria's current charter school placement is drastically different from the administration at her placement school:

> My placement school was, like, every man for themselves. What happens in your classroom happens in your classroom, and teachers didn't really interact that much. There was no administrative support, the kids ran wild. And now [at my current school], we actually work as a team, we have support from our administration, it's a totally different vibe in the building…The school I work in now is incredibly functional.

Maria and Portia's current school sites still serve a high-poverty population, but the positive impact of effective leadership stands in "stark contrast" to the negative impact of ineffective administration that they witnessed in their previous schools.

The presence of an ineffective administration or the absence of an effective administration was a challenge addressed, in some form, by ten of the teachers. Even Lance and Damien, who remain at their placement schools where an effective administration is in place, recognize through their interactions with educators at other sites, how detrimental a poor administration can be. However, there were only four teachers who indicated that a poor administration directly influenced their decision to leave their school site. Still, these teachers remained in the profession after transferring to new schools serving similar student populations.

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Bureaucratic System and Shifting Priorities

Challenges presented by the ambiguous, district bureaucracy and its constantly shifting priorities were cited by eight of the 14 teachers. Five teachers spoke about how difficult it was to get anything approved, from field trips to new programs that may benefit the school. Raul explained that the best piece of advice he ever received as a teacher was to "never ask for permission, just beg for forgiveness," because navigating the bureaucracy of a large, urban school district is "maddening." Richard described the hoops he had to jump through to get a field trip approved, and explained that his impression is "all schools in [this district] operate under abject insanity."

The teachers felt that initiatives are often introduced one year, only to be replaced by another the next year. Robin commented, "There's not really enough time to see that a system works before a new mandate gets sent down the pipeline." With each new priority, Carol feels frustrated because all of the extra things on her plate "don't even necessarily have a positive impact or a supportive impact on your teaching."

Cathy's frustration stems from the fact that with each new initiative, such as the program in which her district placed her because she was seen as a successful teacher, she feels like she is being punished:

> They're not paying me extra for this, but they're telling me it's something I have to do. In my opinion, they're punishing good teachers….[The people running the program] come in, they see my classroom, everybody's working or doing projects and they think it's awesome, but the one thing they tell me is, "You're not doing the lessons online." And I was so angry and discouraged, like why are you giving me more when you haven't even….when I tell you that I need a printer?

Cathy expressed a common sentiment heard throughout the interviews. Her priorities include having immediate access to resources so that she can teach her students, but her district's priorities lie in trying out a new, research-based program that provides them with more funding.

Even more frustrating to Cathy, and as expressed by Samuel, is the fact that once there is another turnover of leadership at the district level, this program will likely go away:

> And some new superintendent somewhere comes along with an idea that now we must all do this. And it's really tough because they want you to buy into it and change everything you are doing and you know the whole time that you're doing this that this SOB is going to retire in two years. So you do what so many teachers do and you just kind of go with the flow and you don't make a sound, and you don't put up a stink, and you go to the training…but nothing in the classroom really changes.

Samuel's statement also demonstrates how he copes with such shifting initiatives. In the end, he doesn't make waves, he closes his door, and he teaches. This reflects how many of the interviewed teachers remain resilient while coping with challenges that impact their teaching.

Response to Challenges

When asked how or why the challenges haven't gotten the better of them, the teachers had very similar responses. At the end of the day, they focus their attention on their students. For Cathy and Carol, the fear of who would take their place if they left motivates them to persist. Even when frustrated by constant challenges at her school site, Cathy does not see herself leaving her school, "There are still kids who have to go to this school. Then I'm turning my…I feel like I'm just deserting them." Carol explained, "If I leave, that's just another hole in their day. That might be another sub every day when…I was the only consistent teacher my kids had." Similarly, Robin says she could not stand the "guilt" she would feel by turning her back on the problem. Though they articulated it in different ways, all of the teachers are able to work through the challenges through frequent, solutions-oriented reflection, and an unwavering focus on their students.

Hugo explained that you have to just learn to "expect" the challenges and figure out what you need to do to help your students succeed despite them:

It's like a video game where as the levels get harder, we still have to make it work in order to get to the final level. It doesn't mean I stop playing the video game. Ok, 40 kids to a classroom and less personnel. Ok, what do we need to do, because at the end of the day, this is what is on our plate. So what do we do?

Emma described this as being "resourceful." She can succeed with her students despite the lack-of-resources because she has learned to be resourceful. She may have nearly 40 kids in her classroom, but she has to find a way to make that work.

After 15 years of teaching, Samuel has learned to ignore that which he has no control over, such as constantly changing administration and district initiatives, and instead focus all of his attention on his students, "You can drive yourself insane thinking about that, so I don't, I just kind of focus on what's going on in my classroom." Similarly, by focusing on what she can control, Ivy has been able to engage in thoughtful discussion with her current administration, rather than be continually frustrated by obstacles she cannot fix, such as California IEP laws.

Ultimately, the teachers stay, despite the challenges, because of their commitment to students, as was discussed earlier in this chapter. The teachers are frequently frustrated, but they do not feel that the challenges are insurmountable. Lance's statement is a good reflection of this:

I wouldn't want to live in a world where there wasn't anything that could be done. I don't want to take that worldview of, yes, it's bad and there's nothing we're going to be able to do to fix it, because then what is the point? I don't want to exist in a world where that's the case. Is it difficult and sad, yes, but even in really difficult and sad situations, there can be little successes that can make things worth it. And so that makes it all the easier staying committed to stay.

In sum, the teachers stay because they feel that, despite the challenges, they see those "small successes" that make facing the challenges worth it.

Reliance on Human Resources

When asked what external resources they rely upon for support, none of the 14 teachers described any material resource. Instead, they spoke of their colleagues, their friendships with

other TFA corps members, and their families. Even when I asked directly about material resources, such as books, supplies, or technology, the teachers tended to say that, though they may have a favorite website or piece of equipment that they use, they feel that their lives and their jobs are made easier by the relationships they form with the people around them.

This reliance on human resources began in their early years of teaching and has remained with them throughout their careers. This is consistent with data from the group of 39 surveyed teachers; the two forms of support that were cited the most were "guidance or advice from other teachers within the school," and "friendship with other TFA teachers." Eleven of the interviewed teachers said that in their early years of teaching, their friendships with other TFA corps members served as both a social and emotional outlet. Corps members often lived together, socialized together, and attended graduate school together. In describing his credentialing program he attended at Cal State Dominguez Hills with other TFA corps members, Damien explained that "it was my graduate school, it was my social life, it was my therapy session." Relationships with other TFA corps members allowed Robin to see that she wasn't the only one who was experiencing certain challenges. This was echoed by the other teachers as well. Their reliance on other TFA corps members diminished after their two-year commitment, in part because so many TFA corps members leave the profession after two years.

The primary source of support that the teachers said they rely upon on a day-to-day basis is their like-minded and similarly-motivated colleagues, as was stated by 13 of the 14 teachers. Four teachers said that they had a mentor within their school site that was a valuable resource during their early years of teaching, and six teachers were surprised at how helpful and welcoming many veteran, non-TFA teachers were towards them as new teachers. Carol said that her colleagues "who are in the same mindset" provide her with validation that she is on the right

path and give her a sounding board when she is trying to work through a problem. This thought was expressed by the other teachers as well, and they felt their jobs were more rewarding when they had positive relationships with their colleagues. Ivy explained:

> This is the first time I really like everyone in my grade level, and that's been a huge thing for me this year, as far as feeling empowered and supported and positive about things. The biggest thing for me is the people that are there.

In an earlier section, the teachers' frustration with "unprofessional colleagues" was cited as a primary challenge. These are not the colleagues that the teachers form positive relationships with; rather, it is those who, as Hugo described, "truly have the best student interests at heart," that they form relationships with. These relationships help them to persist despite the many challenges that afflict teachers in high-poverty schools.

Comparison of Teachers Who Stayed to Teachers Who Left

Findings resulting from the survey and the interviews do not reflect any obvious differences between the teaching experiences of the teachers who stayed in the profession and of those who left the profession. None of the interviewed teachers or former teachers majored or minored in education, and all were motivated in some part by TFA's mission when they made the decision to apply to the program. Three of the interviewed former teachers felt that they had always been draw to teaching, just as four of the teachers had indicated. A small difference between the groups of interviewed teachers and former teachers is that six of the teachers indicated on the survey that they initially expected to remain in the teaching profession for only two years, while none of the former teachers had initial expectations to leave following their two-year commitment to TFA. However, the survey was intended to select interview participants, and those who appeared to change their mind at some point – meaning they stayed in the profession when they initially expected they would not – were intentionally selected for

interviews in order to understand this change-of-heart. Data from the full group of surveyed participants show that the majority of the teachers and former teachers did not initially expect to leave the profession immediately following their two-year commitment. Table 5 shows how the full group of survey participants responded.

Table 5
Initial Expectations of Teaching Duration

When you first joined Teach For America, how many years did you initially expect to remain in the teaching profession?		Teacher	Non-Teacher	Total
2 years	Count	10	4	14
	% within Teaching Status	25.6%	16.7%	22.2%
3 years	Count	1	0	1
	% within Teaching Status	2.6%	0.0%	1.6%
4-5 years	Count	3	1	4
	% within Teaching Status	7.7%	4.2%	6.3%
More than 5 years	Count	8	4	12
	% within Teaching Status	20.5%	16.7%	19.0%
I knew I would stay for two years, but I wasn't sure beyond that.	Count	17	15	32
	% within Teaching Status	43.6%	62.5%	50.8%
Total	Count	39	24	63
	% within Teaching Status	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Comparison of Early Teaching Experiences

Similar to the teachers, the former teachers described their first two years in the classroom as exhausting, overwhelming, and challenging. Lori's comment, "Every day, I did want to go home and cry," was typical. On the survey, five of the nine former teachers said that the experience was harder than they had expected it to be, while four said that it was about as easy/hard as they had expected. In the interview, these four former teachers clarified that their first year was still quite challenging; however, just as two of the teachers explained, these four former teachers felt that they were well aware of the challenges they would face before ever entering the classroom. Thomas explained:

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I don't think Teach For America sugarcoated it at all…they pretty much put you in the worst teaching environments in America and expect you to do something about it. So that's how I went into it. I knew it was going to be tough.

Data from the survey show that the full group of surveyed teachers and former teachers did not differ substantially in answering the question, "Which, if any, of the following did you find to be the MOST difficult aspects of teaching during your two-year commitment to Teach For America?" Table 6 shows the top six responses from the groups of teachers and former teachers. Exhaustion was cited the most by both groups and student discipline or classroom management was cited by combined percentages of 74.4% of the teachers and 79.1% of the former teachers.

Table 6
Top Six Responses – Most Difficult Aspects of Teaching

Which, if any, of the following did you find to be the MOST difficult aspects of teaching during your two-year commitment to Teach For America? You may choose up to THREE.		Teacher	Non-Teacher	Total
Exhaustion or general feeling of being overwhelmed	Count	24	11	35
	% within Teaching Status	61.5%	45.8%	55.5%
Dealing with student disciplinary issues	Count	15	11	26
	% within Teaching Status	38.5%	45.8%	41.3%
Classroom management	Count	14	8	22
	% within Teaching Status	35.9%	33.3%	34.9%
Poor school environment or climate	Count	15	6	21
	% within Teaching Status	38.5%	25.0%	33.3%
Balancing work and personal life	Count	11	6	17
	% within Teaching Status	28.2%	25.0%	27.0%
Lack of support from administration	Count	9	7	16
	% within Teaching Status	23.1%	29.2%	25.4%

Similar to the teachers, all of the former teachers described in the interviews the sheer exhaustion they experienced during their first year in the profession. Tara described leaving the house at five-forty-five in the morning and coming home at seven, and Nick described living in a

constant state of physical and emotional exhaustion during his entire first year. Eight of the nine said that they did not feel prepared for the intensity of the workload and felt that they were "thrown" into the deep-end of teaching. Just as ten of the 14 teachers described their first year as a series of "failures" involving poor classroom management and a constant struggle to reach their students, all of the former teachers described similar experiences. Nick said, "I felt like I was doing a really bad job, and I felt like I wasn't helping anybody."

All of the former teachers described their second year in the classroom as much more successful than their first. This echoes the findings from the interviewed teachers. Nancy described her first year as "just a big kick in the pants," but during her second year, she felt like she got into her "groove," and felt that she had a better understanding of both her students and the curriculum. This feeling of "improvement" during their second year was reiterated by the eight other former teachers.

Eight of the nine former teachers returned to the classroom for a third year, even though their commitment to TFA was only for two years. Similar to thoughts expressed by the teachers, six of the eight former teachers who stayed for year three said that they returned to the classroom because they wanted to continue to improve. Tara explained that at the end of each year, she felt that she could be even better the next year. Gia and Rebecca felt that they had to come back for year three because there was still "work to do." Rebecca wanted to see some of her students graduate, and Gia simply felt that her job wasn't "done." Five of the eight former teachers who stayed for year three described how a new role helped them become invested in teaching. Nick and Gia taught at a large, public high school that was being taken over by a charter organization after their second year teaching. The take-over provided them with new opportunities to contribute to the school's transformation and, as Nick described, "hope." Nora switched to a

new school so that she could experience teaching at a different grade level, and Lori and Tara described the multiple "hats" they wore by taking on teacher-leader positions within the school. This reiterates what 10 of the 14 teachers revealed in their interviews – by taking on new roles, they became more invested in their schools and in the profession.

Comparison of Challenges that Impact Resilience

When asked about challenges that they faced that made teaching difficult, all of the former teachers interviewed pointed to the adults rather than to the students. Student challenges were mentioned; the former teachers described their struggles to reach every student and to accommodate the wide range of ability levels that may be present in a given classroom, and they described problems with truancy and discipline. However, these student-centered issues were never cited as the biggest challenge they faced when teaching, nor were they cited as their ultimate reason for leaving the teaching profession. This echoes the sentiment expressed by all of the interviewed teachers – the students are not the problem, rather it is the adults and the bureaucratic system of public education that present the biggest challenge to their personal resilience.

