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# Teach For America and English Language Learners: Shortcomings of the Organization's Training Model

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## *Teach For America and English Language Learners*

### *Shortcomings of the Organization's Training Model*

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#### **Abstract**

*Teach For America (TFA) places novice teachers, referred to as corps members, in several regions across the United States that have among the highest English language learner (ELL) populations in the nation. In this paper, we present a policy and program analysis of TFA's training related to ELLs, arguing that the organization inadequately prepares teachers to work with this student population even though it places corps members in regions with high ELL populations. First, we describe the current Elementary and Secondary Education Act amendment that allows TFA corps members to be considered highly qualified without ELL-related training. Next, we analyze TFA's curriculum and teacher preparation approach specific to ELLs. We then describe alternative approaches, including an emerging residency model and a community-based program, which prepare teachers for specific local contexts and student populations. Drawing on these exemplars, we conclude with recommendations for TFA to modify its model in ways that would sufficiently prepare its corps to teach ELLs.*



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As the United States (U.S.) school-age population becomes increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse, all teachers must be prepared to support the social, emotional, cultural, linguistic, and academic development (Wrigley, 2000) of students who are not yet deemed proficient in English (Bunch, 2013). Nevertheless, a disproportionate number of these students, referred to as English language learners (ELLs), are taught by teachers without standard certification (Cohen & Clewell, 2007), including those in Teach For America (TFA) (Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, & Heilig, 2005; Kini, 2013).

Founded in 1990, TFA's aim is to close the "achievement gap" – a gap based on student scores on standardized assessments – that exists along racial and socio-economic lines (TFA, 2012d). The organization utilizes an alternative pathway to certification and enlists elite college graduates for placement as novice teachers, known as *corps members*, in low-income urban and rural schools (TFA, 2012d) in one of 46 regions across the United States (TFA, 2012a). Following a national, prescriptive curriculum for a five-week summer pre-service training (Farr, 2010; Teaching as Leadership, 2012), the model assumes that extensive teacher training is not necessary for graduates from top-tier universities to excel in the nation's most underserved schools. However, empirical research shows that TFA corps members are, at best, only as effective as other new teachers in the same schools, and turnover rates after three years are as high as 80 percent (Heilig & Jez, 2010). Such high turnover negatively affects student achievement overall (Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2012) and represents an investment loss for school districts, universities, and taxpayers (Heilig, 2012).

Based on this evidence, as well as on our experiences as former TFA corps members in Phoenix, Arizona, who felt vastly underprepared to meet the needs of our students, we believe that an overhaul of TFA's model is necessary for the program to contribute meaningfully to education reform. Indeed, we have argued elsewhere that TFA should adopt a teacher residency model and require longer tenures for its recruits (Hopkins, 2008, 2011). For the purposes of this paper, we focus on one population of students who are disproportionately served by TFA corps members – English language learners – in order to demonstrate the lack of training corps members receive related to the specific communities in which they serve.

ELLs are the fastest growing, yet often the most underperforming, student population in the United States (Gándara & Hopkins, 2010). As we will show, TFA's placement regions include cities with among the highest ELL populations in the country, yet TFA corps members receive little to no preparation specific to teaching ELLs before they enter classrooms (Heineke & Cameron, 2013b). Thus, even though federal policy deems TFA corps members to be "highly qualified" teachers, program recruits begin teaching with insufficient awareness of ELLs' educational needs and knowledge of pedagogical strategies that support ELLs' language and content knowledge development.

We begin our policy and program analysis by describing the nation's ELL population in terms of growth and need and outlining TFA placement in high-density ELL regions. Then, we critique the current Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) amendment that allows TFA corps members to be considered *highly qualified*. We will show that, while TFA was heavily involved in the passage of this amendment, the organization has done little to ensure that corps members have adequate training to work with the very students they will encounter. To demonstrate this lack of training, we analyze TFA's curriculum and preparation approach (Farr, 2010; Teaching as Leadership, 2012) specific to ELLs. In order to offer a more sound alternative to TFA's model, we next draw from our work as TFA-trained teachers and as teacher educators

and researchers (Heineke, 2009; Heineke & Cameron, 2013a, 2013b; Hopkins, 2008, 2012) to describe two alternate approaches for preparing teachers for the specific student populations they will serve, an emerging residency model (Schweig, Appelgate, & Quartz, 2010) and a community-based teacher education program (Ryan et al., under review). Drawing on these approaches, we conclude with recommendations for TFA to alter its model in ways that align with effective ELL teacher preparation practices.

