The Unintended Consequences of Cohorts: How Social Relationships Can Influence the Retention of Rural Teachers Recruited by Cohort-Based Alternative Pathway Programs

Daisy Rooks

University of Montana

To understand the social experiences of rural teachers recruited by cohort-based alternative pathway programs in the United States, I interviewed 17 rural teachers recruited by Teach For America (TFA). While many new rural teachers experience social isolation early in their careers when teaching in communities in which they did not grow up, these rural TFA teachers experienced very little social isolation. Instead, they were embedded in insulated but dense social networks comprised primarily of other TFA teachers. The richness of these teachers' social lives reflects shared life stage, similar worldviews, and proximity, as well as TFA's institutional practices. The type and composition of their relationships appears to have influenced these teachers' short- and long-term retention in rural schools and communities. Personal relationships with short-time residents and utilitarian friendships with long-time rural residents appear to have promoted their short-term retention and undermined their long-term retention, while personal relationships with long-time rural residents appear to have promoted their short- as well as long-term retention, especially when they were romantic. To improve the long-term retention of participants, I conclude that cohort-based alternative pathway programs operating in rural schools and communities should deemphasize friendships with short-time residents, actively encourage personal friendships with long-time residents, and recruit long-time residents of the rural communities where they operate

Teacher recruitment and retention has long interested scholars, policymakers, and practitioners. According to the National Center for Education Statistics' Teacher Follow-Up Survey, teacher attrition in the United States has grown steadily since the early 1990s but has stabilized in recent years (Goldring, Taie, & Riddles, 2014). Teacher turnover is highest in under-resourced schools. According to Goldring et al. (2014), total teacher turnover was above 22% in schools where 75% or more of students received free or reduced-price lunch and just below 13% in schools with the lowest number of low-income students. Teacher recruitment and retention takes different forms in urban, rural, and suburban schools. While rural schools experience less teacher attrition than their urban counterparts, they experience more than schools in suburban areas and towns (Goldring et al., 2014). Rural schools also have different recruitment opportunities and challenges than their urban or suburban counterparts. While the unique characteristics of rural schools and communities appeal to some teachers, they are unattractive to others.

Alternative pathway programs emerged in the 1980s to address recruitment and retention challenges in U.S. public schools, especially under-resourced public schools. These programs recruit college graduates who are interested in teaching but lack the necessary coursework and credentials to enter the classroom (Spooner, 2005). They assist participants in gaining provisional credentials, securing jobs in high-need schools, and enrolling in credential classes. While some alternative pathway programs deliver credential curriculum themselves, others partner with schools of education that provide courses for their participants. Some alternative pathway programs underwrite the cost of credential programs partially or fully, while others do not.

Alternative pathway programs have grown exponentially since the 1980s. By 2007, 47 U.S. states had established alternative pathway programs, and one in five new teachers in the United States had entered the profession through one of these programs instead of a traditional school of education (Walsh & Jacobs, 2007). Scholars and policymakers have carefully followed the growth of alternative pathway programs, conducting research on participants' perceptions about their preparedness (Darling-Hammond, Chung, & Frelow, 2002; Kee, 2012), longevity and professional commitment (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Dickar, 2005), and efficacy (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Dickar, 2005; Laczko-Kerr & Berliner, 2002; Pilcher & Steele, 2005; Raymond, Fletcher, & Luque, 2001).

Despite the depth and breadth of this evaluation research, there is still a great deal that we do not know about alternative pathway programs. We know very little about participants' experiences in these programs (for exceptions, see Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, and Wyckoff, 2006, and Dickar, 2005) and even less about their social experiences. We know little about how participants' experiences in cohort-based and non-cohort-based alternative pathway programs are similar or different. We know little about alternative pathway programs operating in rural areas and next to nothing about participants' experiences in these programs. This dearth of knowledge is curious since alternative pathway programs have proliferated in rural areas in recent years. For example, acute teacher shortages in rural Mississippi and Texas have resulted in the establishment of numerous alternative pathway programs in rural areas of the two states. In the Mississippi Delta, two alternative pathway programs, the Mississippi Teacher Corps and the Teach Mississippi Institute, place teachers in rural schools. The Mississippi Teacher Fellowship Program uses scholarships and loan forgiveness to entice college graduates to teach for two or three years in high-need areas of the region, many of which are rural. In Texas, more than a dozen alternative pathway programs operate in the Rio Grande Valley, much of which is rural. These programs include South Texas Transition to Teaching, Texas Teachers, and the aptly-named Alternative Certification Program, among others (State Board of Educator Certification, n.d.).

One of the longest-running and largest cohort-based alternative pathway programs operating in rural schools and communities is Teach for America (TFA). TFA is often thought of as an urban program, and during its 25-year history the organization has certainly placed more teachers in urban schools than in rural schools.[1] However, the organization

has been placing new teachers in under-resourced rural schools for two-year stints since its establishment in 1989. Given its size and longevity, the organization has arguably placed more teachers in high-need rural schools than any other alternative pathway program in the United States.

TFA differs from other alternative pathway programs in important ways, which I document in Appendix A. These differences notwithstanding, TFA is an appropriate fit for research about rural teachers recruited by cohort-based alternative pathway programs. The organization has the same mission and employs similar recruitment and placement practices as other cohort-based alternative pathway programs, and it is equally enthusiastic about applicants who lack teaching experience. Moreover, TFA has been engaged in rural schools and communities in the United States for over 25 years.

To understand the experiences of new rural teachers recruited by cohort-based alternative pathway programs, this article explores three questions: What kinds of experiences do participants in these programs have in rural schools and communities? Specifically, what kinds of social and romantic experiences do they have? And how do these experiences influence their retention in rural schools and communities? By answering these questions, this article deepens our understanding of cohort-based alternative pathway programs operating in rural schools and communities.

Literature Review

The literature on rural teachers and rural teaching provides a useful jumping-off point for this study. Although the research in this area does not examine alternative pathway programs operating in rural areas, it addresses three relevant topics: unique characteristics of rural schools and communities, causes of rural teacher retention and turnover, and strategies for retaining rural teachers. This body of work is international in scope, examining rural teachers and rural teaching in Canada, Australia, Ghana, China, Finland, South Africa, and the United States Despite the different working and living conditions for teachers in these countries, researchers working in this area have generated findings that are applicable to a range of international contexts.

Characteristics of Rural Schools and Communities that Facilitate Recruitment and Retention

The unique characteristics of rural schools and communities can motivate some aspiring teachers to pursue jobs in rural communities and retain experienced rural teachers. On average, rural schools are smaller than schools in urban and suburban areas—one of the "significant

---

[1]In its first two years of operation, 1990 and 1991, TFA placed teachers in eight regions, four urban and four rural. The organization has a different mix of rural and urban placements today, though. In 2017, the organization placed teachers in 53 regions: nine rural, seven mixed urban and rural, and 37 urban.

advantage[s] of teaching in a rural setting," according to Player (2015, p. 21). Rural teachers in small schools report high levels of autonomy and flexibility and modest amounts of bureaucracy (Ballou & Podgursky, 1995; Haughey & Murphy, 1983; Player, 2015). In addition, small school size makes it possible for rural teachers to implement individualized learning plans for their students and develop warm, supportive relationships with students and parents (Gibson, 1994). These close relationships have a positive impact on student behavior. Rural teachers often cite their students' impressive attendance records and the scarcity of disruptive incidents in their classrooms as especially positive aspects of their jobs (Abel & Sewell, 1999; Ballou & Podgursky, 1995).

"The rural lifestyle" can also motivate some aspiring teachers to pursue jobs in rural communities and retain experienced rural teachers (Boylan & McSwan, 1998, p. 51). For example, the relaxed pace of life and friendliness found in many rural communities enhance rural teachers' lives considerably (Storey, 1993, p. 166), as do natural beauty and recreational amenities, for teachers in communities that possess them. Many rural communities also have low costs of living, making it possible for teachers to live comfortably on modest teacher salaries (Anttila & Vaananen, 2013; Gao & Xu, 2014; Player, 2015; Storey, 1993). Finally, the "family benefits" of rural communities, such as low crime rates and clean environments, make rural teaching positions especially attractive for new and experienced teachers with children (Boylan & McSwan, 1998, p. 60; Sargent & Hannum, 2005).

Rural communities are particularly attractive to aspiring teachers who grew up in rural communities (Boylan & McSwan, 1998; Storey, 1993; Yarrow, Ballantyne, Hansford, Herschell, & Millwater, 1999). The fact that these teachers tend to "have goals, mores, expectations, and lifestyles similar to the families they serve" in rural communities facilitates their relationships with students and parents (Theobald, 1991, p. 48). Teachers with rural backgrounds often have an easier time integrating, socially and culturally, into the rural communities where they live and work than their colleagues who grew up in urban and suburban areas (Sargent & Hannum, 2005; Yarrow et al., 1999, p. 8). Unsurprisingly, teachers who grew up in rural communities tend to stay in rural teaching positions longer than their urban and suburban counterparts (Boylan & McSwan, 1998; Storey, 1993; Yarrow et al., 1999).

If the unique characteristics of rural schools and communities can motivate some aspiring teachers to pursue jobs in rural communities and retain experienced rural teachers, especially those with families and those who grew up in rural communities, why do many rural schools continue to struggle with recruitment and retention?

Characteristics of Rural Schools and Communities that Undermine Recruitment and Retention

Although the unique characteristics of rural schools and rural communities are attractive to some teachers, they can discourage the recruitment and retention of others. While the small size of rural schools appeals to some teachers (Ballou & Podgursky, 1995; Gibson, 1994; Haughey & Murphy, 1983; Player, 2015), it can be unattractive to others. Teachers in small rural schools often are assigned multi-grade classes, which can be challenging for individuals who lack relevant experience or training.[2] Small rural schools often lack specialized courses, which can be frustrating for rural teachers passionate about specialized subjects (Ballou & Podgursky, 1995; Gibson, 1994; McEwan, 1999; Monk, 2007).

