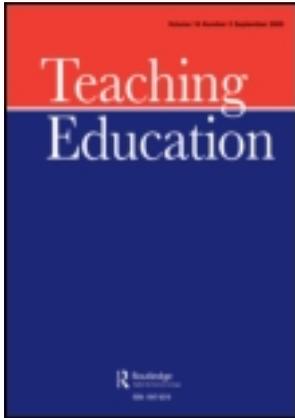


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A case study of a career in education that began with “Teach for America”

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In this article I share the results of a seven-year case study of an educator who began his career without formal preservice teacher education, as a participant in Teach for America. Steven (a pseudonym) began teaching mathematics in an urban middle school, later teaching social studies to English language learners, and is currently a principal of an urban charter school. Using a narrative/biographical research method, I have documented how Steven combined his personal resources, the confidence he gained from participating in Teach for America, and, because he began taking professional coursework in his second year of teaching, his emerging understanding of the foundations of teaching and learning (i.e. what he learned at the university) to form the educator he has become. His growth in understanding the culture of his students is a particularly compelling part of his story. Implications for contemporary teacher education are discussed, including the role of multicultural education courses and why customized teacher education programs should become more commonplace.

Keywords: teacher education policy; teacher socialization; teacher education curriculum

That some teachers get their psychology by instinct more effectively than others by any amount of reflective study may be unreservedly stated. It is not a question of manufacturing teachers, but of reinforcing and enlightening those who have a right to teach. (John Dewey, 1882/1953)

Introduction

What does preservice teacher education “buy” the beginning teacher? Are all those who enter the profession via an alternative route destined to be poor teachers, learning only by trial and error? Alternatively, does preservice teacher education select the least capable candidates and expose them to superfluous coursework and experiences? Clearly these extreme positions create a dualism not worth defending, but after an examination of recent policy debates on the role of teacher education, one might conclude that they have shaped the discussion (see Cochran-Smith, 2005, for a review).

The ongoing policy debate on the role of teacher education in the United States has turned into concrete policy in some states where legislators have embraced the idea that preservice teacher education is a needless detour for those who wish to teach. For

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instance, Florida's legislature recently approved the tests of the American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence (ABCTE) as a valid route to all state teaching certificates (http://www.fldoe.org/edcert/cert_steps.asp). In another example, Pennsylvania now accepts the ABCTE examinations for those seeking the elementary and secondary English and math licenses. The state of Texas has all but given up on professional school preparation, recently approving on-line only certificate programs.¹ As legislators continue to create routes to teacher licensure that detour professional-school preparation, the community of teacher educators finds itself in a fight for legitimacy (Bales, 2006). In response to this challenge, some teacher educators have taken on the task of proving that such routes to professional licensure consistently result in less-effective teachers (Baines, McDowell, & Foulk, 2001). Like many other university teacher educators, I am sympathetic to this cause, but I would suggest that the burden of such proof is impossibly high, and teacher educators cannot possibly prevail in a battle thus framed.

More enlightening than uniformly defending preservice teacher education or even comparing beginning teachers by their route to a credential (McCaslin et al., 2006) would be a study of how a beginning teacher without professional preparation negotiates a career in schools. Given the rich tradition of case-study research of beginning and student teachers (Bullough, 1989; Bullough & Baughman, 1997; Bullough, Knowles, & Crow, 1991; Knowles, Cole, & Presswood, 1994), I was surprised that I could not find a systematic case study of an alternatively certified teacher, although Maloy and Ludlow's (2006) recent study of four alternatively certified teachers' views on their preparation programs came close. The lack of case studies seemed all the more surprising given that we have several widely cited empirical studies comparing student test scores of traditional and alternatively certified teachers (e.g., Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, & Heilig, 2005) and scores of policy reports on the number of teachers who enter the classroom prior to licensure (e.g., Humphrey & Wechsler, 2007; Tatel, 1999). Autobiographies of teachers who have entered the classroom without formal preparation are common, but these works lack a research methodology.