### **English Language Learners and Teach For America in United States Schools**

Eleven million students in the U.S., or 20 percent of national school enrollment, speak a language other than English at home (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2010). About one-half of these students do not speak English well enough to be considered fluent and are therefore designated as ELLs. The numbers and percentages of ELLs are increasing in districts and schools across the nation. Specifically, several states in the Southeast and Midwest, such as Georgia and Wisconsin, have experienced dramatic increases in their ELL populations (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition [NCELA], 2010), and even states with traditionally high proportions of ELLs, such as California and Arizona, have experienced growth such that ELLs are present in nearly every classroom (Samson & Collins, 2012).

Notwithstanding rapid growth in the nationwide ELL population, five states have the highest percentage of linguistically diverse students and educate about 70 percent of the country’s ELLs: Arizona, California, Texas, New York, and Florida (Fry, 2008). Remarkably, these five states include the longest-standing and largest TFA regions, including Phoenix (started in 1994; 300 current corps members), Los Angeles (1990; 300 corps members) and the Bay Area (1991; 430 corps members), the Rio Grande Valley (1991; 140 corps members) and Houston (1991; 450 corps members), New York City (1990; 688 corps members), and Miami-Dade (2003; 300 corps members). In fact, among the 12 school districts in the U.S. with the highest ELL enrollments (Migration Policy Institute, 2010), 9 also have a large TFA presence (see Table 1). In addition, TFA places corps members in locales with rapidly expanding ELL populations (Cohen & Clewell, 2007), including Georgia (Atlanta Metro region) and Arkansas (Mississippi Delta region; TFA, 2012a).

Table 1

*Top English Language Learner Districts and Teach for America Regions*

Top School Districts by ELL Enrollment (Migration Policy Institute, 2010)	TFA Region that Partners in this District (Teach for America, 2012a)
Los Angeles, California	Los Angeles Region
New York City, New York	New York City Region

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Chicago, Illinois	Chicago Region
Miami-Dade, Florida	Miami-Dade Region
Houston, Texas	Houston Region
Clark County, Nevada	Las Vegas Valley Region
Dallas, Texas	Dallas-Fort Worth Region
Fort Worth, Texas	Dallas-Fort Worth Region
Denver, Colorado	Colorado Region
San Francisco, California	The Bay Area Region
Sacramento, California	Sacramento Region
Oakland, California	The Bay Area Region

The rapid growth in the ELL student population (NCELA, 2010), coupled with persistent gaps in achievement between ELLs and their peers (Fry, 2008), substantiate a significant concern for this population. ELLs perform lower than all other categories of students, except those in special education, on nearly every measure of academic progress, and these trends have endured over several years and continue across grade levels (Gándara & Hopkins, 2010). These disparities make evident that ELLs’ educational needs are not being met and motivate improvements in the quality of ELL instruction and the support that diverse students receive in the classroom.

For all students, having an effective teacher is the greatest in-school factor associated with their academic achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Haycock, 1998; Sanders & Rivers, 1996), a factor that is particularly important for vulnerable students such as ELLs (Gándara & Maxwell-Jolly, 2006). ELLs need opportunities to learn rigorous, relevant content in all academic areas while developing their English language proficiency, and teachers must be well-prepared to meet these dual academic and linguistic needs (Goldenberg & Coleman, 2010; Wrigley, 2000). Given that the majority of mainstream teachers have at least one ELL in their classrooms (NCELA, 2002), and the ELL population is increasing nationwide, it is imperative that all teachers be equipped with skills to effectively educate these students (Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008). Moreover, the newly-implemented Common Core State Standards place responsibility for literacy demands into the content areas (Bunch, Kibler, & Pimentel,

2012), including science and social studies, so that ELLs' language and literacy needs must be addressed not just by English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers and English Language Arts teachers, but also by mainstream teachers within the other content areas (Working Group on ELL Policy, 2010).