While the close-knit nature of many rural communities is attractive to some teachers (Anttila & Vaananen, 2013; Gibson, 1994; Sharplin, O'Neill, & Chapman, 2011), it is unappealing to others. For teachers who desire strict separation between their personal and professional lives and for teachers who place a high value on privacy, this feature of rural communities will be especially unattractive (Anttila & Vaananen, 2013; Boylan & McSwan, 1998; Miller, 2012; Storey, 1993). They will likely gravitate toward positions in urban and suburban schools.

Finally, remote rural communities are certainly attractive to some teachers, especially when adjacent to nature and/or recreational amenities, but not all. Schools in remote communities that lack commercial, cultural, and/or recreational amenities often have trouble recruiting and retaining teachers (Anttila & Vaananen, 2013; Boylan & McSwan, 1998; Gibson, 1994; Inverarity, 1984; Miller, 2012). This is especially true of schools in remote rural communities with high poverty rates. Schools in remote rural communities often struggle to retain teachers who feel socially, culturally, or geographically isolated; these teachers often decamp for jobs in urban or suburban schools (Anttila & Vaananen, 2013; Boylan & McSwan, 1998; Gibson, 1994; Inverarity, 1984; Miller, 2012). In response to the challenges that many rural schools confront, scholars and practitioners have documented, and in some cases developed, individual- and institutional-level interventions that can improve the recruitment and retention of rural teachers.

---

[2]Rural teachers often report a mismatch between their pre-service training and the demands of their jobs. For example, 75% of the new rural teachers interviewed by Gibson (1994, p. 76) reported that the school, college, or department of education (SCDE) that they had attended failed to prepare them for "teaching in rural situations."

Interventions that Improve the Recruitment and Retention of Rural Teachers

Several individual strategies and behaviors are positively related to long-term retention for rural teachers. For example, experienced rural teachers often engage in "help-seeking strategies," such as "seeking 'adopted' mentors, advocating for resources, and acquiring allies to resolve problems" (Castro, Kelly, & Shih, 2010, p. 624). In addition to seeking "assistance from colleagues," Sharplin et al. (2011, p. 139) found that long-time rural teachers often secure "access to professional development." While help-seeking can benefit all teachers, it is especially beneficial for teachers in small rural schools, who typically have access to a smaller pool of colleagues and fewer professional development activities than their urban and suburban counterparts.

Many experienced rural teachers consciously integrate themselves into the communities where they live and work, establishing close friendships with long-time residents and frequently participating in community activities. By integrating themselves into the social fabric of the communities where they live and work, these teachers can fully enjoy "the rural lifestyle" that motivated many of them to pursue jobs in rural communities (Boylan & McSwan, 1998, p. 51). This strategy can also reduce, and in some cases eliminate, the social isolation that many new rural teachers experience early in their careers, when teaching in communities in which they did not grow up (Anttila & Vaananen, 2013; Boylan & McSwan, 1998; Gibson, 1994; Inverarity, 1984; Miller, 2012).[3] Rural teachers who employ this strategy typically have higher job satisfaction and longer retention than those who do not (Anttila & Vaananen, 2013; Boylan & McSwan, 1998; Miller, 2012).

Several institutional strategies can bolster recruitment and retention among rural teachers as well. "Grow your own" programs build on the overwhelming evidence that teachers who grew up in rural communities tend to be more satisfied by rural life and rural teaching positions than their urban and suburban counterparts (Boylan & McSwan, 1998; Sargent & Hannum, 2005; Theobald, 1991; Yarrow et al., 1999). Whether they focus on high school students, college students, or adults interested in changing careers, these programs seek to "cultivate interest and skill in teaching" among residents of rural "areas with hard-to-staff schools" (Monk, 2007, p. 169). By recruiting individuals who are already familiar with and enthusiastic about rural life, these programs can produce long-time rural teachers (Cobbold, 2006; Miller, 2012; Monk, 2007; Theobald, 1991).[4]

3New rural teachers who live and work in the communities where they grew up are less likely to experience social isolation because they begin their teaching careers already embedded in the social life of the communities where they live and work (Yarrow et al., 1999).

4An important caveat about these programs has to do with

Loan forgiveness programs can also improve the recruitment and retention of rural teachers. School districts and government agencies have offered loan forgiveness to incentivize teachers both to accept positions in rural schools, and to stay in those jobs (Storey, 1993). Prorating is especially effective; programs that increase the size of payments each year that teachers stay in rural teaching jobs, often have positive effects on teacher retention.[5]

Two institutional strategies focus exclusively on improving the retention of rural teachers. Some rural schools and school districts have developed peer mentoring programs that pair new and experienced rural teachers. Experienced rural teachers help their mentees navigate the unique characteristics of rural schools and communities, such as their small size, multi-grade classes, and close relationships with students and parents. Mentoring programs, and peer mentoring programs in particular have been shown to improve long-term retention among rural teachers (Sharplin et al., 2011; Yarrow et al., 1999).

Finally, some schools, colleges, or departments of education (SCDEs) have begun to address the urban bias of their curriculum on the grounds that it fails to prepare aspiring rural teachers for the unique characteristics of rural schools. For example, in Australia the majority of SCDEs provide "generally city-based" pre-service training. Not only is this training located in urban areas, but it is designed to prepare teachers to work in urban schools (Gibson, 1994; Yarrow et al., 1999). The same is true in the United States. By offering relevant coursework, such as classes about multi-grade instruction, SCDEs ensure that aspiring rural teachers are prepared for rural teaching positions. Rural teachers whose pre-service training prepared them for the unique characteristics of rural schools tend to have higher job satisfaction and retention rates than rural teachers whose pre-service training did not (Azano & Stewart, 2015; Gibson, 1994; Sharplin et al., 2011; Storey, 1992; Theobald, 1991; Yarrow et al., 1999).

This literature has generated important insights about rural teachers and rural teaching. It demonstrates that the unique characteristics of rural schools and communities motivate some teachers to teach in rural schools, while deterring others. Scholars working in this area have described individual- and institutional-level interventions that can improve the recruitment and retention of rural teachers. In

scale. The small size and low population density of many rural areas makes it challenging to scale up these programs (Player, 2015).

5These programs work in countries, like the United States, where teachers accumulate significant debt while training to become teachers. In countries where teacher education is subsidized or low-cost, these programs are much less effective at promoting short- and long-term retention of rural teachers. These programs also operate from an assumption that rural teaching positions are inherently unappealing. As I have demonstrated above, this is not true.

some cases, they have also measured the effectiveness of these programs. Although these studies provide valuable insights about the professional experiences of rural teachers, we still know little about their social experiences, and even less about their romantic experiences. This is especially true of rural teachers recruited by alternative pathway programs. This study fills these gaps in our understanding of rural teachers and rural teaching. I draw upon interviews with 17 rural teachers recruited by Teach for America (TFA) to answer three questions:

- What kinds of experiences do participants in cohort-based alternative pathway programs have in rural schools and communities?
- Specifically, what kinds of social and romantic experiences do they have?
- How do these experiences influence their retention in rural schools and communities?

Data and Methods

This study has its origins in a larger project about activism in the 1990s: a comparison of TFA and the AFL-CIO's Organizing Institute, an organization that recruits, trains, and places union organizers across the United States (Rooks, 2014). While conducting interviews with TFA teachers for that project, I noticed several striking differences between their experiences in rural and urban areas. For one, when discussing their motivations for joining TFA, rural TFA teachers often spoke about rural communities in glowing terms, comparing them positively to urban areas. The urban teachers never did this. Secondly, during their interviews rural and urban TFA teachers painted very different pictures of their social lives during their two years in the organization. While the rural teachers reminisced fondly about the dense social networks that they were embedded in, the urban teachers rarely did the same. The rural teachers' social networks were comprised primarily of other TFA teachers, and therefore were insulated from the communities where they lived and worked. In contrast, the urban teachers were as likely to spend time with TFA teachers as friends from college or childhood. Finally, the rural TFA teachers had much more to say about dating and romantic relationships than their urban counterparts. In their interviews, they frequently reflected on their experiences dating while participating in TFA and described how romantic relationships, or lack thereof, influenced their decision making at the end of their two-year commitment to the organization. This was curious, since my interview schedule contained no explicit questions about these topics. The urban teachers were much less likely to touch on these topics during their interviews.

These emergent differences were salient, especially the discrepancies in urban and rural TFA teachers' social experiences. Given the dearth of scholarly research about the social experiences of rural teachers, especially rural teachers recruited by cohort-based alternative pathway programs, this seemed like a fruitful direction for another project.

The Data Collection Process

This article draws upon interviews with 17 teachers placed by TFA in the Rio Grande Valley in Texas and the Mississippi Delta in Mississippi. All interviews were conducted during a three-year period (2004-2006), using a structured interview guide (see Appendix B).[6] The average length of the interviews was one hour and 11 minutes; the shortest interview was 51 minutes long, and the longest was one hour and 47 minutes. The interviews generated 308 single-spaced pages of transcripts. The average interview transcript was 18 single-spaced pages long; the shortest transcript was 11 single-spaced pages and the longest was 23 single-spaced pages.

Fifteen of the 17 interviews were conducted over the phone. Despite that modality, or perhaps because of it, interviewees revealed intensely personal information during their interviews (Holt, 2010; Novick, 2008). They spoke frankly about their fears about teaching, their initial assumptions about rural communities, and the mistakes that they made inside and outside the classroom. While recalling their time in TFA, many interviewees became emotional, running the full gamut of emotions from joy to frustration to sadness during their interviews.