Seven of the nine former teachers pointed to the teacher's union and the presence of unprofessional teachers as a significant challenge. By comparison, 12 of the 14 teachers pointed to this issue as well. Anna described a situation in which she and two other teachers proposed a new schedule that shortened the homeroom block, thus enabling students to increase their time in science and history while creating an elective period. Her proposal was met with a great deal of resistance from the school's union representative and his supporters who felt that teachers should not be required to teach an extra 30 minute period without extra pay:

> I always thought of teaching as a profession, not as a labor, as in, like, Teamsters, something that you clock in and clock out of. There is a cohort of teachers that lived that

way to the point that during school meetings, they would watch the second hand on the clock, and the moment that it hit the minute that the contract said we didn't have to be on campus anymore, they would all pack up their stuff and leave, even if somebody was midsentence speaking. And so I found that attitude very uninspiring.

Anna viewed herself as a professional, but struggled with the notion that other teachers did not act in what she considered to be a professional manner. This was echoed by six more of the nine former teachers. After transferring to a charter school after her third year of teaching, Lori appreciated the fact that she could be fired for under-performing:

It pushed me to work a lot harder, knowing that I didn't have job security. I liked that…One of my biggest complaints [about the district] was just seeing teachers who, in my opinion, didn't really belong in the classroom but had been teaching for 30 years, so nobody would do anything to change that.

Just as 12 of the 14 teachers expressed in their interviews, the former teachers often felt frustrated working beside teachers that they didn't feel were pulling their weight.

Six of the nine former teachers complained about the bureaucracy of a large, urban district and the impact that its priorities had at the classroom level. Gia stated, "You can put in 20 hours a day and change individuals' lives, but the system is just so much bigger than you. The systemic issues really got to me." Similarly, Nancy stated, "You're under this big system that doesn't necessarily have the children's best interest at heart, or it has all these shortcomings. And just to keep bumping your head against that, it's so frustrating."

The dysfunction of the bureaucracy manifested itself in many ways, including a lack of sufficient resources, endless paperwork, and ineffective, district-mandated professional development that does not pertain to the curriculum. Rebecca explained how a proposal she had written to improve the structure of self-contained classes was only partially accepted. Her frustration, in this case, stemmed from the fact that, "if I was able to implement certain things that I wanted to with my students, I felt like I could have had more of an impact." She also

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routinely requested supplies and field trip approvals that were denied. Her frustration was

compounded when fiscal decisions were made without properly evaluating the needs of the

students or teachers. When she was brought to the supply room after requesting a certain supply,

she was shocked to find floor-to-ceiling stacks of construction paper:

> I asked her about it, and she replies, "Well, we have to spend our Title I fund before the end of the year." So, you're meaning to tell me that we're spending money on this ridiculous amount of construction paper and no one even knows it's in here and nobody has been using it, and we could have been using that for [field trips]? We had the means to do certain things, and we weren't using that money in the best way possible to assist the students.

This idea that the "system" and its priorities do not always serve in the best interest of the

students was reaffirmed by both teachers and former teachers.

Comparison of Sources of External Support

Just as the teachers relied primarily on human resources for support, the former teachers

pointed to their TFA support network and their colleagues as significant sources of support

during their teaching career. Seven of the nine former teachers said that other TFA teachers

within their school or in their graduate school courses provided a sense of camaraderie and a

sounding board. Many of them lived with other TFA corps members and socialized outside of

school with other TFA corps members. Six of the nine former teachers said that they relied on

their colleagues who were of a similar mindset. Nora's comment is typical:

> I tended to find teachers at my school who I thought were really good teachers. Even in lower income schools, there's always a really great teacher at the school…you have to find them and learn from them, and that's what I would do.

Data from the survey supports the idea that both the teachers and former teachers relied primarily

on human resources during their teaching careers. Table 7 shows how the 63 survey participants

responded to the question, "Of the types of support listed below, which, if any, did you rely upon

the most during your two year commitment to TFA?" The two responses selected the most were,

"Guidance or advice from other teachers within the school," and "Friendship with other TFA

teachers."

Table 7
External Support

Of the types of support listed below, which, if any, did you rely upon the MOST during your two-year commitment to Teach For America?		Teacher	Non-Teacher	Total
Guidance or advice from other teachers within the school	Count	16	10	26
	% within Teaching Status	41.0%	41.7%	41.3%
Friendship with other TFA teachers	Count	11	7	18
	% within Teaching Status	28.2%	29.2%	28.6%
Guidance and/or support from graduate school courses and instructors	Count	6	1	7
	% within Teaching Status	15.4%	4.2%	11.1%
Emotional support from family and friends	Count	4	2	6
	% within Teaching Status	10.3%	8.3%	9.5%
District-provided professional development	Count	0	2	2
	% within Teaching Status	0.0%	8.3%	3.2%
Guidance and/or support from TFA Los Angeles	Count	1	1	2
	% within Teaching Status	2.6%	4.2%	3.2%
Support from school administration	Count	0	1	1
	% within Teaching Status	0.0%	4.2%	1.6%
Other (please describe)	Count	1	0	1
	% within Teaching Status	2.6%	0.0%	1.6%
Total	Count	39	24	63
	% within Teaching Status	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Why and When the Former Teachers Left the Teaching Profession

While the teachers indicated that the students were the primary reason they stayed in the

profession, the opposite was not true for the teachers who left the profession. Their commitment

to the students was reiterated throughout the interviews. When asked about the rewards of the

profession, every former teacher said that they were most motivated by witnessing student

success and by forming positive relationships with their students. When explaining why they left

the profession, none of the former teachers indicated that the students were the reason. Rather,

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the students tended to be what they liked about the job. The reasons the former teachers gave for leaving had more to do with burnout and frustration stemming from the constant systemic challenges described earlier. This is supported by data from the full group of 24 former teachers. The most common factor that the former teachers cited as having contributed to their decision to leave the profession was burnout (33.3%), followed by their desire to either find a job in a less stressful environment (29.2%) or to impact education outside of the classroom (29.2%).

It is important to note that only one of the nine former teachers left the profession immediately following her two-year commitment to TFA. This is contrary to the criticism that plagues TFA – that corps members leave after two years. Of the interviewed former teachers, only one left after two years, two left after three years, one left after four years, four left after five years, and one left after six years. Survey data also does not support the idea that the majority of TFA corps members leave the profession. Of the former teachers who participated in the survey, 15 out of 24 stayed in the classroom past two years (62.5%), and 11 out of 24 (45.8%) remained in the classroom beyond three years.

Burnout

Four of the nine former teachers directly stated that they were burnt out by the time they left the profession. Three of these former teachers persisted in the teaching profession for five years, and one persisted for six. Though all four cited burnout as a factor that led to their resignation, their reasons for leaving the profession varied somewhat. Two had recently started families and felt that they could no longer put in the extensive hours that teaching requires. Gia described how her teaching career was affecting her personal life:

> My husband, who is not in education, had difficulty understanding how I was only making X amount of money as a teacher but I was working 70 hours a week and just didn't see the big picture of urban education…so I think the personal definitely did have a toll…I'm the type of person, had I been single and unmarried with no kids, I could've

stayed on longer….[but], it's not sustainable. The amount of time and energy and emotion is not sustainable, unless…I don't know unless what.

Gia also explained that in order to be an effective teacher in a high-poverty school, you could not "give it less and have results." Tara expressed a similar sentiment when she said, "Could I possibly go back to the classroom and dedicate as much time as I want to with a one-year-old?" Both Gia and Tara wanted to find a more flexible position that allowed them to spend more time with their families. Gia is now a stay-at-home mom who teaches fitness classes part-time and consults part-time with a university, and Tara works for a professional development company that provides her with a flexible, part-time schedule.

The other two former teachers who cited burnout as a factor that led to their resignation ultimately left the profession because systemic challenges took a physical and emotional toll on their resolve. Lori worked at a charter school that came under enormous budgetary constraints during her last year there. As teachers were laid off and resources were cut, the faculty took on multiple roles:

> They were wearing us to the bone. I felt like a piece of Play-Doh that was being rolled as thin as possible all the time, and in a way that wasn't helping kids. And when I first went to the charter school, I thought that every decision that was being made was student-centered, and then in the face of this huge budget-crisis, decisions were not made the same way anymore. It was just a stressful, difficult place to work.

When Lori decided to leave the charter school, she initially expected to find another teaching position. However, she was "feeling so burnt out that year….I didn't know how effective I would be in a new school." Instead, she began working full-time managing a non-profit that she and two other TFA corps members had created. Similarly, Rebecca, who taught for two years in New Jersey following three years in Los Angeles, explained why she started looking for jobs outside of public education:

I really loved when I could shut my door and be with my kids in my classroom, but all the other external factors that would go into it, I just knew it wasn't…it was taking a toll on me, and I just knew it wasn't going to be sustainable for long…As much as you want to take care of other people and take care of your students, you can't do that if you're not taking care of yourself.

Rebecca found a job working for a pre-college university program where she works with disadvantaged, academically-able high school students. She said that she feels more "in control of student outcomes" in her current position.

Though seven of the nine former teachers described feelings of "burnout" throughout their years in the classroom, the four former teachers described above were the ones who directly cited burnout as having a significant impact on their decision to leave the profession. Whether the burnout was compounded by personal issues, new families, or systemic challenges, these former teachers ultimately decided that they would prefer to contribute to education in a capacity that is outside of the classroom.

Desire to Fix the System from the Outside

Two of the former teachers said that their decision to leave the profession was motivated, in part, by their desire to "fix" the broken system of public education from the outside. Both of the former teachers left the classroom for law school, one after three years of teaching and the other after four years of teaching. Anna felt that there was only so much she could do in her classroom:

Best case scenario, 150 kids out of the 800,000 in [the district] might learn how to read a little better. The magnitude of that, that realization, was very influential in my decision of, well, maybe I'm ready to start thinking about or attacking other problems at a more systemic level. And thinking about that interaction, of how our laws run society, kind of all the things that you get in law school.

Anna, however, is now a corporate litigator and did not indicate that she is involved in educational reform efforts. Nora, a law student and former special education teacher, expressed similar thoughts to Anna's when she made the decision to leave the classroom:

> I thought I can do something to make a difference in the way the system is working as opposed to just – you know, being stuck as a teacher and not being able to fight the system…I think every year that I was there, there was just another experience that maybe just connected more with special ed and the law…The school doesn't get scared until a lawyer shows up [during the IEP process]. And that's the part that made me decide that I just wanted to do the law.

Nora is not sure what type of law she will practice, but she is interested in education and public interest law.

Nora and Anna expressed a desire to impact education in a different capacity. Three of the other former teachers expressed this desire as well, but Nora and Anna were the only two who said that this desire led to their exit from the teaching profession.

Other Reasons for Leaving

In addition to burnout and the desire to "fix" the system, the former teachers' decisions to leave the profession were precipitated by other factors. Nick always knew that he was not going to stay in the profession for the long-term, though he did stay for five years. When he decided to leave, his school was about to be phased out. Nick worked in a small school that was part of a much larger, public high school, and the last class of students was about to graduate. Nick had the option to move to another one of the small schools, but he felt that his situation presented him with a "cleaner break" at that particular time. Though systemic challenges and burnout were certainly obstacles that he had faced, he always knew that he would eventually leave the profession. He currently works for an educational non-profit organization.

Thomas taught for two years in South Texas before relocating to New York City. After teaching at a charter school in Harlem for one year, his contract was not renewed due to "failure

to perform." Thomas had initially envisioned himself as a career educator and felt fulfilled and successful during his teaching experience in Texas. However, he feels that his position at the charter school was not a good fit for many reasons. He struggled to connect with the students and with the faculty at his new school, but was willing to give it another try had his contract been renewed. Thomas currently works as a construction project engineer and said that his termination at the charter school was:

> a serious blow to my own ideas and of continuing in the profession as a teacher. I miss it, and I think that if things were different or maybe if I didn't do so well in construction, that I would go back to it.

Finally, Nancy, whose sister was a teacher, thought that teaching would turn into a long-term career, but she changed her mind quickly. She left the profession after two years. The main reason she cites for leaving the teaching profession is "isolation." She taught in Las Vegas when all of her family lived in Los Angeles. However, she also explained how overwhelmed she was during her two years of teaching and that she didn't think teaching was the best fit for her. Having watched her older sister succeed as a teacher, Nancy didn't realize how much work actually goes into the craft:

> I had felt so comfortable in that world, [but] of course you're comfortable [because] everything's being taken care of by someone else. In terms of the teacher, she's done all this planning, and all you see is the end product, you don't see all the preparation that goes into it….I think my first year really stung me, and by the end of my first year, I just couldn't picture myself doing it again. It had been really tough.

She submitted her resignation halfway through her second year on the job, but she soon had regrets. Her second year ended on a much more positive note. However, after moving back to Los Angeles, she said that she has no desire to work under the bureaucracy of a large public school system. She currently works for an agency that is part of the welfare entitlement program. She provides training to childcare providers.

Nick, Thomas, and Nancy left the teaching profession for reasons that were unique from those cited by the other six former teachers. However, none of the former teachers interviewed left the profession for just one reason. Instead, their decisions were motivated by an interplay of all of the factors listed above, though one factor may have stood out as being the most influential.

The Impact of Administrative Support

None of the former teachers cited a lack-of administrative support as a reason for leaving the teaching profession, just as none of the teachers cited the presence of administrative support as a reason for staying in the teaching profession. However, looking a little deeper at the experiences of some of the teachers and former teachers reveals that the presence or the absence of administrative support impacts resilience.

The former teachers understood and could articulate the impact that ineffective administration had on their ability to teach their students. The four teachers who left the profession due to burnout described ways in which their administration led to their increased frustration. Lori's charter school was in the midst of a financial collapse that led to a mostly-absent administration who allowed an enormous burden to fall upon the teachers. Gia's school was taken over by a charter organization, and she was constantly frustrated by policies that were enacted by administrators who did not listen to the needs of the teachers or the students. Tara kept a "Should I Stay or Should I Go?" journal chronicling her teaching experiences, and she described the entries she'd written detailing interactions with unsupportive administrators. Rebecca felt that her administration did not protect her from the external forces that constantly acted upon her classroom. Though none of the four teachers directly stated that their

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administration led to their exit from the profession, it is evident that their level of burnout was impacted, in some part, by unsupportive administration.