As responsibility for supporting ELLs is increasingly placed on all educators, teachers require additional training and preparation to learn how to address ELLs' unique social, emotional, cultural, linguistic, and academic needs (Wrigley, 2000). Experts in language education argue that all teachers should have knowledge of the first and second language acquisition processes and how to teach language forms and functions explicitly (Wong Fillmore & Snow, 2005). Others describe a host of additional competencies, including how to plan and execute rigorous content instruction that also supports students' English language development, knowledge of appropriate assessments and accommodations for ELLs, and willingness to incorporate students' language and culture into the curriculum (Lucas et al., 2008; Téllez & Waxman, 2006). Nevertheless, ELLs are disproportionately taught by teachers who lack appropriate teaching credentials or who have little, if any, training specific to meeting their needs (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; Gándara, Maxwell-Jolly, & Rumberger, 2008; Honawar, 2009). This lack of training is problematic in light of research that shows that teachers with specialized language training report using practices deemed important for ELLs significantly more often than teachers without such training (Hopkins, 2012, and Hopkins in press).

### **Teach For America Corps Members as Highly Qualified Teachers?**

The current authorization of the ESEA, known commonly as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), mandates that teachers in core academic subjects meet specific criteria to be considered *highly qualified* (NCLB, 2001); however, no federal regulations exist related to the specific qualifications for teachers who specialize in ESL or English language development (Working Group on ELL Policy, 2010). Additionally, the ESEA does not require that state departments of education include components in their teacher credentialing to prepare teachers for cultural or linguistic diversity. Thus, although the majority of teachers who work with ELLs lack sufficient preparation to meet their educational needs (Gándara et al., 2008; Honawar, 2009), federal policy does little to address this problem, a discrepancy that presents a significant equity challenge (Fry, 2008; Gándara & Hopkins, 2010; Gándara & Maxwell-Jolly, 2006).

Intensifying this challenge, during the regulatory process of NCLB, lawmakers added a significant loophole related to the definition of a *highly qualified teacher* (Russo, 2012). Originally, the law defined *highly qualified teachers* as fully prepared and certified professionals according to state laws, and the goal was that all teachers would be considered highly qualified by 2006. Further, the law prohibited unprepared and uncertified teachers from instructing low-income students and students of color at disproportionate rates. If a district or school faced a teacher shortage, administrators had the option to hire uncertified teachers, pending parental notification regarding the teachers' lack of preparation or certification (NCLB, 2001). Pushed forward in large part by the TFA organization (Russo, 2012), but opposed by some lawmakers who were instrumental in drafting NCLB, including Senator Ted Kennedy (Kennedy, 2002), a regulation (34 C.F.R. 200.56(a)(2)(ii)) allowed participants in alternative certification programs to be considered highly qualified and teach for as long as three years, even if they never completed training or passed certification tests (USDOE, 2002).

In 2007, low-income, minority parents in California filed a lawsuit against the alternative certification regulation, and the Ninth Circuit Court found this loophole to be invalid three years later (*Renee v. Duncan*, 2010). Faced with the threat of corps members not being considered highly qualified and therefore the eventual demise of the entire organization reliant on alternative pathways to certification, TFA swiftly lobbied to embed language regarding alternatively certified teachers into H.R. 3082, the *Continuing Appropriations and Surface Transportation Act* (Section 163, Public Law 111-242; Russo, 2012). Though opposed by several civil rights, disability, parent, community, education, and language organizations (Coalition for Teaching Quality, 2012), lawmakers approved and extended this highly qualified teacher amendment through the 2012-2013 school year, nullifying the low-income, minority parents' demands and concerns related to the adequate preparation of teachers for diverse classroom settings (Russo, 2012). Thus, TFA supported and upheld the placement of unprepared, unqualified teachers in schools and classrooms with the greatest need.