Interviews covered a variety of topics, including interviewees' motivations for joining TFA, their experiences during TFA's pre-service training, their experiences in the classroom, the social and political dynamics of the schools and communities where they lived and worked, their career trajectories since leaving TFA, and their assessments of TFA's strengths and weaknesses. Several questions in the interview guide directly explored teachers' social experiences in the Valley and the Delta. Other questions, which were not explicitly about teachers' social experiences, also generated rich data about their social and romantic relationships. As mentioned above, although the guide contained no direct questions about romantic relationships, this topic loomed large in the interviews. These interviews generated plentiful and rich data about teachers' social experiences in the Valley and the Delta. During the data

---

[6]Although the interview guide was structured, and organized chronologically, the interviews themselves were quite conversational. Interviewees often looped back to previous questions and topics when a new question sparked a memory about a topic that we had already covered. I encouraged these tangents, as long as they did not veer too far off topic. As is often the case in qualitative research, tangents generated some of the most interesting information that I gleaned from the interviews.

analysis process, described below, I identified 148 interview excerpts that directly related to this topic. As I explain in the findings section, these data suggest that teachers' social experiences influenced their decisions about whether to stay in the two regions at the end of their two years in TFA.

The Dataset

Two interviewees joined TFA in 1993, three in 1995, six in 1997, four in 1999, and two in 2000. Ten interviewees were women, and seven were men. Fourteen were between the ages of 21 and 23 when they joined TFA, two were between 24 and 26, and one was over the age of 26. Eleven interviewees were White, one was a person of color, and five did not disclose their race during their interviews. Six interviewees grew up in rural areas or small towns, nine grew up in urban or suburban areas, and two did not disclose where they grew up during their interviews.

Five teachers lived and worked in the Delta, and 12 lived and worked in the Valley.[7] The Mississippi Delta spans 19 counties in Mississippi. It is bounded by the Mississippi River on the west and the Yazoo River on the east. The Rio Grande Valley encompasses four counties in southeastern Texas, three of which have the Rio Grande River as their southern boundary. The two regions have a great deal in common. Both their economies are dominated by agriculture, and both are "majority-minority" areas. The

[7]I had hoped to interview equal numbers of teachers from the two regions, but several recruitment issues prevented me from doing so.

Delta is majority African American, while the Valley is majority Mexican American. Table 1 offers a demographic snapshot of the dataset, while Table 2 presents select demographic information for each interviewee.

Analysis

After data collection was complete, to protect interviewees' confidentiality I replaced all proper names with pseudonyms and deleted all references to specific schools and towns.

I used a mixture of inductive and deductive coding categories to analyze the dataset. After reading through the interviews several times, I generated two inductive coding categories: one about teachers' social experiences and another about teachers' romantic experiences. After completing my review of the scholarly research on rural teachers and rural teaching, I generated two deductive coding categories: individual-level retention strategies and institutional-level retention strategies. I then created 18 codes for the four coding categories. Table 3 contains detailed information about the coding categories and codes that I used to analyze the dataset. After loading the interviews and coding schema into NVivo, a qualitative coding software program, I used the inductive and deductive codes to analyze the dataset.

Findings

My analysis of the dataset produced three main findings. First, in their interviews none of these rural

Table 1
Demographic Composition of the Dataset

		# interviewees
Region	Rio Grande Valley	12
	Mississippi Delta	5
Year joined TFA	1993	2
	1995	3
	1997	6
	1999	4
	2000	2
Gender	Female	10
	Male	7
Age when joined TFA	21-23	14
	24-26	2
	Over 26	1
Race	White	11
	Person of color	1
	Missing data	5
Grew up in	Rural / small town	6
	Urban / suburban	9
	Missing data	2

Table 2
Demographic Information by Interviewee

Pseudonym	Region	Year joined TFA	Gender	Age joined TFA	Grew up in
Brandy	Delta	1995		22	Rural / small town
Dalia	RGV	1999		21 or 22	Rural / small town
Glen	RGV	1997	Female	25	N/A
Hilary	RGV	1993	Female	22	Rural / small town
Jada	RGV	1999	Male	21 or 22	Urban / suburban
Kendra	Delta	2000	Female	21	Urban / suburban
Kyle	RGV	1997	Female	22	Urban / suburban
Levi	RGV	1997	Female	21 or 22	Urban / suburban
Maloney	RGV	1997	Male	21 or 22	Urban / suburban
Margot	RGV	1999	Male	21 or 22	N/A
Rori	Delta	1995	Male	22	Rural / small town
Ted	Delta	2000	Female	21	Urban / suburban
Tori	RGV	1997	Female	22 or 23	Rural / small town
Vera	RGV	1997	Male	26 or 27	Urban / suburban
Veronica	RGV	1993	Female	22	Rural / small town
Wayne	Delta	1999	Female	23 or 24	Urban / suburban
William	RGV	1995	Male	24	Urban / suburban

Table 3
Code Mapping

Coding Categories	Codes
Social experiences	Social isolation
	Dense social networks comprised primarily of TFA teachers
	Dense social networks comprised primarily of short-time residents, non-TFA
	Utilitarian friendships with long-time residents, co-workers
	Personal friendships with long-time residents, co-workers
Romantic experiences	Romantic isolation
	Romantic relationships with TFA teachers
	Romantic relationships with short-time residents, non-TFA
	Romantic relationships with long-time residents, co-workers
	Romantic relationships with long-time residents, not co-workers
Individual-level retention strategies	Focus social energy on other short-time residents
	Focus romantic energy on other short-time residents
	Focus social energy on long-time residents
	Focus romantic energy on long-time residents
Institutional-level retention strategies	Encourage friendships with TFA teachers, other short-time residents
	Facilitate friendships with TFA teachers, other short-time residents
	Encourage utilitarian friendships with long-time residents, co-workers
	Facilitate utilitarian friendships with long-time residents, co-workers

teachers described themselves as lonely or socially isolated. Second, these teachers enjoyed dense social networks comprised primarily of other TFA teachers—networks that were insulated from the rural communities where they lived and worked. Finally, the type and composition of these teachers' relationships, not merely the presence or absence of relationships, appears to have influenced their short- and long-term retention in the Valley and the Delta.

The Rich Social Lives of Rural Teachers Recruited by TFA

In their interviews, teachers spoke at length about their social experiences in the Rio Grande Valley and the Mississippi Delta. No one depicted themselves as lonely. Instead, they harkened back to the vibrant social lives that they enjoyed during their time in TFA. All 17 teachers befriended other short-time residents of the two regions, most of whom were other TFA teachers. Fourteen teachers also developed friendships with long-time residents of the Valley and the Delta. Table 4 documents the social and romantic relationships that teachers developed during their time in TFA.

In their interviews, teachers spoke enthusiastically and nostalgically about their friendships with other TFA teachers. Like Kendra, all but one had a "social life [that] revolved around TFA corps members."[8] These friendships often started at home, since 16 of the teachers lived with other TFA teachers. Kendra and the "two other TFA corps members" with whom she lived in the Delta "would try to have dinner together every night…. We had a lot of fun together." Kendra's roommates were not her only social outlet, though. On "Thursday nights we'd have potlucks" with other TFA teachers. She and her roommates "always went for that social outlet, to talk to people and see people." Jada had a similar experience in the Rio Grande Valley. During the week, the TFA teachers who lived in her part of the Valley would regularly "get together and play tennis or get together and hang out."

Three teachers cultivated friendships with short-time residents who were not TFA teachers. One of Rori's co-workers during her first year in the Delta was in the Mississippi Teacher Corps, another alternative pathway program operating in the region. "He started the same time" as Rori and the other TFA teachers in her school, and they "bonded with him immediately." At Veronica's school in the Valley "there were two other Anglo teachers," both of whom were in their second year of teaching when Veronica was in her first. One of these teachers, who had recently moved to the Valley, "became very, very good friends" with her.

Fourteen teachers befriended long-time residents of the Valley and the Delta, all of whom were co-workers.[9]

---

[8]TFA uses the phrase "corps members" to describe its participants.

[9]Three additional teachers mentioned casual friendships with

Eight developed friendships that were strictly utilitarian. These professional relationships revolved around teaching and students and did not venture outside of the workplace. Kendra developed one of these utilitarian friendships during her second year in the Delta. The co-worker that Kendra befriended "was not TFA. She did have her master's from Ole Miss, but had grown up in that community." Although Kendra became "really close" with this "teacher, who taught next door to" her classroom, they never socialized outside of school.

Six teachers developed personal friendships with co-workers—relationships that were personal rather than strictly professional and moved beyond the workplace. During her second year in TFA Dalia "bonded" with several of her co-workers, all of whom were long-time residents of the Valley. She would "have breakfast with them" and would see them "outside of school on occasion" in addition to these breakfasts. Kyle also developed a personal friendship with a co-worker who

> was a rancher by day and a teacher to keep himself busy during the weekdays. He ranched all weekend. He had close to 100 head of cattle and a thousand acres. He invited me to go up to the ranch with him one weekend and deliver hay.

In the months that followed, whenever his friend "needed hay delivered" Kyle would

> jump in the truck and we'd go for a four-hour drive to go deliver hay. We started working the cows. He taught me how to shoot guns. He took me hunting. I never shot anything, but it was fun to go sit and hunt.

Like Dalia, Kyle "really did enjoy" this personal friendship. In addition to companionship, the friendship provided him with insights about rural life, and rural life in the Valley in particular, something he had hoped to learn about when he initially applied to TFA.

The richness of these rural teachers' social lives is curious since scholars have demonstrated that many new rural teachers experience social isolation early in their careers when teaching in communities in which they did not grow up (Anttila & Vaananen, 2013; Boylan & McSwan, 1998; Gibson, 1994; Inverarity, 1984; Miller, 2012). But what about the romantic lives of rural teachers recruited by TFA? Were they as satisfying as their social lives appear to be?

---

long-time residents whom they met at churches in the Valley and the Delta. They did not have much to say about these acquaintances, though. After an initial mention, none returned to the topic during their interviews. This suggests that they were less enmeshed with these individuals than with their co-workers, and that these relationships were less consequential than their friendships with other TFA teachers.