A similar pattern emerges when looking at the former teachers who did not cite burnout as a direct cause of their exit from the profession. Anna, who left the profession for law school, did not feel that her administration was unsupportive; however, she was frustrated by the fact that her principal seemed unwilling to stand up to district bureaucracy. Nick did not leave the profession because of his ineffective administration; however, he described many situations in which his administration either enacted a bad policy or did not provide him with the support he needed. Nancy did not leave the profession because of her administration either; however, she expressed frustration over all of the initiatives she was expected to implement as a first year teacher without being given any support or guidance on how to do so.

The experiences of these former teachers show that an unsupportive administration did impact their resilience, even if the absence of administrative support was not directly cited as a reason for leaving the profession. Similarly, the experiences of the interviewed teachers show that support from administration impacts their resilience as well. Of the 14 interviewed teachers, only three stated that they currently work for ineffective administrations, but they persist in the profession despite them. However, seven of the 14 teachers had previously been assigned to schools with ineffective administration, and all of these teachers said that the poor administration was a constant obstacle that impacted their job satisfaction. Though only four of the teachers said that they transferred school sites as a direct result of poor administration, all seven of the teachers underscored how much easier and happier their jobs are made by their present, effective administration as opposed to their previous ineffective administration. As a result of supportive

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administrators, the seven teachers felt they could more easily take on new roles and grow as professionals. Charles describes the difference between his current school and his previous:

> My principal will say, 'This is the goal, this is what I need to happen. You guys figure it out.' So we [the teachers] get to plan professional development…I like that part of teaching, too. I like that feeling of bringing the teachers together to change the place. And this school has given us the power to do that. Versus the other one, if you want to do anything, you have to meet with ten people,….and then it probably wouldn't get approved anyway. So this new place has given me a lot that I like.

Charles' comment shows how, even though he has always been committed to teaching, the administration at his current school allows him to contribute to the development and progress of the school outside of his own classroom. This helps him feel committed and fulfilled professionally. Likewise, the other seven teachers who left schools that had poor administrations understood the impact that a positive administration now has on their day-to-day persistence.

Though the presence or absence of administrative support was not directly stated by the teachers or former teachers as a reason for staying in or leaving the profession, it is clear from the data that administrative support impacts resilience. By comparing the experiences of both the teachers and the former teachers, a pattern emerges that shows that both the teachers and former teachers were more likely to leave a school in which administrative support was lacking.

"Just a Teacher"

As described above, their decision to leave may have been motivated in large part by one particular reason. However, when describing why they left the profession, five of the former teachers referred to an idea that was cited as a challenge by the interviewed teachers: society views teachers as "just a teacher."

Anna acknowledged that she may have stayed in the profession if "teachers were being paid $150,000 a year." It was hard for Anna to accept that on a teacher's salary, she might never be able to afford a home, or she may have to rely on her spouse. She also said:

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There are teachers that teach because that's the only job that they could get right out of college and they didn't do very well and they didn't go to a great college. And they're going in to do the only thing that they could do. And then there's the other portion of the faculty where I would imagine a lot of ex-TFA people fall into, where they are teachers because they love what they do and they could have done anything else and they chose to do this. And they're going to hone their craft. It's hard not to internalize that sentiment that you're kind of absorbing from the other teachers, that they're not very valuable and they're just clocking in and clocking out. It's hard not to think, well wait a minute, am I just a cog in the train as well?...And the school and the administrators put [good and bad teachers] in the same category.

Similarly, Lori, who sees herself returning to the classroom at some point, explained that had she stayed in teaching rather than transitioning to work for the non-profit she co-founded, she would not feel as "accomplished as a person, which I feel a little uncomfortable saying….it would be like, yeah, I'm a teacher." She felt that when she stayed on for a third year of teaching, people looked at her as though she had thrown away an excellent and prestigious education "just to become a teacher." She described how the reaction of university advisors often cracked her resolve to stay in teaching:

I definitely heard from college advisors even, oh, you're just teaching now? Should I be like, yeah, but I'm making a difference in the world? Should I shoot back with something like, I'm doing an important job that I'm proud of, but hearing you refer to it that way makes it harder for me to stay invested in why I am doing this.

The ideas that Anna and Lori expressed were echoed to a smaller extent by three other former teachers. For example, Nick acknowledged his frustration with TFA corps members who leave the profession with a certain "arrogance" that they are leaving to do something "better" than teaching. However, the notion that they were "just teachers" did not surface as a primary reason that they left the profession. Instead, it seemed to be an underlying theme that contributed to their desire to move on.

Response to Teach For America Criticism

All of the interview participants were asked to respond to the statement, "Some people claim that Teach For America does more harm than good by creating a 'revolving door' of poorly-prepared teachers in high-poverty schools." This criticism of TFA is prevalent in the literature (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; Heilig & Jez, 2010). Twenty-two of the 23 interview participants disagreed with this statement, though eight participants acknowledged that there may be a small amount of validity to part of the statement. All in all, they understood the basis of the criticism, but they disagreed that TFA does "more harm than good."

The response that was given most frequently was that TFA places corps members in schools where most teachers don't want to go. In that sense, the participants saw TFA as fulfilling a need in high-poverty schools. Nick said that the large, public high school in which he taught "wouldn't have functioned without TFA because we had 16 or 17 [corps members] there, and if they weren't there, we would have had long-term subs instead." Fifteen other participants reiterated that had they not been teaching in their particular school, a long-term sub or another under-qualified teacher would have taken their place. Richard, who continues to teach after eight years, said, "When I started at the school I worked in, literally, if you had a pulse, they would give you a room, TFA or not-TFA." Samuel, who has been teaching for 15 years, explained that when he began teaching, "there wasn't a line." He feels the criticism of TFA is unfounded because:

> Unless things have changed recently, at that point in time, TFA was meeting a need. They weren't bumping fully educated, USC grads from working with these low-performing children. You were here because nobody else wanted the gig. It wasn't as if a more highly qualified, or even a less-qualified, person was getting the job. I didn't have to beat anyone up to get the job for $26,000 a year.

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Samuel's comment echoes remarks made by the other participants. In a perfect world, a highly-qualified teacher would have wanted that slot; however, the reality was that no one wanted the types of teaching positions to which TFA teachers are assigned.

Ten of the participants took the idea that "nobody else wanted the job" a step further. Not only did these participants feel that they were filling an otherwise empty slot, they also felt that the work that TFA teachers are willing to put in outweighed the risk that they might leave after two years. Charles explained that during their two-year commitment, "they do work their butts off, and they are accomplishing, I think, more than the people around them." Charles has been teaching for 15 years and has seen the rotation of TFA teachers that come and go. However, he went on to say:

> Their drive is so much higher. It's easier to push them to be all crazy with their lesson planning and what they're going to do. They'll do anything. The woman [who is my mentee], she went through a traditional preparation program….and she's so negative and refuses to do anything above the requirements. Teach For America people are not like that. They're so driven. Super driven. And they bring that energy into the school and it can spread. And they typically do really well. And you can tell when you walk into the classroom, you can tell that that person's TFA, just in how they'll do things.

Ultimately, both the teachers and former teachers felt that it was better to have a dedicated, hard-working teacher for two years than to have a weak, poorly-qualified teacher for ten. As Nancy stated, "There's something of real value to bringing a person who is almost fanatical about being good at teaching students, even if it's only for two years."

Ten of the participants felt that the mission of TFA is not to create life-long teachers; rather, TFA seeks to, as Raul explained, "create a cohort of professionals who have the experience of working in public education in a high-needs school." The hope is that TFA corps members use this experience to inform their future actions as community leaders, business

leaders, doctors, lawyers, etc. Rebecca, who left the classroom after five years, explained how

TFA has impacted her:

> For me personally, I know that I am forever changed from what I saw and the
> experiences of the classroom. I know I can never fully turn my back on education and
> education reform for that reason. And I know that if I didn't do the corps, I wouldn't
> have those experiences, and I would not have had that knowledge, and I would've been
> ignorant to some of the big problems our education system faces. So for me personally,
> it's a life-changing experience. And I don't think that just because I'm not in the formal
> classroom arena anymore that I can't impact education from a different angle.

Sixteen of the 23 interview participants felt that the training they received through TFA

was not only adequate, but superior to traditional teacher preparation programs. The participants

expressed the idea that Tara described as "a first year teacher is a first year teacher." Gia felt that

the best preparation she received was just "to be thrown right into the mix and learn it." With

that said, the participants truly felt that the training they received from TFA was just as

beneficial, if not more beneficial, than the training they received in their credentialing program.

Even though Maria wished she had more training, she felt that "at least with TFA, it was five

weeks of being supported in a classroom in addition to getting some of the theoretical stuff," as

opposed to teacher education programs in which student teachers follow the long-term plan of

their cooperating teacher. Samuel went so far as to say that neither his credentialing program nor

his graduate coursework "compare at all to what took place with TFA." There was an

acknowledgement among the participants that more training would have been beneficial,

especially among the teachers who were given special education placements that required

specific knowledge of IEP's. However, they were not overly impressed by their fellow teachers

who had graduated from traditional teacher education programs, nor did they feel that they were

better prepared through their own credentialing programs.

Though the participants disagreed with the statement, "Some people claim that Teach For America does more harm than good by creating a 'revolving door' of poorly-prepared teachers in high-poverty schools," they were not blind to TFA's flaws. Ten participants described their own criticism of TFA, and this will be addressed in Chapter Five.

Summary of Findings

The most common reason why the former teachers left the profession pertained to burnout and some were interested in pursuing educational reform efforts from outside of the classroom. The teachers and the former teachers do not differ substantially in terms of their teaching experiences. While teaching, they were motivated by the impact they had on their students and leaned on their like-minded colleagues for support. They cite similar systemic challenges. Overall, the only thing that differentiated the teachers from the former teachers is that the former teachers left the profession, and most do not have plans to return. There is some evidence that an absence of administrative support impacted the resilience of both the teachers and former teachers, leading in small part to some of the former teachers' exit from the profession.

Despite the challenges that high-poverty students bring to the table, the teachers' main source of resilience is the positive impact they have on their students. Many of the teachers, having come from highly academic backgrounds, feel that their resilience is supported by their ability to take on multiple roles in the profession, thereby increasing their impact while contributing to their own professional growth. This ability to take on new roles has allowed many of the teachers to come to grips with the fact that they are employed in a profession that is not compensated well and tends to not be held in high esteem by societal standards. The teachers are both discouraged and inversely motivated by systemic challenges that plague public

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education. Unequivocally, every teacher maintained that the main challenges facing public education in high-needs areas have little to do with the students; rather, the system, and the adults within the system, make effective teaching difficult. However, their connections to the students, to the community, and to their colleagues help them to remain resilient in the face of adversity.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

The primary purpose of this study was to understand how high-quality teachers who began their career through Teach For America became resilient while teaching in challenging, high-poverty schools. A secondary purpose of this study was to ascertain how, if at all, the teaching experiences of TFA teachers who stayed in the profession differed from those who left the profession shortly after fulfilling their two-year commitment. Though there are many studies on teacher retention, there are relatively few that focus on teacher "resilience" as an internal, personal construct that enables teachers to persist in high-poverty schools despite challenging circumstances. Studies of teacher resilience tend to focus on veteran teachers who have persisted in high-poverty schools with little context given regarding how such teachers entered the profession, or on programmatic aspects of teacher preparation that enable novice teachers to become resilient. This study adds to the current literature on teacher resilience by focusing on the unique group of teachers that are brought into the profession by TFA: high-ability college-graduates who have no prior background or preparation in education and who initially signed-on for only a two year teaching commitment.

Consistent with the research on teacher resilience, the teachers who were interviewed for this study stayed in the profession due to their steadfast commitment to their students and because of the fulfillment they get from the knowledge that they are positively impacting their students' lives (Brunetti, 2006; Nieto, 2003; Patterson et al., 2004; Stanford, 2001; Yonezawa et al., 2011). Also consistent with the resilience research was the finding that the most pervasive challenges cited pertained to the "crazy adults" running the system, not to the students.

Three unexpected findings resulted from the interviews. First, the teachers' resilience was supported by their desire and ability to take on new roles within education in an effort to

grow professionally. This was surprising because "role changing" was not cited in any of the resilience studies as a motivating factor that enabled teachers to persist in the classroom. Though several of the studies found that teachers view their work as an intellectual endeavor that is fostered through collaboration with colleagues (McCann & Johannessen, 2004; Nieto, 2003; Patterson et al., 2004; Yonezawa et al., 2011), none of these studies referenced a teacher's desire to take on new roles to advance his or her career as a resilience strategy.

Second, both the teachers and the former teachers referenced the fact that the teaching profession is not held in high esteem by our society, and the teachers felt they had to come to terms with this in order to remain in the profession. Though I was not surprised that this also emerged from interviews with the former teachers, I did not expect that those who remained in the classroom would feel that they had to "come to terms" with the notion that they are a "just a teacher." I would have expected that this would be cited as a reason for leaving; instead, the teachers acknowledged society's perception of the profession, and they persisted in spite of it. This notion that resilient, high-quality teachers feel any sense of uneasiness with the perceived prestige of their chosen profession was not referenced in the resilience literature; however, a similar finding emerged from a study of teachers who were prepared through UCLA's Center X master's program (Olsen & Anderson, 2007) and is discussed later in this chapter.

Finally, contrary to what I expected to find in comparing the teachers to the former teachers, the teaching experiences of the two participant groups did not differ substantially. They persisted through several years of teaching due to their commitment to their students and to their ability to take on new roles within education. They cited similar experiences during their two-year commitment to TFA, such as a challenging first year of teaching followed by a successful second year. They cited similar systemic challenges, such as working within

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budgetary constraints and navigating school district bureaucracy. They relied on their colleagues and fellow TFA corps members for support, just as the teachers reported. The only difference that stands out between the teachers and the former teachers is that the former teachers left the profession at some point. Their primary reason for leaving the profession was not due to specific school or student factors. Rather, they tended to feel "burned out" after several years of putting forth an extreme amount of time and energy into teaching. I was not surprising that "burnout" was referenced by the former teachers, given research that shows that almost half of teachers who leave the profession each year cite "job dissatisfaction" as their reason for departure rather than large class sizes, student behavior, or a lack of resources (Ingersoll, 2004). This is also consistent with findings from Olsen and Anderson's (2007) study, mentioned above. Olsen and Anderson discovered that some urban teachers who consider leaving the profession do so because they do not think the workload is sustainable.