In a more recent turn of events, TFA faced a “showdown” in California related to whether or not corps members could be considered highly qualified without sufficient ELL-specific training (Cody, 2013). As the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing reconsidered its policy to give intern teachers an ELL authorization without completing the requisite ELL training, TFA collaborated with several members of the charter school community to oppose any and all changes to state teacher credentialing requirements (Cody, 2013). Yet, after reviewing testimony from national experts in ELL education, the Commission voted unanimously to require TFA and other intern teachers to complete 120 hours of pre-service training specific to ELLs (Baron, 2013). Put simply, the state of California, where the largest ELL population in the U.S. resides, determined that TFA teachers could not be considered highly qualified without training related to ELL instruction and assessment. To examine this issue further, we next examine the current scope and quality of TFA's pre-service preparation related to teaching ELLs.

### **Teach For America Corps Member Preparation for English Language Learners**

In order to prepare corps members for their two-year commitment to teach in low-income classrooms, TFA follows a five-phase continuum of development that begins at acceptance to the program and continues through the two years: (1) *pre-institute* work that requires preliminary readings and classroom observations, (2) *regional induction* to familiarize corps members with their placement regions, (3) *summer institute* to introduce corps members to TFA teaching, (4) *round zero* to provide initial support during the first weeks of teaching, and (5) *ongoing support* throughout the remainder of the two-year obligation (TFANet, 2012). Of these five phases, the summer institute encompasses TFA's pre-service preparation, where corps members learn about TFA's brand of pedagogy and practice prior to entering the classroom.

The five-week summer institute is held at one of nine locations, where corps members from three to six regions come together to work with TFA alumni and staff to develop “a foundation of knowledge, skills, and mindsets needed to be effective beginning teachers” (TFA, 2012b, p. 2). Whether attending institute in Atlanta, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, Mississippi Delta, New York City, Philadelphia, Phoenix, or Tulsa (TFA, 2012b), all corps members experience a standardized curriculum based on the TFA-developed *Teaching as Leadership* (TAL) framework (Farr, 2010; TAL, 2012a), while teaching students for a short portion of the

day in a summer school classroom (TFA, 2012b). At their school sites, corps members work with institute staff, mostly TFA alumni, who observe and provide feedback on classroom teaching, introduce pedagogical tenets of the TAL framework, and integrate basic literacy development into organizational knowledge, skills, and mindsets (TFA, 2012c). Although these staff members facilitate corps member training sessions, national TFA staff script the detailed 45- to 90-minute sessions in order to standardize and ground corps member preparation in the specific tenets of the organization, which emphasize leadership in the field of education over longevity in the classroom (TFA, 2012b, 2012c). In the analysis that follows, we examine TFA's written curriculum and training sessions, highlighting the dearth of training related specifically to ELLs.

TFA's 800-page, 37-chapter training guide is based on the TAL framework (Farr, 2010; TAL, 2012a) and centered on four key areas: (1) *Instructional Planning and Delivery*, (2) *Investment, Classroom Management, and Culture*, (3) *Diversity, Community, and Achievement*, and (4) *Literacy Development and Learning Theory*. In the pedagogically-focused curricular area, *Instructional Planning and Delivery*, ELLs are discussed in a six-page portion of a stand-alone chapter that presents strategies for differentiating instruction for students with special needs and ELLs (TAL, 2012b). There is no mention of ELLs in the narrative of the other chapters in that area, which describe general instructional practices used by "effective teachers in low-income communities" (Farr, 2010, p. 3). The materials state, "Students in special education and students who are learning English represent particular populations that merit unique sets of differentiated strategies. All teachers, no matter what their ultimate teaching assignment, will most certainly encounter students in need of these instructional strategies" (TAL, 2012b, p. 172).

Although numerous problems exist in TFA's approach, we present two core issues. First, TFA's equating of ELLs to students with special needs is highly problematic. Language-related needs should not be approached as learning deficits, as decades of empirical research has demonstrated that students' first language is a useful and important tool in the learning process (Francis, Lesaux, & August, 2006; Greene, 1997; Orellana & Eksner, 2006; Rolstad, Mahoney, & Glass, 2005; Slavin & Cheung, 2005; Willig, 1985). Second, TFA devotes just six pages of content to the instruction of ELLs specifically and simply suggests the use of "special kinds of differentiated instruction" (TAL, 2012b, p. 172), such as using context clues, modeling appropriate language, and valuing students' native languages, without providing theoretical support for these approaches or offering detailed descriptions of how these practices should be used effectively in instruction or assessment.