Table 4

Social and Romantic Experiences of Teachers in the Dataset

Type of relationship	# of interviewees
Personal friendships with short-time residents, TFA teachers	17
Personal friendships with short-time residents, non-TFA	3
Utilitarian friendships with long-time residents, co-workers	8
Personal friendships with long-time residents, co-workers	6
Romantic relationships with short-time residents, TFA teachers	7
Romantic relationships with short-time residents, non-TFA	3
Romantic relationships with long-time residents, co-workers	2
Single	3
Married short-time resident whom they met during time in the Valley or the Delta, TFA teachers	5
Married short-time resident whom they met during time in the Valley or the Delta, non-TFA	2
Married long-time resident whom they met during time in the Valley or the Delta	2

The Romantic Lives of Rural Teachers Recruited by TFA

As mentioned above, the topic of romantic relationships was quite salient for these teachers, despite the lack of explicit questions about dating in my interview guide. During their interviews, teachers not only described their dating experiences in the Valley and the Delta, but also mused about how their romantic lives influenced their decisions about staying in or leaving the two regions at the end of their two years in TFA.

The largest group of these teachers, seven, dated other TFA teachers during their time in the Valley and the Delta. Three teachers were in relationships with short-time residents of the regions who were not affiliated with TFA, and two dated long-time residents of the Valley. Three teachers were single for the majority of their time in TFA, and three teachers did not discuss their relationship histories during their interviews.[10] Table 4 illustrates the prevalence of these romantic relationships among these teachers.

[10]One teacher is counted twice. This person dated a TFA teacher during their first year in TFA, and then dated a short-time resident of the region, who was not affiliated with TFA, during their second year.

Of the seven teachers who dated other TFA teachers, two were in long-distance relationships and five were involved with TFA teachers in their region. The second scenario was common in the Delta, according to Kendra. "Out of my friends," in the Delta, she remembers, "a lot of us were in these TFA relationships…. I don't know how it would have been if I didn't have a boyfriend there. It's a social outlet." Five of these teachers ended up marrying the TFA teacher that they dated during their time in TFA. This was the case for Hilary. During the second semester of her first year in the Valley, she "met the person [she is] now married to, who was a corps member a year ahead of" her.

Three teachers had romantic relationships with short-time residents who were not TFA teachers. During his time in TFA, Levi dated a participant in another alternative pathway program operating in the Valley. "There seemed to be a lot of volunteers down there, not necessarily volunteers, but people trying to do things like AmeriCorps" he explains. The TFA teachers and participants in these other programs, including the alternative pathway program with which his future wife was associated, would "get together from time to time. That's how I met her." Levi and another teacher who dated a non-TFA short-time resident ended up marrying their partners after completing their commitment to TFA.

The third teacher, Brandy, arrived in her region with partner in tow. Her husband was a certified teacher who "didn't go through the TFA process" and was not affiliated with another alternative pathway program in the region. Since schools in the Delta "were blood-thirsty for a certified teacher," he had no problem securing a teaching job once they arrived in the Delta.

Two teachers dated long-time residents of the Valley. During Veronica's first year in the Valley, she spent "between 50% and three-quarters" of her social time with TFA teachers, but also "dated a couple of people who were not [TFA teachers], who were from the Valley." During her second year in the Valley, Veronica "started seriously dating someone who was" from the Valley. Although she still socialized with other TFA teachers, she spent far more time with her "boyfriend and his family." William had a similar experience. Early in his tenure in the Valley, he decided he "wanted to live" there long term. Knowing that he "wanted to establish social relationships with people who were born and raised there," he

> started dating a woman at [his] school who was born and raised there. We wound up in a relationship for two and a half years, and my social circle was driven by her and her friends. I had it really cool. I had a lot of fun.

Both teachers ended up marrying long-time residents of the Valley. Veronica married the man whom she started dating during her second year, and William married someone whom he met after the relationship with his co-worker ended.

Not all these teachers were involved in romantic relationships during their time in TFA, though. Three teachers were single for all, or most, of their time in the Valley or the Delta. According to Tori, this was not only the case for her but for many of her fellow TFA teachers in the Valley. "We were all young and most of us were single," she remembers, "and we didn't know anyone else in the area, so we tended to spend a lot of time together." As Tori's quote suggests, being single did not mean being lonely in the region, because TFA teachers were embedded in such dense social networks.

The salience of romantic relationships for these teachers is surprising for two reasons. First, scholars have been rather silent on this dimension of new rural teachers' social experiences (for an exception, see Westling & Whitten, 1996), instead emphasizing the social isolation that many new rural teachers experience early in their careers, when teaching in communities in which they did not grow up. Second, this topic emerged organically during the interviews. The fact that this topic loomed so large despite no explicit interview questions about it, suggests that romantic relationships were an important aspect of these rural teachers' social experiences. But why did this group of rural teachers experience so little social isolation? And why do other TFA teachers feature so prominently in their social and romantic networks?

Explaining the Social and Romantic Experiences of Rural Teachers Recruited by TFA

My analysis uncovered several explanations for these teachers' social and romantic reliance on other TFA teachers. Life stage, shared worldviews, and proximity were important factors, as were TFA's institutional practices.

One explanation for these teachers' reliance on each other is that they tended to be in different life stages than their co-workers in the Valley and the Delta. For example, there was a big age gap between TFA and non-TFA teachers in the Delta school where Rori worked. Many of her non-TFA co-workers "were my parents' age, so they thought of us as their kids, in a way," which made it challenging to develop peer relationships with them. But even when TFA teachers and their non-TFA co-workers were the same age, they were often in different life stages. According to Veronica, this was also the case in the Valley. As she explains, "people down here marry a lot younger than I was used to. To put it in perspective, there were plenty of people my age, who I taught with, who were married, and they had children." Although differences in life stage were not insurmountable, they did create logistical and experiential barriers to friendships between TFA teachers and their co-workers. In response, TFA teachers often sought out other TFA teachers for social and romantic relationships.

While life stage complicated teachers' relationships with non-TFA teachers, shared perspectives and worldviews facilitated relationships with other TFA teachers. Although Rori certainly had "good friends from college," TFA was "the first time that [she] had found a group of people who had really similar social beliefs." Shared perspectives and worldviews made Rori's friendships with other TFA teachers easy to establish and maintain. Dalia and Ted made similar comments in their interviews. "I joke about TFA: just add water and you have instant friends," Dalia explains. Early in her tenure in the Valley, Dalia "immediately made connections with" other TFA teachers, which she attributes to the fact that TFA "had recruited people with similar mindsets" in her region. For Ted, shared interests and similar backgrounds explain his social reliance on other TFA teachers in the Delta. Since he "had a lot more in common with the other TFA teachers; where we were from, what we were interested in" than he did with his non-TFA co-workers, it was easier for him to establish and maintain friendships with them.

Proximity also explains some of TFA teachers' reliance on each other. TFA teachers in the Valley and the Delta tended to live near each other. For example, the town where Jada lived "was small enough, and [TFA teachers] pretty

much lived in the same area, so you could walk to someone's house in the evening if you needed to talk to someone, or if you wanted to hang out, or if you needed help with something." This flies in the face of much of the research on new rural teachers. When new rural teachers live and work in communities in which they did not grow up, the social isolation that many experience early in their careers often stems from their geographical isolation (Haughey & Murphy, 1983; Mafora, 2013). The lack of geographical isolation among these teachers is not a coincidence; it reflects an informal practice of TFA teachers. According to these teachers, departing TFA teachers In the Valley and the Delta often pass their apartments and houses down to incoming TFA teachers, creating residential clusters of TFA teachers in both regions.

A final explanation for these teachers' social and romantic reliance on other TFA teachers is TFA's institutional practices. The organization's strong commitment to cohorts, which I describe below and in Appendix A, is a big piece of the puzzle. By placing new TFA teachers in schools alongside new and experienced TFA teachers for two years, the organization increases the likelihood that they will develop friendships, and possibly romantic relationships. Staffers in the Valley and the Delta in the 1990s and early 2000s appear to have taken this a step further. Table 5 describes these staffers' involvement in teachers' relationships in the Valley and the Delta during this time.

According to teachers, TFA staffers in both regions not only encouraged TFA teachers to befriend each other, but often went out of their way to facilitate such friendships. During his interview, Glen mentioned that he and other TFA teachers in the Valley "regularly got together for parties…. We were really cohesive as a corps." When asked who organized these parties, Glen explained that TFA's "program director" and other staffers in the region

> were really involved in organizing both social and edifying events. We met pretty regularly for cultural events. We got together with a whole bunch of people and made tamales. We had a party and we smashed a piñata, or whatever. They were really cognizant of the area.[11]

---

[11]Not all staffers in the Valley and the Delta were as keen as Glen's program director to play social coordinator. When Dalia arrived in the Valley two years after Glen, staffers spent less time and energy organizing social events than their predecessors. This did not mean that the teachers in Dalia's cohort had a less robust social experience than those in Glen's, though. According to Dalia, there was a robust social infrastructure in the Valley when she arrived. In addition to a "corps member advisory committee" that planned social events, there was also "somebody who was the social chair, a second year [TFA teacher], who would organize social events. Whether they organized them or not, they'd make sure that everybody knew about them. They'd do email lists and call and do phone trees." By creating the advisory committee and

In contrast, in their interviews teachers never mentioned TFA staffers facilitating personal friendships between TFA teachers and long-time residents of the Valley or the Delta. Nor did they describe TFA staffers facilitating romantic relationships between TFA teachers and short- or long-time residents.