This chapter begins with a discussion of these three salient findings, followed by a discussion of the implications they hold for educational policy and practice. I then discuss how the findings may inform TFA's efforts to support corps members to remain committed to both the teaching profession and to educational reform. This section includes recommendations for TFA based on study findings and on advice that came directly from the TFA teachers and former teachers interviewed. Finally, I present the study's limitations. I end with implications for future research.

Discussion of Salient Findings

The Ability to Take On New Roles

These 23 participants were accepted into Teach For America, in part, because of their drive, passion, and proven leadership capabilities. Therefore, it is not surprising that teachers

possessing such capabilities would be fearful of becoming, as Carol said, "stagnant." Unfortunately, due to this high drive, as Emma put it, "You get these really amazing people, but they're so amazing, and they're good at everything, so they go on to do something else." The 14 teachers interviewed in this study all found something else to do, as Emma suggested; however, that "something else" kept them in the classroom, or at least at the school. The teachers in this study felt that their ability to take on new roles within their schools or within the field of education in general contributed to their ability to be resilient.

By continually exploring new roles or projects, the teachers in this study were able to avoid a feeling of stagnation. When the time came that four of the teachers – Charles, Raul, Richard, and Portia – felt that they could no longer grow or have the impact they wanted to on their school and on their students, they either transferred to a new school or temporarily left the profession to pursue something else. In an effort to increase their educational impact, Lance and Ivy joined a fellowship that allowed them to grow professionally while contributing to educational policy. Carol transitioned to a teacher-leader role so that she could increase her impact, and Hugo and Lance persist in the profession because of the knowledge that they may someday transition to administration. Even the teachers who did not directly state that their ability to take on new roles has motivated them to persist have actually changed roles several times throughout their career. These role-changes included coaching new teams, teaching new classes, transferring schools, creating small learning communities, attending graduate school, and consulting outside of the classroom. The ability to grow, whether by changing roles in the school, transferring to a new school, or by going to graduate school to obtain administrative credentials, was very important to the teachers in this study.

This ability to change roles within education as a resilience strategy permeates the findings in this study. Even the former teachers described a more successful second year of teaching as they became more involved in their schools. Their investment in new roles or projects, such as teaching AVID, coaching, or becoming department head, hooked them in for year three. The fear of becoming "stagnant" was addressed by the former teachers as well. Lori, who left the classroom after six years of teaching to work for the non-profit she co-founded, gave a telling statement:

> I realized I needed a change, and I hope this isn't a pattern in my life where every three years I need something new, but I was starting to, even before [the fiscal collapse of my charter school] happened, I was excited to have a new role at this school because I felt like I needed to try something new.

Lori reiterated what many of the teachers and former teachers stated: every few years, they need to "change it up." Lori eventually left the teaching profession, but cited this need to change and grow as her reason for transferring from one school to another between her third and fourth year of teaching.

Teachers with the type of motivation, drive, and energy that these particular teachers possess require opportunities to change and to grow as professionals. This is reiterated in Olsen and Anderson's (2007) study investigating the career decisions of 15 teachers who had graduated from UCLA's Center X, a two-year urban teacher preparation master's program. The teachers in Olsen and Anderson's study are similar to the TFA teachers in this study in that they were highly motivated, high-achieving graduates of an elite university; however, they differ in that they graduated from a teacher preparation program prior to entering the classroom, which the TFA teachers in my study did not. Regardless, it is worth noting that both the teachers in Olsen and Anderson's study and in my study were highly-motivated teachers who wished to avoid becoming "stagnant" in their profession. The six teachers in Olsen and Anderson's study who

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were uncertain whether they would stay in the classroom referred to feelings of stagnation. Six of the 15 teachers in their study reported that they wanted to stay in teaching for the foreseeable future, and they referenced many ways in which they change roles or hope to change roles within a teaching context. They actively sought ways to grow professionally, such as by applying to doctoral programs or for certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. They took on mini-projects within the school and organized groups of teachers around common goals.

The teachers in Olsen and Anderson's (2007) study were graduates of a competitive teacher preparation program, were placed in schools that were known to have highly functional administrative teams, and received multiple forms of ongoing support throughout their early years of teaching. On the contrary, the TFA teachers in my study did not go through a teacher preparation program and were not typically placed in schools with highly functional administrative teams, nor did they receive the type of ongoing support that Center X teachers received. Given the different contexts, it is interesting that both groups of teachers relied on a similar resilience strategy, regardless of whether or not they were prepared through a teacher education program. Though the contexts are different, Olsen and Anderson's study confirms this study's finding that highly motivated teachers actively seek ways to change and to grow professionally. In fact, if teachers become stagnant, they may feel motivated to find a new role outside of the classroom.

Coming to Terms with Society's Perception of Teachers

It did not surprise me that many of the participants in this study feel that society diminishes the role of teachers. However, I did not expect that the teachers in the study would cite coming to terms with society's perception of teaching as a less-than-prestigious endeavor as

a resilience strategy. This finding did not appear in any of the resilience literature. Yet, this theme was also noted in Olsen and Anderson's (2007) study referenced above. Perhaps Olsen and Anderson's study draws this parallel to my own because of the nature of the participants involved – high-achieving, highly-motivated teachers from an elite university. Like the teachers in my study, 80% of the teachers in Olsen and Anderson's study said that their families disapproved of their career choice, and some referenced their own misgivings regarding the pay and prestige of the profession.

As described above, the ability to advance their careers by taking on new roles was cited as a source of resilience to some of the teachers in my study. For Hugo and Lance, career advancement was a necessity in order to persist in the profession. Both distinctly remember evaluating whether the title of "teacher" and the compensation that comes with it would sustain them in the long term. Both only felt comfortable with their chosen career path after discovering that some of their TFA peers chose to remain in the profession and that there are other avenues they can take in the field while still remaining committed to educational reform. Lori, who left the profession after six years, admitted that she would not feel "accomplished as a person" if her career only consisted of classroom teaching. Though Hugo, Lance, and Lori felt slightly "uncomfortable" acknowledging it, they questioned whether the title "teacher" was good enough for them and actively looked for "bigger" roles outside of the classroom, though Hugo and Lance do not wish to leave the profession in the short term. This wasn't based on how they viewed their own work or how fulfilled they felt; rather, this was based on the idea that in order to maintain a level of accomplishment and prestige, they had to recognize that they can eventually move onto something "bigger" than teaching. Hugo's statement reflects how he felt comfortable to stay in teaching after realizing that he could follow other pathways:

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I think just being comfortable with that, that I guess I'm gonna be a teacher. At least I have other pathways in education, and the experiences I've accumulated, the people I've been able to meet…I have that network in place [when I want to leave]…and I think that when I realized that, it was ok, now I'm comfortable to stay in education… But this is what I'm passionate about, [teaching] is what I love doing.

The idea that teachers must move onto something "bigger" is again supported by Olsen and Anderson's (2007) study. One of the participants in their study decided to apply to a doctoral program as a "logical next step" as though he was expected to move onto something "bigger" than teaching. The authors posit, "This view of doctoral work as a 'logical next step' taps into an entire meaning system about what highly trained, successful, dedicated urban educators are socialized to do after they have stabilized as early career teachers" (p. 20). The teachers in Olsen and Anderson's study, just like the TFA teachers in my study, felt that they must continue to grow professionally, seek higher degrees, or take on leadership roles in order to feel comfortable with their status as "a teacher." Furthermore, they felt that this type of advancement was something they were expected to do, having come from an elite, selective preparation program.

The findings from Olsen and Anderson's (2007) study and the findings from my study lead me to ponder this question: When high-achieving college students have the expectation of a prestigious, six-figure career after completing their chosen majors from top-universities, is it realistic to ask them to settle for a job that will never earn the salary or the prestige that a degree from an elite university can earn for you elsewhere? The teachers in Olsen and Anderson's study intended to become career educators when they entered the master's program through Center X. This was not the case for the TFA teachers in my study. They were initially on different career trajectories, such as pre-med, pre-law, engineering, and business. The teachers who cited coming to terms with society's perception of teachers as a resilience strategy had to reconcile

their previous career expectations with their current reality as a public school teacher. Though all of the teachers in my study were motivated and fulfilled in their work with high-poverty students and they expected to remain in the profession, they had to find a way to accept that this would be their career. This meant accepting that pay would always be low, and that until they advance out of the classroom, they risk being seen as "just a teacher."

Little Difference Between Experiences of Teachers and Former Teachers

As the former teachers in my study made a conscious choice to leave the teaching profession, I had expected that their teaching experiences would differ from those of the teachers who stayed in the profession. I had expected that there would be a certain experience, a particular challenge, or the absence of a crucial support structure that would have pushed certain teachers out of the profession. That was not the case for the 14 teachers and 9 former teachers in my study. The experiences and early motivation of the teachers and the former teachers in this study did not differ substantially; they cited similar challenges and relied on similar forms of support. The only thing that differentiated the former teachers from the teachers was the fact that the former teachers left the profession, most commonly due to burnout. Though there is some evidence that the decision to leave the classroom was partially influenced by a lack of administrative support, there does not appear to be one significant, differentiating factor that keeps some teachers in the profession, the absence of which causes teachers to leave the profession, or vice versa. Instead, the decision to stay in the profession or to leave the profession is impacted by an interplay of different factors, many of which are unique to the individual teacher.

It is possible that that the similarities between the groups of teachers and former teachers can be explained by the fact that many of the nine former teachers, though not teaching, still

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remain connected to education in their current roles. Six of the nine former teachers who participated in interviews remain in education-related occupations. Furthermore, 1 of the 3 that do not remain in education is in law school and hopes to practice within the field of education. There are only two former teachers who work completely outside of education. Freedman and Appleman (2009; 2008) build on ideas presented by Olsen and Anderson (2007) in their description of "shifters" in urban education. In their research, teachers are considered "shifters" if they still work in urban education but outside of the classroom. In my study, it is fair to say that five of the former teachers would be considered "shifters" by this standard because they all still work within urban education. One provides professional development to urban teachers, another works for a pre-college program for disadvantaged students, two work for non-profit organizations that partner with high-poverty schools, and another provides training to child-care providers in high-poverty areas.

If we consider these five former teachers as "shifters," it is difficult to draw a firm line between this group and the teachers who remain at the school level. The teachers explained that they remain committed by changing roles in the profession. Perhaps these five former teachers have simply "changed roles" as a means to stay committed to education, and their particular change brought them outside of the classroom. Though they have left the classroom, the former teachers remain committed to education; however, their current efforts are concentrated outside of the classroom, and this, of course, is the only circumstance that differentiates them from the teachers.

Even though they still work within the context of high-poverty education, these former teachers still made a conscious decision to leave the classroom, most commonly due to burnout. This also differentiates them from the teachers in this study. The teachers similarly cited issues

related to burnout, such as constant stress, exhaustion, and frustration over ineffective administration and the district bureaucracy. However, they persisted despite these issues. Still, this study's findings do not indicate that a particular experience, challenge, or a particular form of support made the difference between whether a teacher would choose to stay or to leave the profession.

Implications for Educational Practice

One of the frequent criticisms of TFA is that corps members frequently leave the profession after two years, thus creating a "revolving door" of teachers in high-poverty schools. Findings from this study do not support the notion that TFA corps members primarily leave after two years. Instead, 8 of the 9 interviewed former teachers and 11 of the 24 surveyed former teachers remained in the profession beyond three years. Recent data show that between 40% and 50% of new teachers leave the profession within their first five years on the job (Ingersoll, 2007). Therefore, it appears that TFA teachers in this study left the profession at a similar rate as did other new teachers who have less than five years of experience. Poor retention among new teachers is not confined to TFA teachers; rather, poor retention among new teachers is a problem on a national scale.

As my review of the literature demonstrated, the most academically able college-graduates tend to not enter the teaching profession at all, and of those who do enter the teaching profession, the most academically able tend to sort away from high-poverty schools (Ascher & Fruchter, 2001; Bacolod, 2007; Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, Rockoff, & Wyckoff, 2008; Ingersoll & Merrill, 2010; Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002; Peske & Haycock, 2006). The teachers in this study were exceptionally bright and motivated college-graduates who held degrees outside of education, many of whom expected to pursue careers in law, medicine, or politics. Why, then,

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did they persist, knowing that as teachers they may always be paid and regarded poorly? The answer to this question has far-reaching implications for educational policy and practice.

Both the teachers and former teachers in this study were motivated to persist because of their students. In this study, nine of the participants had left the teaching profession, even though they did feel a deep commitment to their students while they were there. None of the teachers in this study said that they needed more mentoring or more material resources to become more resilient, though indeed mentoring and material resources are nice to have and were mentioned as support. Furthermore, none of the former teachers said that they would have stayed if they'd had better mentors or more resources. Instead, if we want to keep high-quality teachers in the profession, we have to give them the support, the space, and the autonomy to do what they do best. We have to offer them the same autonomy that is granted to other professions by valuing their insight, experience, and expertise. We have to give them the ability to teach without the barriers of a bureaucratic district that hands out teacher-proof curriculums and professional development that is unrelated to the curriculum. Granted, this is a broad recommendation, and eliminating school district bureaucracy requires an enormous shift in the political landscape of public education. However, there is much that school and district leaders can do within the confines of the bureaucracy to help teachers become resilient.

Both the teachers and former teachers in this study needed to find opportunities to grow in their profession in order to feel fulfilled and motivated to continue. Though this finding was not present in the resilience literature, it is supported by Olsen and Anderson's (2007) study of career pathways of teachers who received their MA through UCLA's Center X. When teachers felt that they were becoming stagnant or that they had "gotten everything I can out of this," they either transferred schools or transitioned out of the classroom. In order to hold these teachers in

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the profession for the long run, it is essential that school and district leaders help them find ways to grow as professionals so that they continue to feel that they are increasing their impact on their schools and on their students. To demonstrate how this recommendation may influence teachers' decisions to stay or to leave the profession, I reflect on the experiences of Richard and Anna.