In addition to inadequate consideration for the needs of ELLs in the written TFA curriculum, the only pre-service preparation for corps members related to ELLs falls in one 90-minute training session, entitled *Planning Instruction to Meet the Needs of English Language Learners* (TAL, 2012; TFA, 2013). This session is the eighth of nine sessions in the area of Instructional Planning and Delivery facilitated by TFA institute staff, and it outlines generic, one-size-fits-all strategies for teaching ELLs without offering a foundation in language acquisition and development theories (Krashen, 1987; Wong Fillmore & Snow, 2002), or in the unique social, emotional, cultural, linguistic, and academic needs and abilities of ELLs (Wrigley, 2000).

During the 90 minutes, TFA institute staff members follow a script that accentuates the challenges and difficulties posed by ELLs. The script devotes just six minutes to second language acquisition and development theory, fifteen minutes to learning about input strategies, fifteen minutes to output strategies, and fifteen minutes to teaching vocabulary (TFA, 2013). The

input strategies emphasize making teachers' language comprehensible and include the use of visual aids for direct instruction, paraphrasing and repetition, realia and manipulatives, and songs, rhymes, and chants. The output strategies focus on scaffolding students' language, including explicit language structures and sentence frames, accountable turn-and-talk, and choral and echo responses. For each component, TFA institute staff can either spend the fifteen minutes modeling one strategy for corps members or asking corps members to review a handout on the strategies and to prepare a two-minute mini-lesson around one of them.

This stand-alone session is disconnected from training related to general teaching practices and contrasts with the extant research literature on ELL teacher preparation. In addition to general critiques of the condensed, five-week summer training (Darling-Hammond, Chung, & Frelow, 2002; Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; Hopkins, 2008), TFA's training session for ELLs focuses solely on basic input and output strategies without offering any information about how teachers can integrate language development and content instruction. Indeed, the simplified strategies presented in TFA's 90-minute training session are disconnected from language and learning theory, and the attention to direct instruction, repetition, sentence frames, and vocabulary represents a limited approach to ELL teaching that does not incorporate the literature on ELL instruction and assessment (August & Shanahan, 2008; Goldenberg & Coleman, 2010; O'Malley & Pierce, 1996; Ovando & Combs, 2012). Reducing the teaching of ELLs to "just good teaching" (deJong & Harper, 2005, p. 102), TFA sends corps members into linguistically diverse classrooms without a rigorous level of knowledge on second language acquisition theory or pedagogy that would allow them to provide linguistically responsive practice (García, Arias, Harris-Murri, & Serna, 2010; Lucas et al., 2008).

Moreover, we found no evidence that TFA institute staff members have any specialized training or expertise related to ELLs. Additionally, the scripted option that allows corps members to present strategies to one another in the training session assumes that just about anyone can easily figure out how to execute effective ELL pedagogy. This lack of attention to the specialized skills and training needed to teach both language and content contradicts current research that demonstrates the benefits of extensive preparation related to ELLs for classroom practice (Hopkins, 2012, and Hopkins in press). Finally, the assumption that corps members can learn to teach ELLs in just 90 minutes undermines the field of teacher education in general and ELL teacher preparation specifically.

In our own research, we have found that TFA corps members themselves call attention to their under-preparedness and lack of knowledge and qualifications for working with ELLs (Heineke & Cameron, 2013b). In a recent study related to TFA teacher preparation for ELLs, researchers surveyed and interviewed seven active corps members placed in English language development (ELD) classrooms in Phoenix, Arizona (Heineke & Cameron, 2013b). These first- and second-year corps members taught in classrooms with all ELLs and were mandated by state law to teach four hours of skills-based language instruction. They reflected on their TFA training and shared their lack of preparation for teaching ELLs, even though the organization placed them in 100 percent ELL classrooms. Despite attending the mandatory summer institute session on teaching ELLs, none of the corps members had any recollection of ELL-specific training. Shelly, a first-year corps member who attended TFA summer institute in Phoenix along with corps members from other culturally and linguistically regions such as Colorado, Hawai'i, and New Mexico (TFA, 2012a), described her surprise at the lack of training TFA provided related to ELLs:

I know that at Institute there is so much to do and so little time, and so I know that they just try to do the essential things, but honestly I was surprised that at Institute they didn't do anything with ELD, and I'm like, we're in Phoenix, Arizona [a linguistically diverse locale]... So, it was surprising to me that there was nothing about specifically teaching ELD or English language learners. (Heineke & Cameron, 2013b, p. 10)

Despite the stated mission of these TFA corps members to rigorously teach and demonstrate student achievement (Farr, 2010; TAL, 2012; TFA, 2012d) with classrooms of ELLs, they did not receive the preparation necessary to meet the unique needs of their students. Recognizing this core deficiency in TFA's method of ELL teacher preparation, we now examine approaches that offer more robust preparation for teachers of ELLs.

### **Alternative Approaches to Prepare Teachers of English Language Learners**

To contrast TFA's approach with more rigorous approaches to ELL teacher preparation, we selected two programs that attract teacher candidates similar to TFA and partner with the same districts in TFA regions, and that we have familiarity with based on our experiences in teacher education. Each program follows a different preparation model and is situated within a distinct language policy context. First, we describe an urban teacher residency program at a large, public university in the English-only state of California: the *Inspiring Minds through a Professional Alliance of Community Teachers* (IMPACT) at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Second, we outline a school- and community-based preparation model at a mid-sized, private university in the bilingual state of Illinois: *Teaching, Learning, and Leading with Schools and Communities* (TLLSC) at Loyola University, Chicago. Although these programs differ in their programmatic structures, both involve university faculty working with other educational stakeholders to prepare teachers for specific local contexts and student populations that to a great extent include ELLs.

#### *Inspiring Minds through a Professional Alliance of Community Teachers*

IMPACT is an urban teacher residency program built from a partnership between UCLA's teacher education program, the Los Angeles Small Schools Center, and one local district in the larger Los Angeles Unified School District (Schweig et al., 2010). The *Urban Teacher Residency model* (Berry, Montgomery, & Snyder, 2008) is a pathway meant to bridge the distance between the university and community and to ameliorate the *trial by fire* that alternatively certified teachers often experience. Distinct from the TFA alternative path to teaching, the IMPACT program utilizes an extended apprenticeship that allows teachers to engage in professional learning and practice in urban classrooms for a full school year, rather than for just five weeks. The 18-month program targets high-need areas of math, science, early childhood, and special education, and includes a one-year apprenticeship in an experienced teacher's classroom as well as induction support for an additional two years (Schweig et al., 2010). At the end of the program, after successfully completing a portfolio project and the state teacher performance assessment, candidates graduate with their teaching certification and a

Master's degree and pledge to teach in the Los Angeles Unified School District for at least three years.

To prepare to teach the large number of ELLs in the Los Angeles area, IMPACT participants first complete a combined second language acquisition and ELL methodology course, and content related to ELLs is integrated throughout other program coursework. This integration is important, given that research demonstrates improved teacher learning related to ELLs when a full-program approach rather than a one-course approach is taken (García et al., 2010). To achieve impactful teacher preparation for ELLs grounded in the unique needs of the culturally and linguistically diverse area of southern California (Gándara, Rumberger, Maxwell-Jolly, & Callahan, 2003), program staff work closely with community-based organizations to co-construct course curricula. Additionally, a unique component of IMPACT is that, throughout their residencies, candidates work on projects within their school communities. Grounded in a *funds of knowledge* (Moll & González, 1997) framework, candidates gather information about the assets, resources, and needs of the community by talking with parents, students, and community members; then, they identify meaningful ways to realize those assets in the classroom. Rather than focusing on generic input and output teaching strategies as TFA does, the IMPACT program prepares teachers to respond directly to ELLs' diverse needs by building on their cultural and linguistic assets.