In their interviews, just two teachers mentioned TFA staffers encouraging them to befriend long-time residents. In both cases, this happened during TFA's pre-service training, and in both cases staffers encouraged TFA teachers to develop utilitarian friendships. During Ted's pre-service training, TFA staffers cited the professional benefits of utilitarian friendships with co-workers. During a training session, the staffers encouraged participants "to try to find a mentor at our school site, a teacher who had been there for a while, so you could observe and do things." Levi received a similar message during his pre-service training. "I remember understanding," he explained, "that at the schools you … are going to have fantastic teachers, and they'd always encourage us to go observe those fantastic teachers. Learn everything you can from those people." This was certainly good advice. To a person, the eight teachers who developed utilitarian friendships with their co-workers in the Valley and the Delta gained valuable professional support and guidance from them.

Why does this matter? If this group of rural teachers was embedded in insulated but dense social networks and received support and encouragement from their fellow TFA teachers and co-workers, why be concerned about the composition of their social and romantic networks? My analysis suggests that there is a connection between the types of relationships that these teachers developed and their retention in rural schools and communities. At the end of their second year in the classroom, 12 teachers left the Valley or the Delta, and five stayed in the Valley for a third year. Two of those five stayed in the Valley permanently. Both had established personal friendships and romantic relationships with long-time residents of the Valley. None of the teachers who left at the end of their second year did the same. Table 6 illustrates the potential impact of relationships on the retention of these TFA teachers in the Valley.

Effects of Relationships with Short-Time Residents and Utilitarian Friendships with Long-Time Residents on Short-Term Retention

My analysis suggests that personal relationships with short-time residents and utilitarian friendships with long-time residents promote the short-term retention of rural teachers recruited by TFA. These relationships had several

---

social chair position and giving them the task of planning and promoting social events, the organization was able to facilitate friendships among TFA teachers in the Valley even when staffers were disinclined to play social coordinator.

Table 5
TFA Staffers' Involvement in Teachers' Social Relationships

Type of relationship	TFA staffers in the Valley and the Delta encouraged	TFA staffers in the Valley and the Delta facilitated
Personal friendships with short-time residents, TFA teachers	Yes	Yes
Personal friendships with short-time residents, non-TFA	Yes	No
Utilitarian friendships with long-time residents, co-workers	Yes	No
Personal friendships with long-time residents, co-workers	No	No
Romantic relationships with short-time residents, TFA teachers	No	No
Romantic relationships with short-time residents, non-TFA	No	No
Romantic relationships with long-time residents, co-workers	No	No

Table 6
Potential Impact of Relationships on Teachers' Retention

Type of relationship	Potential impact on short-term retention	Potential impact on long-term retention
Personal friendships with short-time residents, TFA teachers	+	-
Personal friendships with short-time residents, non-TFA	+	-
Utilitarian friendships with long-time residents, co-workers	+	-
Personal friendships with long-time residents, co-workers	+	+
Romantic relationships with short-time residents, TFA teachers	+	-
Romantic relationships with short-time residents, non-TFA	+	-
Romantic relationships with long-time residents, co-workers	+	+

concrete benefits for TFA teachers, which they described in their interviews. For example, friendships and romantic relationships with short-time residents provided them with social outlets and peer support, while utilitarian friendships with long-time residents provided them with professional support and guidance.

In their interviews, teachers often described their relationships with short-time residents as important social outlets. Frequent dinners, parties, and casual get-togethers with TFA teachers meant that teachers had rich, vibrant social lives in the Valley and the Delta. This was especially critical for them, given the limited commercial and recreational amenities in the two regions.[12] As a result of this social outlet, these rural TFA teachers seem to have felt less socially, culturally, or geographically isolated than other new rural teachers tend to (Anttila & Vaananen, 2013; Boylan & McSwan, 1998; Gibson, 1994; Inverarity, 1984; Miller, 2012).

These relationships also provided teachers with essential support and encouragement. During his first year in the Valley, Glen and his two roommates, both of whom were TFA teachers,

> would come home and cry. Not always, but occasionally. We would share stories and talk about what we could do…. I didn't think that we were going to make it. We just wanted to get to Thanksgiving. That was our goal: make it to Thanksgiving and then see where we could go from there.

The support that Glen gleaned from these friendships motivated him throughout his time in the Valley. It was especially critical during his first year in the classroom, which is widely regarded as the most stressful time in a teacher's career (Hebert & Worthy, 2001; Lortie, 1977; McLaughlin, Pfeifer, Swanson-Owens, & Yee, 1986; Sharplin et al., 2011).

Friendships with non-TFA short-time residents were also an important source of peer support and encouragement. During her first year in the Valley, Veronica and a co-worker, who was a participant in another alternative pathway program, "did all of our lesson planning together." As the friendship moved beyond pedagogy and logistics, it became an essential source of support for Veronica. "If there was an

[12]It is important to note that both regions are rich in cultural amenities. The Delta's blues music and barbecue are world-renowned, and although the Valley's food and music traditions are less well-known, they are prized by locals and tourists. These cultural amenities appear to have had a modest impact on these teachers' social experiences, though. Although several mentioned the food traditions in the Valley in passing in their interviews, no teachers did the same while describing the Delta. None of these teachers appear to have been involved in, or particularly interested in, the music traditions in the two regions, either.

issue, or I tried something and it didn't go well," Veronica explains, that teacher "was definitely a person I would turn to" for support and encouragement.

For the 10 teachers who developed romantic relationships with short-term residents, these relationships were another source of peer support and encouragement. This was especially true for the seven teachers who dated other TFA teachers. Ted and another TFA teacher in the Delta dated during "our first year of teaching, as well as our second year." As Ted explains, he and his girlfriend "spent a lot of time" together and "definitely relied on each other for emotional support" during their two years in TFA.

For the eight teachers who developed utilitarian friendships with long-time residents of the Valley and the Delta who were co-workers, these relationships provided slightly different benefits, namely professional support and guidance. Kendra certainly benefited from her utilitarian friendship with her co-worker, the graduate of Ole Miss described above. "Professionally and personally," Kendra explains, "she was a huge support system, a huge resource for me… I really relied on her a lot." Maloney described the utilitarian friendship that he developed with a co-worker in similar terms. His co-worker "was amazingly supportive. She was the only reason I survived there my first year…. She knew the culture of the school, and she knew the students, and what was going on with the students and their families. She was priceless, really. Invaluable." Given her long tenure in the Valley, Maloney's co-worker possessed knowledge about the community, and about teaching, that he lacked. Her willingness to share her knowledge and experience helped Maloney navigate the unique culture of the Valley and survive his first year in the classroom. The other six teachers who developed utilitarian friendships with long-time residents described their co-workers, and the benefits of these friendships, in similar terms.

Like long-serving rural teachers, these teachers engaged in "help-seeking" behavior and "direct action coping" strategies, gleaning support and encouragement from their personal friendships with short-time residents and/or utilitarian friendships with long-time residents (Castro et al., 2010; Sharplin et al., 2011, p. 139). But this did not translate to long-term retention for these teachers. Even though these relationships may promote the short-term retention of rural teachers recruited by TFA, my analysis suggests that they also undermine their long-term retention.

Effects of Personal Relationships with Short-Time Residents and Utilitarian Friendships with Long-Time Residents on Long-Term Retention

Relationships with short-time residents appear to have influenced teachers' decisions about whether to stay in rural areas or decamp for urban or suburban areas at the end of their two years in TFA. In their interviews, teachers

described being acutely aware that their social networks could shrink, or disappear completely, at the end of their two years in the Valley or the Delta. During his second year in the Valley, while deliberating about whether to stay in the region, Glen remembers thinking that it would have been "easy to leave because most of the TFA people were planning to leave." Kendra had a similar realization during her second year in the Delta. Although she was certainly "thinking about staying," she remembers that she "didn't think that I could stay without the social network that I had. Most of my friends were leaving, so that was a big factor for me." The ephemeral nature of these relationships made teachers like Glen and Kendra reticent to stay in the Valley or the Delta for even one more year.[13]

Romantic relationships with short-time residents appear to have exerted an even stronger influence on teachers' decision making. Of the 12 teachers who left the Valley and the Delta after two years, seven were in romantic relationships with short-time residents, and five of those seven were dating other TFA teachers. When explaining their decision to leave the Valley and the Delta, four of these teachers described their relationships with other TFA teachers as the major, and in some cases only, factor in their decision. This was certainly true of Hilary. When asked how she decided to leave the Valley at the end of her second year, she explained that it "pretty much completely depended on the relationship I had started with" another TFA teacher. This teacher, who eventually became her husband, was a year ahead of her in the TFA program. When "he finished his" two-year commitment to TFA, "he moved to [city name redacted], but we continued to have a long-distance relationship. Then he got a job in [city name redacted] and asked if I wanted to come there, and I packed up and left." As Hilary explains, "I didn't really think, 'Should I stay and forgo the relationship?' I thought, 'Well, I could go and teach somewhere else and try to do a good job and continue the relationship,'" and so she ended up doing that.

Teachers' utilitarian friendships with long-time residents do not appear to have influenced their decision making. In their interviews, none of the eight teachers who developed such friendships mentioned them when describing how they decided to stay in or leave the Valley or the Delta. This suggests that these friendships, although meaningful and beneficial, might have little or no impact on the long-term retention of these rural teachers. If this is true, are there any relationships that could have positively impacted the long-term retention of these rural teachers recruited by TFA?

Effects of Personal Relationships with Long-Time Residents on Short- and Long-Term Retention

My analysis suggests that personal relationships with long-time rural residents promote the short- and long-term retention of rural teachers recruited by TFA. Non-romantic personal relationships appear to have extended the retention of rural TFA teachers by roughly a year, while romantic relationships appear to have promoted long-term retention.

When describing their personal friendships with long-time residents, teachers mentioned several benefits of these non-romantic relationships, including exposure to rural culture and rural life, and assistance integrating them into the rural communities where they lived and worked. The personal friendship that Kyle developed with his rancher co-worker exposed him to rural culture and rural life. After his first visit to his co-worker's ranch, Kyle remembers feeling "like hell, yeah, this is what I'm talkin' about! This is why I wanted to go rural! I want to learn about stuff like that!"