Richard, who has been at his current school for two years, foreshadows his own exit with this statement:

> I have it in my mind that two years beyond now…if things go the way they're supposed to go, then I'll feel like I've done my job…If things work out, then two years from now, I'll probably have done everything I can do to make this place work if it's going to, and I'll probably have gleaned everything there is to glean from this experience…and it'll probably be time to think about what's next.

Richard emphasized in the interview that he enjoys his current school, he has a supportive administration, and he feels like a valued contributor to the school. However, based on his own past experiences, he knows that in two years he will be re-evaluating whether he wants to stay or move on to a new role, either inside or outside of the classroom. This begs the question, is there anything that his current administration can do to keep him at his school beyond the next two years? Or is it inherent in Richard that he will move on despite his principal's best effort to keep him on board?

Without being able to look two years into the future, and based on the findings from this study, Richard's administration should help him find opportunities to grow. Perhaps there is a graduate program in education or leadership that Richard might be interested in. Maybe there is a leadership role within the school into which Richard may transition. The bottom line is that Richard will probably not stay at the school beyond the next two years if he feels that he "has gleaned everything there is to glean from this experience." Of course, that is not to say that

Richard would leave the classroom at that point. He may transfer to a new school. Or, worst case scenario, the profession could lose him entirely.

Anna, who left the classroom after three years, explained her frustration regarding her administration, which did not provide opportunities for growth and did not value the expertise and experience of the teachers. She described her administration's problem of "not recognizing the talent that's before you:"

> If there's a teacher that is going to suggest a new curriculum or is going to suggest a new widespread change in the school, there's the notion of no, the teachers have one role and the administrators have another role. Well, I think that's really stifling to someone that performs well in college and has always thought of themselves as a future leader in the field.

Anna fully expected to make teaching a career, but she left after three years. She said that this decision was motivated by her desire to impact education on a larger scale, but her current role as a corporate litigator is not at all related to education. However, when asked what she likes about her current job as an attorney, she stated, "I like the intellectual challenge…teaching was challenging on an unbelievable amount of levels. But where it wasn't challenging was that you were never faced with an intellectual endeavor."

A limitation to this study is that we have no way of knowing how Anna actually performed as a teacher. It is possible that her exit from the profession was in her best interest and in the best interest of the school. However, Anna's intellectual capability and professional motivation is apparent both from her interview responses and by the fact that she was accepted into TFA. Therefore, it is fair to say that Anna's school lost an intelligent, motivated teacher who had always planned to stay in the profession. Instead, she contributed to the already high attrition rate of teachers in high-poverty schools. Anna was frustrated that her administration did not recognize the talent among teachers in the school, and she also expressed frustrations that her

suggestions to administrators were often halted by "district" policies. Perhaps her administration did recognize her talent and her drive. However, they did not give Anna opportunities to make an impact on her school or to grow into a future educational leader. Had Anna been able to take on a new project, to research and implement a new change, to lead other teachers, perhaps she would have begun to see teaching as more of an "intellectual endeavor." Instead, Anna, who clearly craves intellectual stimulation, often felt surprised by how "mundane" teaching could feel.

The recommendation that school and district leaders find ways to keep teachers invested in the profession is not expensive to implement. On the contrary, by allowing teachers to grow and take on multiple roles within the school, administrators would be able to distribute leadership without having to hire additional staff. The teachers in this study were motivated by their involvement with athletics, curriculum development, school improvement efforts, and teacher fellowships. By allowing and encouraging teachers to take on such roles, administrators would not only see teachers become more invested in the school, but they would reap the added benefit of having increased faculty involvement in critical school functions.

Findings from this study show that it may be impossible to predict whether or not a TFA corps member will sign-on for a long-term career in teaching based on their early motivation and teaching experiences. It may likewise prove difficult to predict whether any new teacher will remain in the profession for the long term. However, by offering teachers opportunities for professional growth, by helping them form connections with their students and their colleagues, and by finding ways to keep them invested in the school community, school leaders can at least increase their chances of "hooking them in," as many of the teachers described in their stories of personal resilience.

Recommendations for TFA

The recommendations presented here are based on study findings and on the recommendations given by the interview participants in this study. Though 22 of the 23 interview participants disagreed with the statement, "Some people claim that Teach For America does more harm than good by creating a 'revolving door' of poorly-prepared teachers in high-poverty schools," many participants offered their own criticism of TFA. My first three recommendations for TFA are based on three areas of concern voiced by study participants: TFA inadvertently pushes teachers to leave the profession after two-years; TFA increasingly places corps members in charter schools, which does not provide an "authentic" look at the problems that plague public education; and TFA does not provide adequate support to corps members who are given special education placements.

Support Corps Members Who Want to Remain in Teaching

There was a feeling among seven participants that TFA may inadvertently be contributing to the "just a teacher" mentality. Lance explained:

> TFA diminished being a teacher, and there was never the question of, how do you want to advance your teaching career after your two years? The question was always, what are you going to do after two years? Are you going to med school, are you going to go to law school? We have all these ways to support you in this…It was never, what about a commitment [to teaching]? The first and major focus and push should have been what can we do to make sure that you stay in these schools and you remain successful, what can we do? My wife and my friends [who were also TFA corps members] always got that feeling as though you were somewhat looked down upon if all you ever wanted to be was a public school teacher.

Lance's statement was reiterated by four more of the teachers and two of the former teachers. The teachers felt that when they stayed past two years, there was a certain amount of judgment among the rest of their cohort who left, almost as if staying in teaching wasn't a worthy-enough

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endeavor. This was made all the more difficult when those who stayed felt that TFA did not do enough to encourage anyone to stay in the classroom beyond two years.

Granted, it is not TFA's mission to keep teachers in the profession for the long run, and the organization does not pretend otherwise. The teachers in this study acknowledged that TFA would lose applicants if they asked corps members to commit to the profession for more than two years. However, those corps members who do wish to stay in the profession should not be made to feel that they are "falling behind," as Charles stated. Instead, TFA should support corps members who might consider staying in the profession by helping them find opportunities to become more engaged in their schools or by helping them find placements in other schools should they choose to transfer. TFA can and should continue to provide assistance to those who ultimately wish to transition out of the classroom. However, TFA may stand to increase its impact on student achievement by helping corps members understand how they can make a career in teaching. Perhaps if corps members felt that they had the support, pride, and encouragement of TFA behind them, they would be more likely to remain committed to teaching.

Decrease the Placement of Corps Members in Charter Schools

Five of the participants felt that TFA places too many corps members in charter schools. According to the participants, life in a charter school is not an accurate portrayal of high-poverty education. Those who taught at large, comprehensive public schools felt that they were able to witness firsthand the many atrocities and injustices that are pervasive in public education, especially in a high-needs district. In a smaller charter school, teachers are likely to be similarly motivated and committed, administration is likely more supportive, classes are likely smaller, and resources are likely more available. This is not usually the reality in a large public school.

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Some of the teachers and former teachers initially taught in a public school and transferred to a charter school. Lori explained that though she moved to a charter school, she was grateful for the experience she gained from teaching in a large public school:

> I am so grateful that I started in a traditional public school and I feel like I learned so much more about how a school works and the state of education in California and public education….you get a better understanding of public education in America that you don't get at a charter school.

If TFA wants their corps members to gain a deeper understanding of the problems that plague public education in our nation's high-needs areas, they should make a concerted effort to place corps members in schools where the majority of high-poverty students are taught – in traditional, public schools.

Increase Support to Corps Members Assigned to Special Education

Two of the teachers and three of the former teachers were given special education assignments upon acceptance by TFA. None of these five participants had any background in education, let alone special education, and felt abysmally under-prepared for their assignments. Special education teachers are unique in that they have to write Individualized Education Plans (IEP's) which are legal documents that can be audited by the state. These teachers had to start writing IEP's almost immediately upon their first day of teaching, and none of them knew how to do it.

The two teachers and three former teachers learned how to write IEP's either by finding a mentor within the school or by relying on their graduate programs. They did not feel that TFA provided any support in this area. The three special education teachers who left the profession did not refer to TFA's lack-of-support in this area as contributing to their exit from the profession. However, had they been prepared to write IEP's, perhaps as part of their Summer Institute training, their first weeks on the job might have been much less stressful.

Continue to Encourage Corps Members to Take on New Roles and Projects

Both the teachers and the former teachers said that they became more invested in their schools by taking on new roles, such as coaching, teaching new classes, taking on new projects, etc. This was cited as a resilience strategy by the teachers; however, both teachers and former teachers felt more successful during their second year of teaching by becoming more invested in their school community.

TFA can contribute, not only to teacher resilience, but to corps members' sense of success and fulfillment during their initial two-year teaching commitment by encouraging them to take on new roles and projects within their school. Corps members should be given guidance on how to find areas of need within the school, along with tips and techniques they may use to approach school administration with their ideas. As findings from this study show that teachers are in "survival mode" during their first year of teaching, this type of support and encouragement may be better placed toward the end of corps member's first year in the classroom. Some of the participants said that TFA already does this. They felt that as corps members, they were encouraged to find areas in the school where they could build a sustainable impact. Based on the findings of this study, this helps corps members persist throughout their two-year commitment. By extending this type of support beyond corps members' two-year commitment, TFA can contribute to the resilience of those who choose to remain in the classroom beyond two years.

Continue to Offer Opportunities for Corps Members to Connect

When asked to describe external resources that they relied upon for support, all of the participants in this study said that they lean the most on the people around them. During their two-year commitment to TFA, 18 of the 23 interview participants said that they relied upon their TFA colleagues for support. This is an invaluable support network for new teachers who can

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easily feel isolated as they struggle to find their footing as a novice teacher. The participants referred to TFA-provided opportunities to network with other corps members, such as study sessions, professional development sessions, graduate courses, alumni mixers, etc. TFA should continue these efforts, as they are clearly appreciated by the participants in this study.

Limitations

Though I took absolute care to design and carry out a thoughtful, balanced, and objective study, there are a few limitations that are important to note. First, all data in this study was self-reported. I have no way of knowing how accurate and truthful participants were in their responses. However, I tried to lessen the impact of this limitation by carefully comparing interview participants' responses to their survey responses. Where a discrepancy was noticed, I asked the participant to expound on their response. For example, if he or she indicated a certain challenge on the survey that they did not discuss in the interview, I asked for clarification.

A second limitation of this study is that findings may not be generalizable to the larger population of TFA corps members, given that the sample size was so small and was drawn only from former corps members who are connected to TFA-Los Angeles, either because they now live in this area or because they taught in this area. Furthermore, the way in which participants were recruited for the study may have led to a sample of participants that was skewed in a certain direction. The link to the Internet survey was distributed in three ways: it was posted in the TFA monthly Alumni Bulletin; members of TFA-Los Angeles' alumni team sent the link directly to former corps members that fit the study criteria; and I sent the link to my own peers who either knew or worked with former TFA corps members. It is possible that those who opted to take the survey did so out of a feeling of obligation to TFA or to their colleague or supervisor who sent them my link. It is also possible that those who opted to take my survey did so because they

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maintain a vested interest in TFA or in education, a possibility that is supported by the fact that many of the former teachers who participated remain working in an education-related capacity. Had I been able to distribute the survey to a wider population of former TFA corps members, I might have gained a different perspective that included people who left education entirely or who perhaps had a less positive experience with TFA. However, it was impossible within the scope of my own resources to recruit participants on a larger scale. I had to recruit participants within the confines of what TFA-Los Angeles was willing to do, and in this case, they were willing to advertise in their monthly Alumni Bulletin, and they were willing to contact participants directly.

A third limitation of this study pertains to an assumption I made regarding teacher quality. Specifically, I assume that high-quality teachers are those that possess high academic abilities. However, this assumption is based on research presented in my review of the literature that shows that the academic ability of teachers has been positively correlated with student achievement. Still, I have no way of truly knowing how "high-quality" each teacher in this study is in practice. Likewise, I do not have any way to measure each participant's true academic ability, thought I do know that TFA is highly selective and that academic achievement is part of their selection criteria. Therefore, I felt it was safe to assume that the participants in this study were highly academically-able.

Finally, though I am confident in my findings regarding the teachers' resilience up to this point, I have no way of ensuring that the 14 teachers that I interviewed will remain in the profession beyond this year. I tried to lessen the impact of this limitation by asking in the survey and in the interview if the teachers intended to return to the profession. Though they all indicated that they have no immediate plans to leave, I have no way to verify this other than to take them at their word.

Future Research Considerations

Though all of the participants in this study shared similar teaching experiences, it is possible that there are regional differences that contribute to a different set of challenges. Indeed, the one former teacher in this study who taught in South Texas described experiences that were different from those of the teachers in Los Angeles, though many of the teaching challenges were similar. TFA places corps members in both urban and rural regions. The experiences of teachers in Los Angeles might be very different from teachers in the Mississippi Delta, or perhaps the challenges faced by teachers in high-poverty schools are not unique to a particular region. Therefore, future research may extend this type of study to other regions in which TFA places corps members.

Future research in teacher resilience may extend the present definition of teacher quality to include other measures. Perhaps teacher quality is better measured through observation, student and parent feedback, or student growth. Though some research on teacher retention has used an extended definition of teacher quality, most of the research is quantitative, and the data was used to show that teachers possessing such attributes tend to sort away from low-performing schools. Such studies were presented in my review of the literature. However, none of these studies used these different measures of teacher quality to explore why such teachers decide to stay in challenging schools. Certainly, TFA teachers in my study are not the only high-quality teachers who decide to stay in the profession. Future research should explore why high-quality teachers, as measured by a variety of indicators, decide to stay in challenging, high-poverty schools.

Finally, TFA recruits very academically-able graduates of some of the nation's most competitive universities to teach in some of the most challenging schools in the country. Can

such efforts be duplicated? Can we attract high-quality people into teacher education programs to begin with, rather than rely on such teachers to enter the profession through an alternate pathway? It is likely that TFA is an attractive option to high-ability college graduates because they only ask for a two-year commitment. However, there are academically-able people who enter the profession without the help of TFA. What motivates such people to enter the profession? Future research in this area may inform how teacher preparation programs attract and recruit teaching candidates.