Several important questions could be addressed using this inductive, case-study approach. For example, how do beginning teachers who lack student teaching learn the myriad details experienced teachers know, if they ever learn them? Without extensive observation of experienced teachers, how do they know when they have been successful? More broadly, are there long-term consequences for teachers who do not receive preservice preparation? If so, what are they? Perhaps most important, are such teachers doing more harm than good as they learn (or fail to learn) to teach the nation's most disadvantaged children and youth? It is impossible to ignore the overarching moral questions raised when the vast majority of alternatively certified teachers work with low-income students of color (Gimbert, Cristol, & Sene, 2007; Shen, 1998).² Moreover, what could teacher educators and policymakers learn from such a case study? These questions motivated the case study described herein.

My overarching goal for this article is to demonstrate how a unique set of psychological and pedagogical sources interacted to shape the career of an educator who began teaching without professional preparation. To this end, I have completed a seven-year biographical study of Steven (a pseudonym), a beginning teacher I met when I was a faculty member in the College of Education at the University of Houston. Steven had already been teaching mathematics for more than a year at a middle school in Houston's predominantly Latino East Side when he first came to my

office in 1997.³ He had just accepted a new teaching assignment working with the school's English Language Learners (ELLs), and he told me then that he wanted to learn more about second language instruction.⁴ We agreed that he should begin a credential endorsement program in English as a Second Language (ESL), and I offered to serve as his advisor. He would later take two courses with me and continue on to complete a master's degree in ESL education.⁵

To my mind, Steven offered a compelling case study, primarily because he was one of the very few alternative route teachers in the area who pursued education courses and a graduate degree at the university, and I wanted to know how his coursework altered his teaching capacity. In particular, I was interested in both what he learned and the educational capital he gained (if any) by earning a master's degree. Steven's story is also intriguing because he entered the profession through the controversial Teach for America (TFA) program. Although my intention at the outset was not to render any judgment on TFA (I studied Steven specifically because he did not seem like a typical TFA recruit), it played an important but circumscribed role in his development as an educator, although Steven reported on several occasions that he would have become a teacher with or without TFA.

Nor do I wish to promote the teacher education program he received while he was my student, championing education coursework as Steven's only avenue to expert teaching. As the data reveal, Steven did make pedagogical progress by virtue of *some* of his courses at the university, but it is clear that he was not transformed by them. The role of his coursework in his professional growth is examined in the results section.

A case study that has spanned several years is bound to be questioned for its merits as research. Is it possible to know someone for so long and remain a dispassionate observer of his development as a teacher? The answer is, of course, no. The best I can do as a researcher is to present, as fairly as possible, an accurate account of my relationship with Steven. As we came to know each other, Steven and I immediately noted several shared life experiences (e.g., we both participated in athletics at small universities, we both enjoy camping), and, in spite of the 10-year gap between our ages, we developed a friendship that, for my part, seemed to enhance our teacher–student relationship. We did not see each other much outside the university setting, but we had many long conversations in my office. I think our friendship was also shaped by the fact that we are both men who had worked in a department where most students are women.

Admittedly, I did not begin the study as soon as I met Steven, and thus my earliest anecdotal notes about his development as a teacher were recorded in 1999, about two years after our first meeting. After this time, I became convinced that his story was worth telling and began to write down details about his teaching and forming a biographical portrait. By 2001, we had both left Houston, but I conducted one- to two-hour, yearly interviews by phone, each time inviting Steven to consider how his alternative route to teaching might have impacted his career. Finally, I admit that my interviews had a personal tone: Steven and I always shared news about our personal lives (he and his wife had two daughters in the intervening years), and I must disclose that I wrote the occasional letter of recommendation for him, although I am quite certain that Steven did not see his participation in the study contingent upon my positive review of his scholarship as my student.