### *Teaching, Learning, and Leading with Schools and Communities*

TLLSC is a school- and community-based teacher preparation program that relies on complete clinical integration in urban schools and community organizations in Chicago. Teacher education faculty designed the program from the ground up based on the recognition that “all teachers must be prepared to serve all learners, including students from diverse social, emotional, behavioral, cultural, linguistic, developmental, and academic backgrounds” (Ryan et al., under review, p. 6). Partnering with stakeholders at schools and community organizations to share the responsibility for teacher education, a developmental trajectory of field-based experiences provides teacher candidates with sequences designed around an original set of enduring understandings, knowledge, skills, and dispositions that emphasize the Loyola dedication to social justice, diversity, and urban education (Ryan et al., under review). By moving beyond constraining structures of the university and grounding teacher preparation in schools and communities, TLLSC aims to respond directly to the needs of the community and to prepare teachers who are well-equipped and can immediately support and impact student development and achievement. At the graduate level, the program follows a residency model during which candidates can complete a Master's degree, teaching certification, and ESL endorsement in approximately 15 months.

Due to the rich linguistic diversity of Chicago (Shin & Kominski, 2010) and dire demand for ELL-trained teachers (Severns, 2012), the TLLSC program responds to the needs of area schools and districts by explicitly emphasizing teacher preparation for ELLs. Recognizing that teacher preparation for ELLs is more effective when purposefully woven throughout a program of study (García et al., 2010), teacher candidates learn about and engage in policy, theory, and practice with ELLs across sequences and clinical sites. Across the developmental sequences of the TLLSC teacher preparation program, candidates engage in culturally and linguistically responsive practice (García et al., 2010; Lucas et al., 2008), including the theoretical foundations and research-based methodology of ELL instruction and assessment to fulfill the requirements

for the state ESL endorsement (Illinois State Board of Education, 2013). Purposive partner selection and clinical placement ensure that candidates work with diverse ELL populations (e.g., native languages, language and literacy abilities), and in various program models (e.g., transitional bilingual, dual language) and instructional approaches (e.g., sheltered instruction, ESL). Through the program, candidates learn about language policy, programs, and practice through direct interaction and engagement with ELLs.

Targeting similar teacher candidates and situated within TFA regions and partner school districts, the IMPACT program in Los Angeles and the TLLSC program in Chicago provide two examples of teacher preparation approaches that specifically emphasize the needs of ELLs within neighborhood schools and surrounding communities. Using the tenets from these unique programs, we next offer recommendations for altering TFA's model in ways that more appropriately and effectively prepare corps members to teach the students they serve, focusing on ELLs.

### **Recommendations for Teach For America**

We have demonstrated that, while TFA corps members are technically considered *highly qualified* per the alternative certification loophole, they are not adequately prepared to teach in the culturally and linguistically diverse regions in which they are placed. In contrast to other programs that place front and center the needs of ELLs, TFA offers minimal, superficial training related to ELLs to its corps members. This training is presented in a stand-alone fashion, rather than integrated into the TFA curriculum in a way that would more effectively prepare teachers for work in their specific contexts (García et al., 2010). Because corps members receive so little pre-service training pertinent to the students they will teach, we argue – as did educators and policymakers in the state of California – that they should not be considered highly qualified until they are aptly prepared to address ELLs' educational needs.

Drawing on other teacher preparation approaches that explicitly address cultural and linguistic diversity and weave ELL-related content throughout their curricula, we offer three recommendations for TFA related specifically to its preparation for ELLs: 1) extend the preparation and commitment of corps members, 2) infuse ELL preparation throughout corps member commitment, and 3) target the unique needs of school and community populations. While these recommendations would improve the overall TFA model, we focus on ELLs because of TFA's lack of ELL-specific preparation, even though the organization places in regions with largest percentages of these students.