Concluding Remarks

Society's view of teachers is not likely to change in the short term, and public schools, particularly high-poverty schools, will continue to struggle to attract and retain high-quality teachers until the teaching profession is advanced in terms of pay, autonomy, and prestige. TFA has been successful in making teaching prestigious but only for a two-year teaching commitment. TFA has not been successful in keeping large numbers of teachers in the profession; however, that is also not necessarily their intention. Instead, it will take a consistent and concerted effort among educational leaders and policy makers to be a part of a movement that advances society's perception of teachers by paying and treating teachers as professionals. This includes eliminating barriers that keep school and district leaders from holding ineffective and unprofessional teachers accountable for their actions. Furthermore, by ensuring that motivated and talented teachers have multiple opportunities for growth and are empowered to take on new projects, roles, and leadership positions, school and district leaders can at least increase the likelihood that such teachers will remain invested enough to stay.

There is much that we can do to help teachers persist, as described in this study, but we have to get them in the classroom first. Perhaps the most significant contribution of this study is

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that it sheds light on the notion that some of our nation's brightest and most energetic college graduates wonder if the title of "teacher" is beneath them. How can we expect to advance our teaching force if our best and brightest do not want to enter the profession? More importantly, what does this say about our nation's view of the teaching profession? We are impressed by doctors and lawyers. We are not impressed by teachers. However, I can say with certainty that the teachers I had the pleasure of speaking to for this study are extraordinary. No matter how they came to the profession, it cannot be denied that they are having a positive impact now that they are here. We should do everything in our power to keep them.

Survey Protocol

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1. Consent and Study Information (Everyone)

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LOS ANGELES
STUDY INFORMATION SHEET

Teacher Resilience in High-Poverty Schools: How Do High Quality Teachers Become Resilient?

Kate Merrill is conducting a research study as her dissertation in partial fulfillment of the degree of Doctorate in Education (Ed. D.) in Educational Leadership through the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). This research is being conducted under the guidance of Robert Cooper, Ph.D. and Diane Durkin, Ph.D.

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because of your teaching experience in high-poverty schools through Teach for America, Los Angeles. Your participation in this research study is voluntary. Your decision to participate in this study will not in any way adversely affect your relationship with Teach for America.

Why is this study being done?

The purpose of this study is to understand how and why high-quality teachers persist in high-poverty schools, despite being assigned to schools that typically experience high rates of teacher turnover. Teach for America provides a fitting context for this study because the organization recruits high-ability college graduates to teach in schools that typically do not receive teachers with such high academic qualities. This study seeks to understand factors that play into high-quality teachers' decisions to stay in or to leave the teaching profession.

What will happen if I take part in this research study?

If you volunteer to participate in this study, the researcher will ask you to do the following:
- Respond to a 20-30 minute online survey.
- If you are willing, participate in a 60-90 minute interview with the researcher.

How long will I be in the research study?

Participation in the survey will take a total of about 20 minutes. If you volunteer and are selected for an interview following the survey, the researcher will contact you on or before January 31, 2013. Interviews will take place either via Skype or at an agreed-upon location between February and March 2013 and will last approximately 60-90 minutes.

Are there any potential risks or discomforts that I can expect from this study?

There are no anticipated risks or discomforts.

Are there any potential benefits if I participate?

You will not directly benefit from the study.

The results of this research may inform how Teach for America and high-poverty schools support and nurture high-quality teachers.

Will I be paid for participating?

- By participating in the online survey, you will be placed in a drawing for a $100 American Express gift card.
- If you volunteer and are selected to participate in an interview, you will receive a $10 Starbucks gift card and will be placed in a drawing for a $50 American Express gift card.

Will information about me and my participation be kept confidential?

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can identify you will remain confidential. It will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Your survey responses will remain confidential and will be monitored and stored through Qualtrics.com's secure server. This data will only be accessed by the researcher. If you are asked to participate in an interview, you have the right to review the audio files made as part of the study to determine whether they should be edited or erased in whole or in part. Audio files will be deleted once they are transcribed, and all identifying information will be deleted and replaced with pseudonyms.

What are my rights if I take part in this study?

- You can choose whether or not you want to be in this study, and you may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time.
- Whatever decision you make, there will be no penalty to you, and no loss of benefits to which you were otherwise entitled.
- You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.

Who can I contact if I have questions about this study?

- **The research team:**
  If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, you can talk to one of the researchers. Please contact:
  - Kate Merrill, 505-400-8365, kmansi98@yahoo.com, kmmerrill@ucla.edu
  - Dr. Robert Cooper (dissertation co-chair), 310-267-2494, cooper@gseis.ucla.edu
  - Dr. Diane Durkin (dissertation co-chair), 310-825-0614, durkin@humnet.ucla.edu

- **UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program (OHRPP):**
  If you have questions about your rights while taking part in this study, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the researchers about the study, please call the OHRPP at 310-825-7122 or write to:

  UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program
  11000 Kinross Avenue, Suite 211, Box 951694
  Los Angeles, CA 90095-1694

  Please note that completion of the survey indicates your consent to participate in the survey portion of the study. You may withdraw yourself from the study at any point during the survey simply by closing your Internet browser.

  If you are willing to participate in an interview with the researcher, you will have a chance to indicate as much at the end of the survey.

  You may keep your survey responses anonymous. However, if you wish to be eligible for the $100 American Express gift card, or if you are willing to participate in an interview, you will need to provide your contact information at the conclusion of the survey. This information will only be seen by the researcher and will ONLY be used to contact you in the event that you are selected for the gift card and/or for an interview.

  Everything you report in an interview and on this survey will remain completely confidential.

2. Background Questions (Everyone)

2.1. What is your gender?
- Male
- Female

2.2. To which racial or ethnic group do you most identify?
- White/Caucasian
- Black/African-American
- Hispanic/Latino
- Asian
- Pacific Islander
- American Indian/Native American
- Multiracial
- Other

2.3. Of which Teach For America cohort are you an alumnus?
- [Dropdown Menu, 1990-2010]

2.4. Did you major or minor in Education?
- Yes
- No

2.5. Does your undergraduate coursework include any courses in Education? If yes, how many Education courses did you take? If no, select '0.'
- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4

	5
	5+

3.1. Do you currently work in Education?
- Yes
- No

Answer to 3.1 is *YES*		Answer to 3.1 is *NO*
3.2. In what capacity? • Teacher (public or charter school) • Teacher (private school) • Administration (public or charter school) • Administration (district level) • Higher Education • Educational non-profit or foundation • I work for Teach For America • Other (please specify)		3.3 Please provide a brief description of your current occupation.
Answer to 3.2 is *Teacher or Admin (public or charter school)*	**Answer to 3.2 is *Teacher or Admin (private school), Admin (district level), Higher Education, Non-profit, or TFA***	
3.4 How would you describe the primary socio-economic status (SES) of the student population in your school? • Low-income • Low- to middle-income • Middle income • Middle – high-income • High-income		
3.5 How many years have you taught at the K-12 classroom level (do not include this year if you are still teaching)? • 2 years • 3 years • 4 years • 5 years • 6 years • 7 years • 8 years • 9 years • 10 years • More than 10 years	3.6 How many years did you teach in a public or charter school classroom? • 1 year • 2 years • 3 years • 4 years • 5 years • 6 years • 7 years • 8 years • 9 years • 10 years • More than 10 years	
Answer to 3.2 is *Teacher (public or charter school)*	**Answer to 3.2 is *Admin (public or charter school), Teacher or Admin (private school), Admin (district level), Higher Education, Non-profit, or TFA***	**Answer to 3.1 is *NO***
4.1 How would you best describe your career aspirations over the next three years? • I hope to remain in a teaching position at my current school		

location or at different school that serves a similar student population. • I hope to attain a school leadership position at my current school location or at a different school that serves a similar student population. • I hope to attain a district leadership position in my current school district or in a district that serves a similar student population. • I hope to transfer to a teaching or leadership position in a wealthier district. • I plan to remain in education but in another capacity not listed (please specify). • I plan to leave the education profession entirely. • I am unsure at this point.		

5.1 Which of the following BEST describes your primary motivation in deciding to apply to Teach For America?
• I wasn't ready for graduate school and wanted to do something meaningful in the meantime.
• I thought that my experience with TFA would enhance my job prospects after my two-year commitment was over.
• I have always thought that I might like to be a teacher, and TFA gave me the opportunity to try it out.
• I wanted to make a difference in the lives of students.
• I was inspired by TFA's mission.
• I became interested in TFA because I had friends who had applied to or been accepted by TFA in the past.
• Other (please specify)

5.2 When you first joined Teach For America, how many years did you expect to remain in the teaching profession?
• Less than 2 years
• 2 years
• 3 years
• 4-5 years
• More than 5 years

5.3 Think back to your first year of teaching. Was the experience easier or harder than you initially expected it to be?
• Easier
• Harder
• About as easy/hard as I expected

5.4 What did you find to be the MOST difficult aspect of teaching during your two-year commitment to Teach For America? You may choose up to THREE.
• Lack of curriculum resources
• Poor school environment
• Lack of support from administration
• Lack of support from other teachers
• Lack of support from students' parents
• Dealing with student disciplinary issues
• Classroom management
• Pressure to perform well on state exams
• Understanding the curriculum

• Time management		
• Balancing work and personal life		
• Exhaustion or general feeling of being overwhelmed		
• Living on a teacher's salary		

5.5 Of the types of support listed below, which, if any, did your rely upon the MOST during your two-year commitment to Teach For America?

- Guidance or advice from other teachers within the school
- Friendships with other TFA teachers
- Guidance and/or support from TFA Los Angeles
- Guidance and/or support from graduate school courses and instructors
- District-provided professional development
- New-teacher induction programs within the school or district
- Emotional support from family and friends

	NOTE: This is the end of the survey for those who answered 3.2 as *Teacher (private school), Admin (public or charter school), Admin (district)* and *Admin (private school)* - skip to contact information.	
Answer to 3.2 is *Teacher (public or charter school)*	**Answer to 3.2 is *Higher Education, Non-profit, or TFA***	**Answer to 3.1 is *NO.***
	6.1 At what point did you decide that you did not want to remain in the teaching profession? • During my first year of teaching. • During my second year of teaching. • During my third year of teaching. • At some point beyond my third year of teaching. • I always knew that I did not want to stay in the teaching profession beyond my commitment to TFA. • I can't remember when I made the decision.	
	6.2 Which, if any, of these factors or experiences contributed to your decision to leave the teaching profession? You may choose up to THREE. • I received a job offer outside of K12 public education. • I was accepted into a graduate school program. • I wanted to find a job that paid a better salary. • I was laid off and/or my contract was not renewed due to budget cutbacks. • I was not able to earn my teaching credential. • I felt that I did not receive enough support from administration/parents/the community. • I felt burnt out. • I did not enjoy my teaching experience. • I wanted to spend more time with my family. • I felt I could make a bigger impact on education outside of the school/classroom. • I always knew that I did not want to stay in the profession for the long term. • I don't remember when I made the decision. • Other	
Answer to 3.2 is *Teacher (public or charter school)*	**Answer to 3.2 is *Higher Education, Non-profit, or TFA***	**Answer to 3.1 is *NO.***

7.1 At what point did you decide that you wanted to stay in the teaching profession beyond your two-year commitment to Teach For America? • During my first year of teaching. • During my second year of teaching. • During my third year of teaching. • At some point after my third year of teaching. • I always knew that I wanted to stay in the profession beyond my two-year commitment to TFA. • Although I am currently teaching, I am not sure that I want to remain in the profession. • I don't remember.		
7.2 Which, if any, of these factors or experiences contributed to your decision to stay in the teaching profession beyond your two-year commitment to Teach For America? You may choose up to THREE • I could not find a job outside of K12 public/charter education. • I want to eventually go into administration, and teaching experience is required for that career path. • I could see the difference I was making in students' lives and wanted to continue this impact. • I wanted to make positive changes within my school or within the local community. • I really enjoy the curriculum that I teach. • I really enjoy working with students. • I have formed positive relationships with my colleagues. • The administration in my school has been very supportive of me. • The new-teacher induction or mentoring program in my school or district provided me with ongoing support. • The school calendar is conducive to my family life. • I always knew that I wanted to stay in the teaching profession. • I don't remember what led to my decision to stay in the teaching profession.		

• Other		

8.1 If you would like to be placed in a drawing for a $100 Visa gift card, please provide your contact information below. Your contact information will remain confidential and will only be seen by the researcher.
- Name
- Email Address
- Phone Number

8.2 I would like to interview some of you to better understand how your teaching experiences have contributed to your decision to stay in or to leave the teaching profession. Everyone who is selected and agrees to an interview will receive a $10 Starbucks gift card, and you will be placed in another drawing for a $50 Visa gift card. Everything that you report in an interview and on this survey will remain completely confidential. Interviews will take place between January and February 2013 and will be conducted via Skype. Are you willing to participate in an interview?
- Yes
- No

APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol for Teachers

Background Questions
- What grade and subject level do you currently teach?
- How long have you taught this grade and subject?
  - What other grades and subjects have you taught?
- How long have you taught at this particular school?
  - In what other schools have you taught and for how long?

Interview Questions

1. Tell me a little bit about why you decided to apply to Teach For America.
   PROBES:
   - In your survey, you indicated that _____ motivated your decision to apply. Tell me a little more about that.
   - How did you hear about TFA?
   - What experiences did you expect to gain from TFA?
   - Did your upbringing/childhood experiences/college experiences influence your interest in TFA?
   FOLLOW UP:
   - What were your career aspirations before applying to TFA?

2. Tell me about your initial two-year teaching commitment. What did you find to be the most difficult aspect of teaching at that time?
   PROBES:
   - How did you deal with such difficulties?
   FOLLOW UP:
   - What did you find to be the most rewarding aspect of teaching at that time? How did these rewards help you to persist?