Steven began his current position two years ago, when he became principal of a new, urban charter elementary school in his native Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. After

several phone interviews in which he described the challenges of beginning the school (e.g. hiring and supervising teachers, selecting a curriculum, working with parents), I noticed that Steven had developed a new capacity to reflect on his career thus far, and I believed that a phone interview was insufficient to capture his thoughts. I also believed that after several years of data collection, it was time to conduct a final set of interviews and write this article. So in the spring of 2006, I went to Pittsburgh and recorded eight additional hours of interviews and took field notes (to augment my earlier data) as I watched Steven work, now as a 36-year-old principal.⁶

Method

Because I wanted to explore those memories and experiences that had led Steven to teaching, as well as his beginning years in the classroom, lengthy interviews proved the most advantageous form of data collection. Specifically, I drew upon Wengraf's (2001) typology for biographic interviewing, using his conception of the biographic–narrative–interpretive method (BNIM). The BNIM suggests that the most productive form of interview questions (i.e., those that yield the most useful data in biographies) are those single questions that induce narratives. *Narrative*, as the term is used by Wengraf, in interview settings refers to a genre commonly found in Western cultures that follows the form suggested by Labov and Waletzky (1967). First, the “teller” offers an *abstract* to an overarching, narrative-inducing question, followed by *orientation information* (e.g., details such as time, place, and persons). These topics are augmented by *complicating actions* that form the core of the narrative and link events using phrases such as “what happened next is.” A *resolution* conveying the results of actions, an *evaluation* sharing the point of the story, and finally a *coda*, which brings both teller and interviewer back to the present, complete the narrative.⁷

I found that Steven's responses fit this narrative structure well and thus offered much useful data. Often the questions that engaged Steven into a narrative were very simple, so simple in fact that reprinting an interview protocol seems unnecessary. For instance, early on in the study I asked Steven to tell me about the first days of his teaching. An easy question to ask and one that in some circumstances might need additional context, but Steven, aware of the general intent of the study, was able to enter into a narrative that followed the structure Labov and Waletzky predicted. And it seemed to happen similarly with each of my questions. A plain query, taking no great effort on my part, brought forth an entire narrative that lead back to his present-day condition. I cannot say with any certainty that Steven is more capable of producing such a narrative than other educators, and I cannot therefore claim any generalizability of the success of this method. However, I can say without hesitation that the strategy yielded precisely the kind of data that I was seeking.

Of course, the ease of the most recent interviews was based partly on the fact that Steven and I have known each for many years, and I am doubtful that Steven would have been as productive an interviewee had we not been friends. He also knew the purpose of the interviews and understood that his words might be reprinted. As a qualitative researcher, I would hope that our friendship provided me with *access* to his thoughts, rather than to *augmented* information no other interviewer could have obtained.⁸

In any event, the narrative structure of Steven's responses to the BNIM gave me a systematic way to explore the data, and I found that coding his speech using the narrative structure offered a suitable axis around which themes could be organized and

Table 1. Primary data collection events and descriptions.

Date	Event	Data
1997	First met Steven	Field notes from advising session with him
1998–1999	Steven begins university coursework	Classroom video, field notes from discussions. Data from interviews in my office; field notes on Steven’s insights on coursework
2000	I move from Houston	Lengthy interview regarding Steven’s pedagogical growth thus far (e.g., what he was learning in his coursework)
2001	Steven leaves Houston for Pittsburgh	Interview regarding his immediate plans for continuing in education
2002–2005	Steven begins his administrative credential and seeks the charter school principal position	Several phone interviews. I also recorded field notes during these calls
2006	Steven begins principal position at charter school	Summative interviews and field notes taken over three days

linked. I also had field notes from a visit to Steven’s ESL class in 1999, as well as videotapes he made of his teaching as part of a class assignment. Interviews and field notes formed the data from our lengthy conversations. Table 1 documents the date and features of the primary data collection points.

Each of these data sources provided keys to Steven’s development as a teacher and allowed me to draw a set of conclusions about the personal and pedagogical influences that had shaped his career.

The specific method by which I analyzed the data varied by date and type. The overarching data analysis and themes were structured both temporally and thematically; that is, part of the data is best reported as a story of Steven’s development as a teacher prior his first classroom. Thereafter, axial coding of themes that emerged across years formed the second set of analyses. Both analyses help to explain Steven’s development as an educator. Finally, as a biographical portrait, the amount of data collected far exceeded that which could be included in an article-length paper. I nevertheless tried to capture and share the most important aspects of Steven’s development.