#### ***Extend Preparation and Commitment of Corps Members***

First, for TFA to make a meaningful contribution to teacher education and the field of education more broadly, the organization must expand its pre-service preparation, including the temporal extension of TFA pre-service training beyond five weeks. As corps member Shelly noted above, there is “so much to do and so little time” during TFA's five-week summer institute. This limited time frame does not allow corps members to develop key understandings related to the schools and communities they will serve, much less cultivate their abilities to address the social, emotional, cultural, linguistic, and academic needs (Wrigley, 2000) of the diverse students they will most certainly teach. Other approaches, like teacher residency models, offer candidates nine months of hands-on training in mentor teachers' classrooms, which allows

teachers to develop awareness of schools and communities and to hone their capacity to deliver instruction that addresses ELLs' language and academic needs. Although historically resistant to incorporating the residency approach (Kopp, 2011), the mounting evidence surrounding the effectiveness of such approaches alongside the lack of evidence related to TFA corps member effectiveness require that TFA revisit that stance. Moreover, TFA teachers should be required to stay for a minimum of three years at their placement schools, and ideally up to five years (Heilig, 2012), to bring individuals into education who are truly committed to students and communities, rather than those who are simply looking to build their resumes (Labaree, 2010; Veltri, 2010).

### *Infuse English Language Learner Preparation throughout Corps Member Commitment*

Second, we propose that TFA incorporates an explicit focus on teacher preparation for ELLs throughout the five phases of corps members' commitments, using the existing literature to develop corps members' knowledge, skills, and dispositions related to teaching this student population. In the six pages of TFA's curriculum related to ELLs and the sole institute session that offers ELL teaching strategies, corps members receive scant training in meeting ELLs' needs, if they even remember the session upon leaving institute (Heineke & Cameron, 2013b). The strategies offered in the session focus on input and output language strategies, essentially ignoring the larger literature base that offers a host of knowledge and skills that teachers of ELLs should possess (Lucas et al., 2008). The stand-alone session does not afford corps members the opportunity to understand how cultural and linguistic diversity plays a role in other aspects of teaching and learning, as do preparation approaches that weave ELL-related content throughout (García et al., 2010). Moreover, it is unclear how TFA works to develop teachers' capacity to work with ELLs beyond institute. Such continuing support is pertinent to teacher development (Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000) and is a practice used by the alternative approaches outlined in this paper. As such, TFA corps members would benefit from an expanded focus on ELLs that is integrated throughout their training and development. To facilitate this expansion, the organization would need to ensure that its institute and other staff members are well-versed in ELL instruction and assessment.

### *Target the Unique Needs of School and Community Populations*

Finally, we suggest that TFA offer corps members a grounding in the specific needs of the populations within the communities they will serve. In addition to general teacher preparation for ELLs (Lucas et al., 2008), teachers require the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to meet the unique needs of the culturally and linguistically diverse students in their classrooms (Wrigley, 2000). Rather than focus primarily on teacher placement, national TFA leaders need to invest in addressing the specific needs of the schools, districts, and communities that the organization and its corps members serve. Building on the foundational preparation that all corps members receive to teach ELLs, regional TFA leaders must incorporate teacher training and support to attend to these needs throughout the five phases of a corps members' commitment. Like the alternative approaches described above, TFA must focus on building partnerships with local organizations to develop complete understandings of communities and schools, and offer opportunities for corps members to engage directly with community members and parents before they enter the classroom. TFA could develop projects for corps members to identify the funds of knowledge that exist in the communities they will serve, as well as strategies for building on these assets at school. In doing so, TFA could more effectively prepare corps members and develop stronger

local partnerships, rather than perpetuating the consistent churning of teacher interns (Baron, 2013).

Given the large and growing ELL population, particularly in urban and rural regions across the country where hundreds of corps members begin teaching each year, TFA must adopt these or similar recommendations in order to fulfill its core mission and contribute to increasing student achievement for the nation's most underserved students (TFA, 2012d). There is no better time than now; the organization has maintained a large presence for over twenty years in many culturally and linguistically diverse regions (e.g., Los Angeles, Phoenix, New York City), and continues to grow, expanding to regions with fast-growing immigrant and ELL populations (e.g., North Carolina, Connecticut). The needs of ELLs and other culturally and linguistically diverse learners should be a top priority for TFA and an emphasis for the preparation of all teachers. If TFA is going to "help to lead an educational revolution," (TFA, 2012d), the organization should take the opportunity and initiative in ELL teacher preparation and serve as the model for alternative certification programs that current policy recognizes as producing *highly qualified* teachers.

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