3. From your first year of teaching to the end of your two-year commitment, how did your perception of the teaching profession change?
   FOLLOW UP:
   - How did you change as a teacher over that two-year period?
   - ***What made you decide to come back for Year 3?*** (based on survey response)

4. Beyond the changes you just discussed, how have you changed from your first day of teaching to *now*?
   PROBES:
   - How have your perceptions of education changed?
   - How have you changed as a teacher?
   - Have your professional expectations changed? In what way(s)?
   - What has contributed to this change?

5. In your survey, you indicated that you knew you realized that you wanted to stay in the teaching profession during your _____ year of teaching. Tell me a little more about how or why you knew at this point that you wanted to stay in the teaching profession.

> PROBES:
> - Was there a "turning-point" when you decided that you actually did want to make teaching your career?
> - Were you surprised by this decision? Were others surprised by this decision?
> - During this time, were you considering any other career options?
>
> FOLLOW UP:
> - Could someone or some event have changed your mind and caused you to leave the teaching profession?

6. Tell me about a time after your two-year commitment that you questioned your decision to remain in the classroom.

> PROBE:
> - What other options were you weighing?
> - What sorts of questions were you asking yourself?
> - At what point(s) in your career did this happen?
>
> FOLLOW UP:
> - What made you come back around and realize that you had made the right decision?

7. In addition to the situation you just described, what other professional challenges have you faced that you eventually overcame?

> PROBES:
> - What was the challenge?
> - How did you overcome it?

8. How do you think overcoming the types of challenge you just described helped you to grow professionally?
> - How did such challenges affect your commitment to teaching?

9. When you have those days that the students are unmotivated, you are exhausted, or the work is piling up, what keeps you motivated to come back for another day?

10. What external resources do you draw on for support? How do you think these resources contribute to your ability or desire to remain in the classroom?

> FOLLOW UP:
> - Are these the same resources you relied upon during your early years of teaching?
> - Are there resources you *wish* you had had during your early years of teaching?
>
> PROBES:
> - For example…Do you draw on friends/colleagues/family for support?
> - Professional organizations?
> - Classroom resources – grants, supplies, training, etc.?

11. Some people claim that Teach For America does more harm than good by creating a "revolving door" of poorly-prepared teachers in high-poverty schools. How would you respond to such critics?

APPENDIX C

Interview Protocol for Former Teachers

Background Questions
- What is your current job title?
- How long did you teach? What/where did you teach?

Interview Questions

1. Tell me a little bit about why you decided to apply to Teach For America.
    PROBE :
    - In your survey, you indicated that _____ motivated your decision to apply. Tell me a little more about that.
    - How did you hear about TFA?
    - What experiences did you expect to gain from TFA?
    - Did your upbringing/childhood experiences/college experiences influence your interest in TFA?
    FOLLOW UP:
    - What were your career aspirations before applying to TFA?

2. Tell me about your initial two-year teaching commitment. What did you find to be the most difficult aspect of teaching at that time?
    PROBES:
    - How did you deal with such difficulties?
    FOLLOW UP:
    - What did you find to be the most rewarding aspect of teaching at that time? How did these rewards help you to persist?

3. From your first year of teaching to the end of your two-year commitment, how did your perception of the teaching profession change?
    FOLLOW UP:
    - How did you change as a teacher over that two-year period?
    - (If taught beyond year 2)
        o What made you decide to come back for a third year of teaching?

4. Upon accepting TFA's offer, did you always know that you wanted to leave the profession after your two-year commitment?
    FOLLOW UP – If YES to Q4
    - What reasons did you have for not wanting to make teaching a long-term career?
    - Could someone or something have changed your mind and caused you to stay in the teaching profession?
    FOLLOW UP – If NO or UNSURE to Q4
    - Talk to me about when and how you realized that you did not want to remain in the profession beyond your two-year commitment. Can you pinpoint a "turning-

point" when you decided that you definitely did not want to make teaching your career?

- Could someone or something have changed your mind and caused you to stay in the teaching profession?

PROBES:

- What precipitated this decision?
- Were you surprised by this decision? Were others surprised by this decision?
- How long had you been teaching at this point?
- Were you considering other career options at this time?

5. Was there ever a time that you questioned your decision to leave the teaching profession?

PROBES

- What other options were you weighing?
- What sorts of questions were you asking yourself?
- At what point in your career did this happen?

FOLLOW UP:

- What made you come back around and realize that you had made the right decision?

FOLLOW UP (if no to Q5):

- What makes you feel sure that you made the right decision to leave the teaching profession?

6. Describe a time during your teaching career that you faced a professional challenge that you eventually overcame.

PROBES:

- What was the challenge?
- How did you overcome it?

FOLLOW UP:

- How did this challenge affect your commitment to teaching?

7. When you were teaching, what external resources did you draw on for support?

PROBES:

- For example…Do you draw on friends/colleagues/family for support?
- Professional organizations?
- Classroom resources – grants, supplies, training, etc.?

FOLLOW UP:

- Were there other resources that you *wish* you had had?
- ***Would the presence of these resources have affected your decision to remain in the classroom?***

8. Some people would claim that Teach For America does more harm than good by creating a "revolving door" of poorly-prepared teachers in high-poverty schools. How would you respond to such critics?

APPENDIX D

Survey Responses of Full Group

		Teacher	Non-Teacher	Total
What is your gender?	Male	16	9	25
	Female	23	15	38
Total		39	24	63

		Teacher	Non-Teacher	Total
To which racial or ethnic group do you most identify?	White/Caucasian	24	12	36
	Black/African American	3	2	5
	Hispanic/Latino	6	5	11
	Asian	2	0	2
	Pacific Islander	2	0	2
	Multiracial	2	5	7
Total		39	24	63

		Teacher	Non-Teacher	Total
Of which TFA Los Angeles cohort are you an alumnus?	1990	0	1	1
	1992	1	0	1
	1994	1	0	1
	1995	0	1	1
	1997	3	0	3
	1998	0	1	1
	1999	1	1	2
	2000	0	1	1
	2001	2	0	2
	2002	2	1	3
	2003	1	2	3
	2004	4	2	6
	2005	5	3	8
	2006	4	5	9
	2007	3	1	4
	2009	3	0	3
	2010	8	2	10
Total		38	21	59

		Teacher	Non-Teacher	Total
Did you major or minor in Education?	Yes	1	2	3
	No	38	22	60
Total		39	24	63

		Teacher	Non-Teacher	Total
Does your undergraduate coursework include any courses in Education? If yes, how many Education courses did you take? If no, selet '0.'	0	28	10	38
	1	6	7	13
	2	2	6	8
	3	2	0	2
	More than 5	1	1	2
Total		39	24	63

		Teacher	Non-Teacher	Total
Do you currently work in Education?	Yes	39	8	47
	No	0	16	16
Total		39	24	63

		Teacher	Non-Teacher	Total
In what capacity? (If answered 'Yes' above)	Teacher (public or charter school)	39	0	39
	Higher Education	0	4	4
	Educational non-profit or foundation	0	4	4
Total		39	8	47

		Teacher
Teachers - How would you describe the primary SES of the student population in your school?	Low-income	36
	Low- to middle-income	3
Total		39

		Teacher	Non-Teacher	Total
Years of Classroom Teaching Experience	2 years	6	9	15
	3 years	7	4	11
	4 years	1	3	4
	5 years	2	5	7
	6 years	4	1	5
	7 years	6	0	6
	8 years	2	0	2
	9 years	1	1	2
	10 years	2	0	2
	10+ years	8	1	9
Total		39	24	63

		Frequency	Percent
Teachers - How would you BEST describe your career aspirations over the next three years?	I hope to remain in a teaching position at my current school location or at different school that serves a similar student population.	16	41.0
	I hope to attain a school leadership position at my current school location or at a different school that serves a similar student population.	6	15.4
	I hope to attain a district leadership position in my current school district or in a district that serves a similar student population.	2	5.1
	I plan to remain in education but in another capacity not listed.	5	12.8
	I plan to leave the education profession entirely.	3	7.7
	I am unsure at this point.	7	17.9
	Total	39	100.0

			Teacher	Non-Teacher	Total
Which of the following BEST describes your primary motivation in deciding to apply to Teach For America?	I wasn't ready for graduate school and wanted to do something meaningful in the meantime.	Count	3	1	4
		% within Teaching Status	7.7%	4.2%	6.3%
	I thought that my experience with TFA would enhance my job prospects after my two-year commitment was over.	Count	2	1	3
		% within Teaching Status	5.1%	4.2%	4.8%
	I have always thought that I might like to be a teacher, and TFA gave me the opportunity to try it out.	Count	10	5	15
		% within Teaching Status	25.6%	20.8%	23.8%
	I wanted to make a difference in the lives of students.	Count	7	9	16
		% within Teaching Status	17.9%	37.5%	25.4%
	I was inspired by TFA's mission.	Count	13	7	20
		% within Teaching Status	33.3%	29.2%	31.7%
	I became interested in TFA because I had friends who had applied to or been accepted by TFA.	Count	2	0	2
		% within Teaching Status	5.1%	0.0%	3.2%
	Other (please describe)	Count	2	1	3
		% within Teaching Status	5.1%	4.2%	4.8%
Total		Count	39	24	63
		% within Teaching Status	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

'Other' Text Responses:
- No lawyer jobs were available
- I plan on starting an educational media production company and I wanted some experience in a classroom to gain a better understanding of what media tools would be most useful to classroom teachers.
- TFA's mission was aligned to my own personal life mission.

			Teacher	Non-Teacher	Total
When you first joined Teach For America, how many years did you initially expect to remain in the teaching profession?	2 years	Count	10	4	14
		% within Teaching Status	25.6%	16.7%	22.2%
	3 years	Count	1	0	1
		% within Teaching Status	2.6%	0.0%	1.6%
	4-5 years	Count	3	1	4
		% within Teaching Status	7.7%	4.2%	6.3%
	More than 5 years	Count	8	4	12
		% within Teaching Status	20.5%	16.7%	19.0%
	I knew I would stay for two years, but I wasn't sure beyond that.	Count	17	15	32
		% within Teaching Status	43.6%	62.5%	50.8%
Total		Count	39	24	63
		% within Teaching Status	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

			Teacher	Non-Teacher	Total
Think back to your first year of teaching. Was the experience easier or harder than you initially expected it to be?	Easier	Count	0	1	1
		% within Teaching Status	0.0%	4.2%	1.6%
	Harder	Count	30	13	43
		% within Teaching Status	76.9%	54.2%	68.3%
	About as easy/hard as I expected	Count	9	10	19
		% within Teaching Status	23.1%	41.7%	30.2%
Total		Count	39	24	63
		% within Teaching Status	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

			Teacher	Non-Teacher	Total
Which, if any, of the following did you find to be the MOST difficult aspects of teaching during your two-year commitment to Teach For America? You may choose up to THREE.	Lack of curriculum resources	Count	7	5	12
		% within Teaching Status	17.9%	20.8%	19.0%
	Poor school environment or climate	Count	15	6	21
		% within Teaching Status	38.5%	25.0%	33.3%
	Lack of support from administration	Count	9	7	16
		% within Teaching Status	23.1%	29.2%	25.4%
	Lack of support from students' parents	Count	4	0	4
		% within Teaching Status	10.3%	0.0%	6.3%
	Dealing with student disciplinary issues	Count	15	11	26
		% within Teaching Status	38.5%	45.8%	41.3%
	Classroom management	Count	14	8	22
		% within Teaching Status	35.9%	33.3%	34.9%
	Pressure to perform well on state exams	Count	4	1	5
		% within Teaching Status	10.3%	4.2%	7.9%
	Understanding the curriculum	Count	5	1	6
		% within Teaching Status	12.8%	4.2%	9.5%
	Time management	Count	3	5	8
		% within Teaching Status	7.7%	20.8%	12.7%
	Balancing work and personal life	Count	11	6	17
		% within Teaching Status	28.2%	25.0%	27.0%
	Exhaustion or general feeling of being overwhelmed	Count	24	11	35
		% within Teaching Status	61.5%	45.8%	55.6%
	Living on a teacher's salary	Count	1	2	3
		% within Teaching Status	2.6%	8.3%	4.8%
	Other	Count	1	4	5
		% within Teaching Status	2.6%	16.7%	7.9%
Total		Count	39	24	63

*Percentages and total count based on respondents.

'Other' Text Responses:
- Coordinating and applying all the extra programs and interventions we were expected to implement.
- The irony of learning how to be an effective teacher, while simultaneously being effective.
- Having taught in a school that was very close to my family, I felt an at times overwhelming pressure to succeed and improve every day. I also knew that I'd very quickly hear about any unsuccessful lessons very quickly - it was a small community and word travels fast.
- Continual reassignment of courses based on migratory attendance of students. I never taught the same course twice.
- Lack of training for Special Education (IEPs, documentation, behavior plans, accommodations, SpEd law, etc.). I worked as a RSP teacher, so these aspects were crucial for me to be successful (yet TFA did not do a very good job of providing the support/training).

			Teacher	Non-Teacher	Total
Of the types of support listed below, which, if any, did you rely upon the MOST during your two-year commitment to Teach For America?	Guidance or advice from other teachers within the school	Count	16	10	26
		% within Teaching Status	41.0%	41.7%	41.3%
	Support from school administration	Count	0	1	1
		% within Teaching Status	0.0%	4.2%	1.6%
	Friendship with other TFA teachers	Count	11	7	18
		% within Teaching Status	28.2%	29.2%	28.6%
	Guidance and/or support from TFA Los Angeles	Count	1	1	2
		% within Teaching Status	2.6%	4.2%	3.2%
	Guidance and/or support from graduate school courses and instructors	Count	6	1	7
		% within Teaching Status	15.4%	4.2%	11.1%
	District-provided professional development	Count	0	2	2
		% within Teaching Status	0.0%	8.3%	3.2%
	Emotional support from family and friends	Count	4	2	6
		% within Teaching Status	10.3%	8.3%	9.5%
	Other (please describe)	Count	1	0	1
		% within Teaching Status	2.6%	0.0%	1.6%
Total		Count	39	24	63
		% within Teaching Status	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

'Other' Text Responses:
- Combination of collaboration with TFA members and older teachers within the school.