Steven’s history

Background

Unlike many educators, Steven cannot recall a time growing up when he wanted to be a teacher. No one in his immediate family is a teacher, so the formation of any opinions or beliefs about teaching came largely from his own educational experience. But like all those who become teachers, Steven’s professional orientation to teaching began long before he taught students in his first classroom. As Lortie (1975) made famously clear, teaching, alone among the professions, is familiar to everyone. In one of his more convincing quotes, Lortie wrote, “What child cannot, after all, do a reasonably accurate portrayal of a classroom teacher’s actions” (p. 62). Of course, mimicking teaching is not the same as real teaching, when planning and reflection become as important as instruction. Nevertheless, Steven paid close attention to his teachers and grew to admire them. He recalled being a good student who enjoyed the

relatively calm, middle-class suburban schooling he received. His teachers were caring professionals for the most part, and he remembered with some fondness many of the teachers who directed him to pursue his own interests.

His father was a businessperson, now retired; his mother a school psychologist, also retired. Together, they made an effort to instill in their three children (Steven is the youngest) a sense of social responsibility that squared with their religious faith. Yet Steven's father's military service may have had the greatest influence on his early career decisions and on his choice of universities after graduating high school. Although his father never directly encouraged him to enter the service, Steven's earliest career interests were leading him to a position in military leadership or a State Department post. Later, he imagined that he might also follow his father's career path into corporate work. In one reflection, Steven revealed one of the more crucial experiences that led him to his early interest in the military:

When I was a junior in high school, my mom and dad split up, and I was living with my dad. It was just my dad and I – my older brother and sister were off in college. So my dad and I, just, you know, lived together. And I started to feel, not necessarily a deeper connection, but I started thinking a lot about what I was going to do. We had conversations about the service. This was just after the first Gulf War, and I began to think about the service seriously.

This conversation reveals the motivations that undergirded Steven's choice of a major (economics) and decision to enlist in the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC), which helped to pay the tuition at the liberal arts college he attended. Both endeavors, he believed, would give him a head start in his career as a naval officer. Yet as so often happens when students enter the university, Steven's early interests faded and new ones took their place.

Entering college, Steven had planned a course and experience trajectory leading to a career path that would parallel his father's: service to country followed by work in a corporation. His major in economics lasted exactly one quarter, coinciding with his first sociology course ("I was hooked!") when he changed majors. His ROTC service lasted until his senior year, the point at which he finally felt comfortable sharing with his father that the military was no longer a career goal for him. In retrospect, he reported that his father supported his decision not to enter officer training and encouraged him to pursue his interests, but he also remembered his father pointing out that Steven would now be responsible for the tuition payments the military was to have paid.

Now as a sociology major, Steven had embarked on a course of study that led to no clear career path, but it did bring him into contact with engaging theories that challenged him to consider his privilege as a White, middle-class male. Steven came to understand that his educational opportunities, which he had taken for granted, had given him immense advantages that less fortunate youth lacked. As he became more interested in the origins of class inequity and how governmental policies could work to either reinforce or reduce such inequity, he grew more convinced of the role that education could play in alleviating poverty.

The small liberal arts college Steven attended was located in an impoverished area of the Northeastern United States, and, as a Jesuit institution, the college valued service to the local community. Consequently, Steven sought out ways to link his community service with his growing interest in education, and his earliest foray into the community had him volunteering in an after-school tutoring program during his

junior year. He found that he both enjoyed the students and seemed to have a capacity for helping them understand their assignments.

Although his college had neither an education major nor a route to the state teaching license, it did offer two education classes (educational psychology and educational philosophy), both of which Steven took. Further, a few of his general sociology classes, he remembered, had “gotten me turned on to A.S. Neill, Summerhill, all that crazy stuff, but I still didn’t have a clue about urban education.” In his junior year, a part-time adjunct professor offered a course in the sociology of education, in which the work of critical theorists such as Paulo Freire and Ira Shor was presented. By this time, the prospect of teaching was becoming real. And when it came time to do his senior internship, he asked to be placed in a school where he might have a chance to see “liberatory” teaching in action.