For Veronica, the personal friendships that she developed with her co-workers helped integrate her into life in the Valley. Toward the end of her first semester, the teachers in her school

> were having tamales. I had never had a tamale and didn't know what they were, but wasn't saying anything about it…. They were kind of laughing. They were maybe trying to be kind to me, and clue me in. This was before I had eaten anything. They were like, 'Oh yeah, remember that Anglo teacher we had here a couple of years ago who thought you were supposed to eat the corn?' Ha-ha. They may have been trying to let me know what to do.

As Veronica's quote indicates, she gleaned important cultural information from this interaction; information that helped her integrate into the culture of the Valley.

Personal friendships with long-time residents appear to have extended the retention of the rural TFA teachers who developed them by roughly a year. By the end of his second year in the Valley and the Delta, Dave "felt really connected with the community." The five other teachers who developed such relationships made similar comments in their interviews. This sense of belonging inspired all six teachers to consider staying in the Valley and the Delta long-term. As Glen explains, it was his "connection with non-TFA people that kept" him in the Valley for a third year. Four of the six teachers who developed personal friendships with long-time residents stayed in the Valley or the Delta for at least one more year, and two of the four stayed permanently.[14]

---

[13]Of the five teachers who stayed in the Valley beyond their second year, four were embedded in social networks that were less temporary. Two, Glen and Kyle, were close friends and former roommates, and another two, Veronica and William, were dating long-time residents of the area.

[14]For the two who left, other factors overrode their community connections. By the end of his second year in the Delta, Wayne was seriously considering staying. Even though he "loved it, at that point," he was in a long-distance relationship with a TFA teacher who was not interested in moving to the Delta. Dalia's concerns

These last two teachers were in romantic relationships with long-time residents, suggesting that personal friendships with long-time residents could promote long-term retention when combined with romantic relationships with long-time residents. This finding about personal relationships echoes scholars' contention that experienced rural teachers tend to have high job satisfaction and long-term retention when they are integrated into community life (Anttila & Vaananen, 2013; Boylan & McSwan, 1998; Miller, 2012).

Romantic relationships with long-time residents appear to have promoted retention even more than personal friendships. Both teachers who dated long-time residents, Veronica and William, ended up staying in the Valley permanently. Both dated people with deep roots in the Valley—people who had lived in the region for most, or all, of their lives, had many friends and family members there, and had no intention of leaving. Once Veronica's and William's relationships became serious, the question about whether to stay or leave essentially became a non-question. As Veronica explains, by the end of her second year in TFA, "I had decided that I was going to stay in the Valley for personal reasons. I was seeing this person who I ended up marrying. I was going to stay."[15] William's experience was similar.

These findings raise several conceptual and applied questions about cohort-based alternative pathway programs that operate in rural communities. If rural TFA teachers experience little social isolation, why is this the case? And

about finding a suitable romantic partner in the Valley convinced her to leave. As she explains, "the biggest reason for me deciding to leave was because of more socially…. For me, everyone who was my age that was not in [TFA] was either married or already had children…. I was single, and I thought, 'If I live here and I don't move, I'm going to end up this old maid who's not going to ever get married, and I'm going to be that crazy English teacher.'" Although her personal friendships with long-time residents "made it really hard to leave because they were so great and wonderful and supportive," Dalia eventually left for an urban area with a larger dating pool.

[15]Community members in the Rio Grande Valley seem to have been aware that romantic relationships with long-time residents could promote retention. In their interviews, three teachers described how their co-workers would try to set them up on dates with long-time residents. For example, "parents at the high school" where Jada worked "were always trying to find me dates, wanted to set me up with their nephew or whatever." When Veronica's co-workers saw "new single teachers coming in, they would try and set you up with people" in the community. "They were like, 'If she starts dating someone, then they'll get married and she'll stay.' … I had fellow teachers who were like, 'Oh, you need to meet my son.' It was very funny." Although this strategy did not work on Jada, it did work on Veronica. During her first year in TFA she "dated a couple of people who were not corps members, who were from the Valley," whom she met through her co-workers. During her second year Veronica met another long-time resident, started dating him, and eventually married him.

if the type of relationships that they develop do indeed influence their short- and long-term retention, what should cohort-based alternative pathway programs do with that information?

Discussion and Conclusions

The most counterintuitive finding of this study has to do with social isolation. Although many new rural teachers experience social isolation early in their careers when teaching in communities in which they did not grow up (Anttila & Vaananen, 2013; Boylan & McSwan, 1998; Gibson, 1994; Inverarity, 1984; Miller, 2012), this was not true for these rural teachers recruited by TFA. During their interviews, these teachers neither described themselves as lonely nor bemoaned opportunities to develop friendships with other TFA teachers in the two regions. Instead, they described being embedded in dense social networks that were insulated from the rural communities where they lived and worked. These teachers' rich social lives, I argue, reflect TFA's strong commitment to cohorts. Not only did the organization place cohorts of teachers in rural schools in the Valley and the Delta, but staffers in the two regions both encouraged these TFA teachers to befriend each other and often facilitated their friendships. They also reflect the unique features of the rural communities where they lived and worked, as I will explain later.

A second counterintuitive finding of this study is the connection between these teachers' relationships and their short- and long-term retention. Scholars have demonstrated that relationships promote rural teacher retention. Long-time rural teachers tend to solicit help from experienced co-workers, develop allies at work, and/or seek support and mentoring from peers (Castro et al., 2010; Sharplin et al., 2011; Yarrow et al., 1999). Rural teachers who befriend community members and participate in community activities and events tend to have higher job satisfaction and longer retention than those who do not (Anttila & Vaananen, 2013; Boylan & McSwan, 1998; Miller, 2012). While these TFA teachers befriended short-time residents, co-workers, and in a few cases, long-time residents of the Valley and the Delta, these relationships appear to have influenced their retention in different ways. My analysis suggests that while romantic relationships with long-time residents bolstered their long-term retention in the Valley and the Delta, utilitarian friendships with co-workers and romantic relationships with short-time residents actually undermined their long-term retention. This suggests that the type and composition of relationships, and not merely their existence, influences the short- and long-term retention of rural teachers recruited by cohort-based alternative pathway programs.

This story is a distinctly rural one. As mentioned above, these teachers' social and romantic experiences in the Valley and the Delta differed considerably from those of the urban

TFA teachers in my broader study (Rooks, 2014). These rural teachers were embedded in dense social networks comprised primarily of other TFA teachers, while their urban counterparts tended to divide their time between TFA teachers and friends from college or childhood. These rural teachers' dating experiences and romantic relationships in the Valley and the Delta appear to be much more salient for them than they were for the urban teachers in the study. Despite the lack of explicit questions about dating in my interview guide, these rural teachers frequently returned to the topic during their interviews. They were especially forthcoming about how these experiences influenced their decision making at the end of their two years in TFA. In contrast, the urban TFA teachers in the study rarely mentioned either thing during their interviews.

The unique features of the rural communities where these teachers lived and worked also shaped their social and romantic experiences. High poverty rates and modest educational attainment in the Valley and the Delta mean that a smaller percentage of the population in both places is middle-class and/or college educated than in New York and Los Angeles, where the urban TFA teachers in my broader study lived and worked. When TFA teachers in the Valley and the Delta sought social and romantic relationships with peers from similar socioeconomic backgrounds, they found them in their insulated but dense social networks. This was not the case for the urban teachers, whose TFA social networks were one of several channels for connecting with middle-class and/or college-educated peers. The amenities in the Valley and the Delta also shaped these teachers' social and romantic experiences. Although the Valley and the Delta have ample cultural amenities, as described above, neither had extensive commercial or recreational amenities at the time when these teachers were living and working there. Frequent dinners, parties, and casual get-togethers with TFA teachers in the Valley and the Delta offset the limited commercial and recreational amenities in both regions. This was not necessary for the urban TFA teachers in the study.

Although these findings are uniquely rural, they cannot be generalized to new rural teachers. Many new rural teachers were trained by traditional schools of education. As such, they are more likely to have completed coursework in education and pre-service training than these TFA teachers, and are more likely to be career changers (Spooner, 2005). While some new rural teachers live and work in the communities where they grew up, this was not the case for any of these teachers. Finally, while many new rural teachers are recruited individually by rural schools and communities, TFA placed all these teachers in schools alongside new and experienced TFA teachers.

These findings should be applied to new rural teachers recruited by cohort-based alternative pathway programs cautiously and carefully. New rural teachers recruited by cohort-based alternative pathway programs that are newer, smaller, and/or less committed to cohorts than TFA might have different social experiences than these teachers. The same is true of new rural teachers recruited by programs that seek applicants with long-term interest in the teaching profession. They might pursue different social and romantic relationships than these TFA teachers, and their social and romantic experiences might impact their short- and long-term retention in different ways than these TFA teachers.

A final caveat about generalizing these findings has to do with the setting for this research. The Valley and the Delta are both majority-minority areas with unique social, political, and racial dynamics—characteristics that shaped these teachers' social and romantic experiences. New teachers recruited to majority-White rural communities by cohort-based alternative pathway programs might have very different social experiences than these teachers.

Further research is necessary to understand whether, and how, these findings capture the experiences of other new rural teachers recruited by cohort-based alternative pathway programs. One approach would be to investigate the experiences of new rural teachers recruited by programs with different commitments to cohorts than TFA. This approach could reveal how the social experiences of teachers recruited by programs with weak and strong commitments to cohorts differ from the experiences of these teachers. It could also determine whether programs with different commitments to cohorts than TFA discourage, encourage, or facilitate friendships between participants.