			Teacher	Non-Teacher	Total
Teachers - At what point did you know that you wanted to stay in the teaching profession beyond your two-year commitment to Teach For America? *Former Teachers* - At what point did you know that you did not want to remain in the teaching profession?	During my first year of teaching	Count	4	5	9
		% within Teaching Status	10.3%	21.7%	14.5%
	During my second year of teaching	Count	15	5	20
		% within Teaching Status	38.5%	21.7%	32.3%
	During my third year of teaching	Count	0	3	3
		% within Teaching Status	0.0%	13.0%	4.8%
	At some point beyond my third year of teaching	Count	3	6	9
		% within Teaching Status	7.7%	26.1%	14.5%
	I always knew that I wanted to stay/leave the profession after my two-year commitment to TFA	Count	8	1	9
		% within Teaching Status	20.5%	4.3%	14.5%
	Although I am currently teaching, I am not sure that I want to remain in the profession for the long term	Count	7	0	7
		% within Teaching Status	17.9%	0.0%	11.3%
	I don't remember	Count	2	3	5
		% within Teaching Status	5.1%	13.0%	8.1%
Total		Count	39	23	62
		% within Teaching Status	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

		Responses		Percent of Respondents
		N	Percent	
Former Teachers - Which, if any, of these factors or experiences contributed to your decision to leave the teaching profession? You may choose up to THREE.	I received a job offer outside of K12 public education.	3	5.6%	12.5%
	I was accepted into a graduate school program.	6	11.1%	25.0%
	I wanted to find a job that paid a better salary.	3	5.6%	12.5%
	I wanted to find a job in a less stressful environment.	7	13.0%	29.2%
	I was not able to earn my teaching credential.	1	1.9%	4.2%
	I felt that I did not receive enough support from administration/parents/the community.	1	1.9%	4.2%
	I felt burnt out.	8	14.8%	33.3%
	I did not enjoy my teaching experience.	1	1.9%	4.2%
	I wanted to spend more time with my family.	5	9.3%	20.8%
	I felt I could make a bigger impact on education outside of the school/classroom.	7	13.0%	29.2%
	I always knew that I did not want stay in the profession for the long term.	3	5.6%	12.5%
	Other (please describe)	9	16.7%	37.5%
Total		54	100.0%	225.0%

'Other' Text Responses:

- I wanted to ensure that students with disabilities get their educational rights. The law is my avenue.
- I wanted to leave for graduate school and then come back to teaching. I never grew tired of teaching--I loved it. Graduate school is just a process I wanted to take part in sooner rather than later.
- I started an educational nonprofit and was committed to working for that organization.
- I am still in the teaching profession, just in a different context.
- I wanted to continue to act on my interest in computer programming that began in college and see where it would take me in my career.
- My husband wanted to move back to our home state.
- Relocation.
- I was dismissed for under-performing.

		Responses		Percent of Respondents
		N	Percent	
Teachers - Which, if any, of these factors or experiences contributed to your decision to stay in the teaching profession beyond your two-year commitment to Teach For America? You may choose up to THREE.	I could not find a job outside of K12 public/charter education.	2	2.0%	5.1%
	I want to eventually go into administration, and teaching experience is required for that career path.	2	2.0%	5.1%
	I could see the difference I was making in students' lives and wanted to continue this impact.	26	25.7%	66.7%
	I wanted to make positive changes within my school or within the local community.	22	21.8%	56.4%
	I really enjoy the curriculum that I teach.	7	6.9%	17.9%
	I really enjoy working with students.	27	26.7%	69.2%
	I have formed many positive relationships with my colleagues.	8	7.9%	20.5%
	The school calendar is conducive to my family life.	1	1.0%	2.6%
	I always knew that I wanted to stay in the teaching profession.	3	3.0%	7.7%
	I don't remember what led to my decision to stay in the teaching profession.	1	1.0%	2.6%
	Other (please describe)	2	2.0%	5.1%
Total		101	100.0%	259.0%

'Other' Text Responses:
- I didn't think two years was enough time to really know if education was the right field for me or if I was any good at teaching. I also still felt like I had "work" to do.
- The opportunity to write a school plan.

APPENDIX E

Survey Responses of Interviewed Group

		Teacher	Non-Teacher	Total
What is your gender?	Male	7	2	9
	Female	7	7	14
Total		14	9	23

		Teacher	Non-Teacher	Total
To which racial or ethnic group do you most identify?	White/Caucasian	9	6	15
	Black/African American	1	0	1
	Hispanic/Latino	0	2	2
	Asian	2	0	2
	Pacific Islander	1	0	1
	Multiracial	1	1	2
Total		14	9	23

		Teacher	Non-Teacher	Total
Of which TFA Los Angeles cohort are you an alumnus?	1997	3	0	3
	2001	1	0	1
	2002	1	0	1
	2003	0	1	1
	2004	1	1	2
	2005	2	2	4
	2006	3	4	7
	2007	2	1	3
	2009	1	0	1
Total		14	9	23

		Teacher	Non-Teacher	Total
Did you major or minor in Education?	Yes	0	0	0
	No	14	9	23
Total		14	9	23

		Teacher	Non-Teacher	Total
Does your undergraduate coursework include any courses in Education? If yes, how many Education courses did you take? If no, selet '0.'	0	12	3	15
	1	1	3	4
	2	1	3	4
Total		14	9	23

		Teacher	Non-Teacher	Total
Do you currently work in Education?	Yes	14	4	18
	No	0	5	5
Total		14	9	23

		Teacher	Non-Teacher	Total
In what capacity? (If answered 'Yes' above)	Teacher (public or charter school)	14	0	14
	Higher Education	0	2	2
	Educational non-profit or foundation	0	3	3
Total		14	5	19

		Teacher
Teachers - How would you describe the primary SES of the student population in your school?	Low-income	12
	Low- to middle-income	2
Total		14

		Teacher	Non-Teacher	Total
Years of Classroom Teaching Experience	2 years	0	1	1
	3 years	2	2	4
	4 years	0	1	1
	5 years	1	4	5
	6 years	3	1	4
	7 years	2	0	2
	8 years	1	0	1
	10 years	1	0	2
	10+ years	4	0	3
Total		14	9	23

		Frequency	Percent
Teachers - How would you BEST describe your career aspirations over the next three years?	I hope to remain in a teaching position at my current school location or at different school that serves a similar student population.	10	71.4
	I hope to attain a school leadership position at my current school location or at a different school that serves a similar student population.	4	28.6
	Total	14	100.0

			Teacher	Non-Teacher	Total
Which of the following BEST describes your primary motivation in deciding to apply to Teach For America?	I wasn't ready for graduate school and wanted to do something meaningful in the meantime.	Count	2	0	2
		% within Teaching Status	14.3%	0.0%	8.7%
	I thought that my experience with TFA would enhance my job prospects after my two-year commitment was over.	Count	1	0	1
		% within Teaching Status	7.1%	0.0%	4.3%
	I have always thought that I might like to be a teacher, and TFA gave me the opportunity to try it out.	Count	4	3	7
		% within Teaching Status	28.6%	33.3%	30.4%
	I wanted to make a difference in the lives of students.	Count	0	4	4
		% within Teaching Status	0.0%	44.4%	17.4%
	I was inspired by TFA's mission.	Count	7	2	9
		% within Teaching Status	50.0%	22.2%	39.1%
Total		Count	14	9	23
		% within Teaching Status	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

			Teacher	Non-Teacher	Total
When you first joined Teach For America, how many years did you initially expect to remain in the teaching profession?	2 years	Count	6	0	6
		% within Teaching Status	42.9%	0.0%	26.1%
	4-5 years	Count	2	0	2
		% within Teaching Status	14.3%	0.0%	8.7%
	More than 5 years	Count	0	3	3
		% within Teaching Status	0.0%	33.3%	13.0%
	I knew I would stay for two years, but I wasn't sure beyond that.	Count	6	6	12
		% within Teaching Status	42.9%	66.7%	52.2%
Total		Count	14	9	23
		% within Teaching Status	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

			Teacher	Non-Teacher	Total
Think back to your first year of teaching. Was the experience easier or harder than you initially expected it to be?	Harder	Count	12	5	17
		% within Teaching Status	85.7%	55.6%	73.9%
	About as easy/hard as I expected	Count	2	4	6
		% within Teaching Status	14.3%	44.4%	26.1%
Total		Count	14	9	23
		% within Teaching Status	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

			Teacher	Non-Teacher	Total
Which, if any, of the following did you find to be the MOST difficult aspects of teaching during your two-year commitment to Teach For America? You may choose up to THREE.	Lack of curriculum resources	Count	2	0	2
		% within Teaching Status	14.3%	0.0%	8.7%
	Poor school environment or climate	Count	5	1	6
		% within Teaching Status	35.7%	11.1%	26.1%
	Lack of support from administration	Count	3	2	5
		% within Teaching Status	21.4%	22.2%	21.7%
	Lack of support from students' parents	Count	1	0	1
		% within Teaching Status	7.1%	0.0%	4.3%
	Dealing with student disciplinary issues	Count	5	3	8
		% within Teaching Status	35.7%	33.3%	34.8%
	Classroom management	Count	8	4	12
		% within Teaching Status	57.1%	44.4%	52.2%
	Pressure to perform well on state exams	Count	1	1	2
		% within Teaching Status	7.1%	11.1%	8.7%
	Understanding the curriculum	Count	3	1	4
		% within Teaching Status	21.4%	11.1%	17.4%
	Time management	Count	1	3	4
		% within Teaching Status	7.1%	33.3%	17.4%
	Balancing work and personal life	Count	3	3	6
		% within Teaching Status	21.4%	33.3%	26.1%
	Exhaustion or general feeling of being overwhelmed	Count	9	6	15
		% within Teaching Status	64.3%	66.7%	65.2%
	Living on a teacher's salary	Count	1	1	2
		% within Teaching Status	7.1%	11.1%	8.7%
	Other	Count	0	2	2
		% within Teaching Status	0.0%	22.2%	8.7%
Total		Count	14	9	23

*Percentages and total count based on respondents.

'Other' Text Responses:
- Coordinating and applying all the extra programs and interventions we were expected to implement.
- The irony of learning how to be an effective teacher, while simultaneously being effective.

			Teacher	Non-Teacher	Total
Of the types of support listed below, which, if any, did you rely upon the MOST during your two-year commitment to Teach For America?	Guidance or advice from other teachers within the school	Count	5	4	9
		% within Teaching Status	35.7%	44.4%	39.1%
	Friendship with other TFA teachers	Count	5	3	8
		% within Teaching Status	35.7%	33.3%	34.8%
	Guidance and/or support from TFA Los Angeles	Count	0	1	1
		% within Teaching Status	0.0%	11.1%	4.3%
	Guidance and/or support from graduate school courses and instructors	Count	2	0	2
		% within Teaching Status	14.3%	0.0%	8.7%
	Emotional support from family and friends	Count	2	1	3
		% within Teaching Status	14.3%	11.1%	13.0%
Total		Count	14	9	23
		% within Teaching Status	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

			Teacher	Non-Teacher	Total
Teachers - At what point did you know that you wanted to stay in the teaching profession beyond your two-year commitment to Teach For America? *Former Teachers* - At what point did you know that you did not want to remain in the teaching profession?	During my first year of teaching	Count	2	2	4
		% within Teaching Status	14.3%	22.2%	17.4%
	During my second year of teaching	Count	8	0	8
		% within Teaching Status	57.1%	0.0%	34.8%
	During my third year of teaching	Count	0	2	2
		% within Teaching Status	0.0%	22.2%	8.7%
	At some point beyond my third year of teaching	Count	2	3	5
		% within Teaching Status	14.3%	33.3%	21.7%
	I always knew that I wanted to stay/leave the profession after my two-year commitment to TFA	Count	1	0	1
		% within Teaching Status	7.1%	0.0%	4.3%
	Although I am currently teaching, I am not sure that I want to remain in the profession for the long term	Count	1	0	1
		% within Teaching Status	7.1%	0.0%	4.3%
	I don't remember	Count	0	2	2
		% within Teaching Status	0.0%	22.2%	8.7%
Total		Count	14	9	23
		% within Teaching Status	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

		Responses		Percent of Respondents
		N	Percent	
Former Teachers - Which, if any, of these factors or experiences contributed to your decision to leave the teaching profession? You may choose up to THREE.	I received a job offer outside of K12 public education.	1	4.2%	11.1%
	I was accepted into a graduate school program.	1	4.2%	11.1%
	I wanted to find a job that paid a better salary.	1	4.2%	11.1%
	I wanted to find a job in a less stressful environment.	4	16.7%	44.4%
	I felt that I did not receive enough support from administration/parents/the community.	1	4.2%	11.1%
	I felt burnt out.	5	20.8%	55.6%
	I did not enjoy my teaching experience.	1	4.2%	11.1%
	I wanted to spend more time with my family.	2	8.3%	22.2%
	I felt I could make a bigger impact on education outside of the school/classroom.	4	16.7%	44.4%
	I always knew that I did not want stay in the profession for the long term.	1	4.2%	11.1%
	Other (please describe)	3	12.5%	33.3%
Total		24	100.0%	266.7%

'Other' Text Responses:
- I wanted to ensure that students with disabilities get their educational rights. The law is my avenue.
- I started an educational nonprofit and was committed to working for that organization.
- I was dismissed for under-performing.

		Responses		Percent of Respondents
		N	Percent	
Teachers - Which, if any, of these factors or experiences contributed to your decision to stay in the teaching profession beyond your two-year commitment to Teach For America? You may choose up to THREE.	I want to eventually go into administration, and teaching experience is required for that career path.	1	2.6%	7.1%
	I could see the difference I was making in students' lives and wanted to continue this impact.	11	28.2%	78.6%
	I wanted to make positive changes within my school or within the local community.	10	25.6%	71.4%
	I really enjoy the curriculum that I teach.	3	7.7%	21.4%
	I really enjoy working with students.	8	20.5%	57.1%
	I have formed many positive relationships with my colleagues.	5	12.8%	35.7%
	Other (please describe)	1	2.6%	7.1%
Total		39	100.0%	278.6%

'Other' Text Responses:
- I didn't think two years was enough time to really know if education was the right field for me or if I was any good at teaching. I also still felt like I had "work" to do.

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