Another approach would be to compare the social experiences of new rural teachers recruited by cohort-based alternative pathway programs that require longer commitments from their participants than TFA. This approach could determine whether rural teachers recruited these programs tend to establish different amounts or types of relationships than these TFA teachers. It could also reveal whether these relationships tend to influence these teachers' short- and long-term retention differently than these TFA teachers.

A final approach would be to explore whether these findings apply to new rural teachers living and working outside of the Valley and the Delta. One strategy would be to investigate the experiences of rural teachers recruited to a variety of rural communities by cohort-based alternative pathway programs including, but not limited to, TFA. This could determine whether new teachers in other rural communities tend to be embedded in insulated but dense social networks comprised primarily of other short-term residents, as these TFA teachers were, or whether they tend to experience social isolation, like many new rural teachers living and working in communities in which they did not grow up. Another strategy would be to examine the social experiences of new rural teachers either in communities

with ample recreational and/or commercial amenities, or in communities with limited cultural amenities. This could reveal whether new rural teachers in communities with different amenities than those found in the Valley and the Delta have different social experiences and retention. A third strategy would be to explore the social and romantic experiences of TFA teachers in other rural regions.[16] This would make it possible to identify commonalities in the experiences of rural TFA teachers.

Although somewhat exploratory, this study clearly demonstrates the need for more inductive, qualitative research about rural teachers, especially those recruited by alternative pathway programs. Researchers working in this area rarely encourage rural teachers to narrate their own experiences, and fewer still describe rural teachers' experiences using their own words (for exceptions to this rule, see Gao and Xu, 2014; Gibson, 1994; Sharplin et al., 2011; and Woodrum, 2004). By doing both things, I was able to identify aspects of these teachers' social experiences that are missing from the existing research on rural teachers. By using qualitative methods and a largely inductive analytical approach, I revealed not only that some new rural teachers are embedded in insulated but dense social networks, but also that the type and composition of their relationships might influence their short- and long-term retention in rural schools and communities. Future inductive, qualitative research about rural teachers recruited by alternative pathway programs could generate additional insights about their experiences living and working in rural communities.

If future research confirms my findings about the relationship between retention and the type and composition of rural teachers' relationships, what can cohort-based alternative pathway programs operating in rural areas do with this information? How can they develop retention strategies that build upon these findings? And what can they do to ensure that these strategies are not too intrusive? If future research confirms that personal friendships and romantic relationships with long-time residents do promote the long-term retention of rural teachers recruited by cohort-based alternative pathway programs, programs operating in rural schools and communities cannot, and should not, mandate that participants establish them. Doing so would simply be too invasive. However, programs could deemphasize relationships with short-time residents, actively encourage participants to establish personal relationships with long-time residents, and recruit long-time residents of the rural communities where they place teachers.

Staffers of cohort-based alternative pathway programs operating in rural areas should not discourage friendships between participants, both because doing so would be intrusive and because these relationships might very well promote short-term retention. But they should not emphasize, or promote, these relationships to the exclusion of others. One way that they could encourage personal relationships with long-time residents would be to incorporate them into social events that they organize for participants. By spending time with long-time residents outside of work and in casual settings, participants would be more likely to establish personal than strictly utilitarian relationships with them.

Another thing that staffers could do is to recruit long-time residents to serve as "social mentors" for participants, sharing their own knowledge of the rural communities where participants live and work, and helping them navigate their unique cultures. When applicable, staffers could also draw upon their own experiences befriending long-time residents. They could describe the ways that they have benefited from these friendships, personally and professionally, and share tips for navigating the logistical challenges of these friendships, many of which are related to life stage. These institutional strategies are not a panacea; they will not ensure that rural teachers recruited by cohort-based alternative pathway programs will develop personal or even utilitarian friendships with long-time residents. But they could do a great deal to encourage these relationships, which could in turn promote the long-term retention of rural teachers recruited by these programs.

A final retention strategy that would build upon these findings is the expansion of "grow your own" alternative pathway programs in rural communities. If further research confirms that personal relationships with long-time residents exert the strongest influence over the long-term retention of new rural teachers recruited by cohort-based alternative pathway programs, then local, community-based recruitment might be the best option for programs operating in rural schools and communities. To harness the positive impact of these personal relationships, programs operating in rural areas should recruit long-time residents of the areas where they place teachers. These participants would enter the classroom already enmeshed in the types of relationships that scholars associate with high job satisfaction and long-term retention (Anttila & Vaananen, 2013; Boylan & McSwan, 1998; Miller, 2012). If organizations or researchers collected data on these efforts, they could identify the feasibility of recruiting long-time residents into alternative pathway programs in rural schools and communities. In doing so, they would deepen our understanding not just of "grow your own" alternative pathway programs, but of cohort-based alternative pathway programs operating in rural schools and communities generally.

---

[16]Interviews with TFA teachers placed in rural areas with ample recreational amenities, such as New Mexico, South Dakota, and Idaho, would illuminate whether, and how, recreational amenities influence rural TFA teachers' social experiences and retention—something that was outside the scope of this project.

References

Abel, M. H., & Sewell, J. (1999). Stress and burnout in rural and urban secondary school teachers. *Journal of Educational Research, 92*, 287-293. doi:10.1080/00220679909597608

Anttila, E., & Vaananen, A. (2013). Rural schoolteachers and the pressures of community life: local and cosmopolitan coping strategies in mid-twentieth-century Finland. *History of Education, 42*, 182-203. doi:10.1080/0046760x.2013.766267

Azano, A. P., & Stewart, T. T. (2015). Exploring place and practicing justice: Preparing pre-service teachers for success in rural schools. *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 30*(9), 1-12. Retrieved from http://jrre.psu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/30-9.pdf

Ballou, D., & Podgursky, M. (1995). Rural schools: Fewer highly trained teachers and special programs, but better learning environment. *Rural Development Perspectives, 10*(3), 6-16.

Boyd, D., Grossman, P., Lankford, H., Loeb, S., & Wyckoff, J. (2006). How changes in entry requirements alter the teacher workforce and affect student achievement. *Education Finance and Policy, 1*, 176-216. doi:10.1162/edfp.2006.1.2.176

Boylan, C., & McSwan, D. (1998). Long-staying rural teachers: Who are they? *Australian Journal of Education, 42*(1), 49-65. doi:10.1177/000494419804200104

Castro, A. J., Kelly, J., & Shih, M. (2010). Resilience strategies for new teachers in high-needs areas. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 26*, 622-629. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2009.09.010

Cobbold, C. (2006). Attracting and retaining rural teachers in Ghana: The premise and promise of a district sponsorship scheme. *Journal of Education for Teaching, 32*, 453-469. doi:10.1080/02607470600982142

Darling-Hammond, L., Chung, R., & Frelow, F. (2002). Variation in teacher preparation: How well do different pathways prepare teachers to teach? *Journal of Teacher Education, 53*, 286-302. doi:10.1177%2F0022487102053004002

Dickar, M. (2005). When they are good... A comparison of career changers and recent college graduates in an alternative certification program. In J. R. Dangel & E. M. Guyton (Eds.), *Research on alternative and non-traditional education: Teacher education yearbook XIII* (pp. 91-104). Lanham, MD: Association of Teacher Educators with Scarecrow Education.

Gao, X. S., & Xu, H. (2014). The dilemma of being English language teachers: Interpreting teachers' motivation to teach, and professional commitment in China's hinterland regions. *Language Teaching Research, 18*, 152-168. doi:10.1177/1362168813505938

Gibson, I. W. (1994). Policy, practice and need in the professional preparation of teachers for rural teaching. *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 10*(1), 68-77. Retrieved from http://jrre.vmhost.psu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/10-1_5.pdf

Goldring, R., Taie, S., & Riddles, M. (2014). *Teacher attrition and mobility: Results from the 2012-13 teacher follow-up survey (NCES 2014-077)*. Retrieved from National Center for Education Statistics website: https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2014/2014077.pdf

Haughey, M. L., & Murphy, P. J. (1983). Are rural teachers satisfied with their worklife. *Education, 104*(1), 56-66.

Hebert, E., & Worthy, T. (2001). Does the first year of teaching have to be a bad one? A case study of success. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 17*, 897-911. doi:10.1016/S0742-051X(01)00039-7

Holt, A. (2010). Using the telephone for narrative interviewing: a research note. *Qualitative Research, 10*, 113-121. doi:10.1177/1468794109348686

Inverarity, D. (1984). Teachers in isolation. *Pivot, 11*(6), 17-18.

Kee, A. N. (2012). Feelings of preparedness among alternatively certified teachers: What is the role of program features? *Journal of Teacher Education, 63*, 23-38. doi:10.1177/0022487111421933

Laczko-Kerr, I., & Berliner, D. C. (2002). The effectiveness of "Teach For America" and other under-certified teachers on student academic achievement: A case of harmful public policy. *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 10*(37), 1-43. doi:10.14507/epaa.v10n37.2002

Lortie, D. C. (1977). *Schoolteacher: A Sociological Study*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Mafora, P. (2013). Managing teacher retention in a rural school district in South Africa. *Australian Educational Researcher, 40*, 227-240. doi:10.1007/s13384-013-0088-x

McEwan, P. J. (1999). Recruitment of rural teachers in developing countries: An economic analysis. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 15*, 849-859. doi:10.1016/s0742-051x(99)00025-6

McLaughlin, M. W., Pfeifer, R. S., Swanson-Owens, D., & Yee, S. (1986). Why teachers won't teach. *The Phi Delta Kappan, 67*(6), 420-426.

Miller, L. C. (2012). *Understanding rural teacher retention and the role of community amenities*. Retrieved from Center on Education Policy and Workforce Competitiveness website: http://curry.virginia.edu/uploads/resourceLibrary/1_Miller_CEPWC_WP_Rural_Retention.pdf

Mississippi Teacher Corps. (n.d.). *About* Us. Retrieved from https://www.mtc.olemiss.edu/about-us/

Monk, D. H. (2007). Recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers in rural areas. *Future of Children, 17*(1), 155-

174. doi:10.1353/foc.2007.0009

Novick, G. (2008). Is there a bias against telephone interviews in qualitative research? *Research in Nursing & Health, 31*, 391-398. doi:10.1002/nur.20259

Pilcher, L. C., & Steele, D. C. (2005). Teach For America and regularly certified teachers: Teacher efficacy, teaching concerns, career aspirations, and teaching effectiveness. In J. R. Dangel & E. M. Guyton (Eds.), *Research on alternative and non-traditional education: Teacher education yearbook XIII* (pp. 123-141). Lanham, MD: Association of Teacher Educators with Scarecrow Education.

Player, D. (2015). *The supply and demand for rural teachers*. Retrieved from Rural Opportunities Consortium of Idaho website: http://www.rociidaho.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/ROCI_2015_RuralTeachers_FINAL.pdf

Raymond, M., Fletcher, S., & Luque, J. (2001). *Teach For America: An evaluation of teacher differences and student outcomes in Houston, Texas*. Retrieved from Stanford University website: http://credo.stanford.edu/downloads/tfa.pdf

Rooks, D. (2014). *Venture activism: Incubating agents of change inside American public education and organized labor*. Unpublished manuscript.

Sargent, T., & Hannum, E. (2005). Keeping teachers happy: Job satisfaction among primary school teachers in rural northwest China. *Comparative Education Review, 49*, 173-204. doi:10.1086/428100

Sharplin, E., O'Neill, M., & Chapman, A. (2011). Coping strategies for adaptation to new teacher appointments: Intervention for retention. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 27*, 136-146. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2010.07.010

Spooner, M. (2005). Overview and framework: Successes and challenges for alternative routes to certification. In J. R. Dangel & E. M. Guyton (Eds.), *Research on alternative and non-traditional education: Teacher education yearbook XIII* (pp. 3-9). Lanham, MD: Association of Teacher Educators with Scarecrow Education.

State Board of Educator Certification. (n.d.). *Approved educator preparation programs*. Retrieved from https://secure.sbec.state.tx.us/SBECOnline/approvedprograms.asp?s=3

Storey, V. J. (1992). Quest for educational equality: The case of a rural pre-service teacher education program. *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 8*(2), 47-57. Retrieved from http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.508.2219&rep=rep1&type=pdf

Storey, V. J. (1993). Factors, issues, and problems in the recruitment and retention of teachers for rural schools. *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 9*(3), 160-169. Retrieved from http://jrre.vmhost.psu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/9-3_4.pdf

Teach for America. (2016). *2015 annual report*. Retrieved from https://www.teachforamerica.org/about-us/annual-report

Theobald, N. D. (1991). A persistent challenge: Staffing special education programs in rural schools. *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 7*(3), 39-50. Retrieved from http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.559.5560&rep=rep1&type=pdf

Walsh, K., & Jacobs, S. (2007). *Alternative certification isn't alternative*. Retrieved from National Council on Teacher Quality website: http://www.nctq.org/nctq/images/Alternative_Certification_Isnt_Alternative.pdf

Westling, D. L., & Whitten, T. M. (1996). Rural special education teachers' plans to continue or leave their Teaching positions. *Exceptional Children, 6*, 319-335. doi:10.1177%2F001440299606200403

Woodrum, A. (2004). State-mandated testing and cultural resistance in Appalachian schools: Competing values and expectations. *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 19*(1), 1-10. Retrieved from http://jrre.vmhost.psu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/19-1.pdf

Yarrow, A., Ballantyne, R., Hansford, B., Herschell, P., & Millwater, J. (1999). Teaching in rural and remote schools: a literature review. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 15*, 1-13. doi:10.1016/s0742-051x(98)00036-5

Appendix A: How TFA Compares to Other Alternative Pathway Programs

TFA is the largest and best-known alternative pathway program in the United States Founded in 1989, the organization places participants in under-resourced urban and rural schools across the United States for two-year stints.

In many ways, TFA resembles other alternative pathway programs. For example, both types of programs seek to fill teacher vacancies in under-resourced public schools. Neither TFA nor most other alternative pathway programs require applicants to have teaching experience or formal coursework in education.

TFA is distinct from other alternative pathway programs in several important ways, though. First, TFA requires applicants to make a two-year commitment to the program and to teaching, while alternative pathway programs typically seek applicants with long-term interest in the teaching profession. Second, TFA has a remarkably strong commitment to cohorts. Whenever possible, the organization places new TFA teachers in schools alongside new and experienced TFA teachers for two years. While other cohort-based alternative pathway programs certainly seek to place teachers in clusters, TFA's size, scope, and longevity makes it easier for the organization to do so on a consistent basis. TFA's cohorts also tend to be much larger than those of other alternative pathway programs. While TFA's 2016 cohort contained 4,100 new teachers (Teach for America, 2016), other alternative pathway programs tend to recruit, train, and place much smaller cohorts. For example, the Mississippi Teacher Corps' cohorts tend to contain between two and three dozen participants (Mississippi Teacher Corps, n.d.).

TFA's geographic reach is also wider than most alternative pathway programs. The organization places new teachers in 36 states and the District of Columbia, while most alternative pathway programs operate in single school districts, regions, or states. Finally, TFA is not a certification program, instead partnering with SCDEs to provide coursework for its participants. While some alternative pathway programs do the same, others develop and deliver credential curriculum themselves.

Appendix B: Interview Guide

<u>Background</u>
How did you first hear about TFA and decide to do the program?
Had you thought about teaching before you applied to TFA? Why or why not?
Had any of your friends or family members worked as public school teachers or participated in TFA at the time that you applied?
How did your friends and family react when you told them that you were applying to TFA?
What other kinds of jobs, internships, graduate programs, etc. were you applying to at the time?
Describe your work history prior to applying to TFA.

<u>The Interview</u>
Describe your in-person interview with TFA.
- Who were the other interviewees?
- Did you do a sample lesson? What was it about? How did it go?
- Did you discuss placements/subject areas/grade levels with TFA staff at any point in the interview?

At the time of the interview, what regions did you want to be placed in? Did you have a strong preference for these regions? If so, why?

<u>Acceptance</u>
How soon after your interview did you find out that you were accepted into the program?
What was your reaction to the acceptance? What was your reaction to the region where you were placed?
How did your family react to your acceptance, and to the region where you were placed?
At this time, were you deciding between TFA and other options? If so, how did you decide to accept TFA's offer?

<u>Institute</u>
Did you have a pre-institute orientation to your region? If so what did that consist of?
What do you remember about the first few days of summer institute?
Describe the other participants at your summer institute.
Describe a typical day at institute.
- For example, how much of the day was spent learning concrete skills, developing your teaching pedagogy, teaching and observing, developing lesson plans, etc.?

How did participants and staff describe TFA's mission during summer institute? Were there any discussions or debates about the mission? If so, what did they consist of?
Describe your experiences teaching and observing in the classroom during institute.
- For example, how closely did you work with your collaborative? What kind of guidance did you get from TFA staff?

During institute, how much and what did TFA staff say about the following topics:
- The teaching profession
  - What did they say about the hours, working conditions, autonomy, etc.?
- Veteran teachers
  - How did TFA staff characterize them? What words did they use to describe them?
- Teachers unions
  - Did they explain union membership?
  - If they mentioned teachers' unions, did they encourage or discourage TFA teachers from joining the unions in their school districts?

At the end of the institute how did you feel about:
- Your skills?
- How prepared you were to run your own classroom?
- Whether you'd be able to complete your two-year commitment to TFA?
- Whether you could see yourself teaching for more than two years?

<u>Induction</u>
Describe the induction in your region.
How did you secure your job?

How did you decide where to live? How did you decide who to live with, if you had roommates?

The School
Briefly describe the school that you were placed in.
- For example, where it was located, what its student population was, the demographics of teachers and staff, etc.

Were there other TFA teachers at the school with you? If not, had the school hired TFA teachers in the past?
During your first few days, what kinds of interactions did you have with non-TFA teachers at the school? Did these interactions suggest that these teachers had opinions about TFA?

First Semester
Describe your first few days in the classroom with your students.
- For example, what did you do, how were the students acting, how were you feeling, etc.?

During your first semester, who did you turn to for help?
- Either emotional support or logistical help with lesson plans, etc.

What were your relationships with non-TFA teachers at the school like?
How much contact did you have with TFA staff in your region? What did it consist of?
What kinds of hours were you working? Did that change over time? If so, why and how?
At the end of your first semester, around winter break, how did you feel about:
- Your skills?
- Whether you'd be able to complete your two-year commitment to TFA?
- Whether you could see yourself teaching for more than two years?

Second Semester
How was it similar or different from the first semester?
During your second semester, who did you turn to for help?
What were your relationships with non-TFA teachers at the school like?
How much contact did you have with TFA staff in your region? What did it consist of?
What kinds of hours were you working? Did that change over time? If so, how and why?
At the end of your first school year, how were you feeling about:
- Your skills?
- Whether you'd be able to complete your two-year commitment to TFA?
- Whether you could see yourself teaching for more than two years?

What did you do during that first summer?

Second Year
How was it similar or different from your first year?
How did your support networks change during that second year, if at all?
What were your relationships with non-TFA teachers at the school like that second year?
How much contact did you have with TFA staff in your region that second year? What did it consist of?
What kinds of hours were you working that second year? Did that change over time? If so, how and why?

Next Steps
At the end of your second year, what next steps were you considering?
- For example, were you considering continuing to teach at the school, continuing to teach but in a different school or region, continuing to work at a school but not as a teacher, or leaving teaching altogether?

How did you decide on your next steps? What factors were important, in that decision?

Briefly explain what you have done since TFA.

TFA as an Organization
In your opinion, what are the strengths of TFA as an organization?
In your opinion, what are the weaknesses of TFA as an organization?