Steven was placed at what he called “a very alternative school, with a non-traditional perspective.” I would describe the school as a hybrid magnet/continuation school where technology was the academic focus. In 1994, Steven began working with kids who were using Hyperstudio to present their reports and designing web sites for businesses, neither of which were skills he himself had learned. To this day, he remains impressed by the technology focus of the school and the advanced work of the students. Further, he credits a social studies teacher there who mentored him as a key influence, suggesting that she had helped him greatly in understanding instruction. As an undergraduate assistant, he worked mostly with individual students and small groups, but he did not student teach in the traditional sense. Nevertheless, with the excitement of working in the school and his pending graduation, Steven abruptly made the decision to become a teacher. He quit ROTC (and was now responsible for the student loans he had accrued as an undergraduate, just as his father had told him) and began to consider his options.

Teach for America program

Just after graduation, Steven married his longtime girlfriend, who had nearly completed a teaching credential program in social studies education at a nearby university. Steven and Jane (also a pseudonym) were prepared to go on a nationwide job search that, without a credential (at least for Steven), was to include private schools, when his roommate told him about a program that would help recent graduates get teaching jobs in “under-resourced” public schools, regardless of whether one held a teaching license. That program, of course, was Teach for America (TFA). Steven also learned that participation in TFA would give him about \$15,000 to pay off his student loans, as well as allowing him to teach while earning a certificate, both features that made the program financially very attractive.⁹

He quickly filled out the application, and after an interview that he remembered was like none other – I later showed him the Haberman interview protocol, designed to select “star” teachers for urban schools (Haberman & Post, 1998) and used by TFA in the early days – he was admitted to the program and learned that he would be sent to Houston, a city he had never even visited. In an intriguing twist that cuts to the heart of why TFA is so frustrating for many teacher educators, Jane had also applied to TFA and did not even get an interview. At the time, Steven, Jane, and their respective families were wholly perplexed. Why did Steven get accepted to TFA, to teach in his own classroom, and Jane not even make an interview? After all, she was the one who had course work and actual experience in teaching. It was only after Steven began the

program that he recognized TFA's intention to recruit Corps Members who were "untainted" by the influence of teacher preparation.

I admit that Steven's participation in TFA complicates the study, but I emphatically did not want TFA to dominate the research. In fact, I chose to study Steven because I believed that TFA had not been a crucial part of his experience. In an interview from 2002, I had asked Steven about the impact of TFA on his early career, and he had told me then that although he shared many common experiences with other TFA Corps Members (e.g., recently graduated from a small, liberal arts college and had not intended to become a teacher; encumbered by student loan debt), his TFA experience was different from the norm. For instance, Steven was recently married (at age 22) when he began his summer TFA training, so instead of staying in the university dorm with other Corp Members, he came home to the apartment he shared with Jane. The social network created among TFA recruits is often portrayed as a crucial aspect of the program, but if Steven needed to reflect on his day at school, Jane was there to listen. She had majored in education, completed her student teaching in secondary social studies, and would soon be teaching herself. Indeed, Steven thought that Jane's insights were very useful, even though she had no experience with the working-class, Latino students he was teaching.

But Jane was more than a sympathetic listener and advisor. She also allayed Steven's fears that he was missing out on a crucial experience by not participating in a "normal" teacher education program. One test away from her license in another state, Jane plainly told Steven that her credential courses and even student teaching were not very useful: "Jane's experience certainly fed the idea that I didn't really need it [student teaching] or the courses."

The TFA summer further convinced Steven that he could begin teaching without additional preparation. The primary pedagogical experience in TFA, at least for Steven, was a few weeks of summer school teaching in which he and two to three other recruits worked with a small group of second-grade students during their reading time.¹⁰ Steven recalled that working with these students helped him understand more about primary grades children and their specific development, but he readily admitted it was insufficient in helping him develop a coherent reading program.

Had the TFA planners wanted to help their Corp Members understand more about reading development, specialists at the university were nearby. But even though the TFA program rented the university's dorm rooms and meeting spaces for their summer program, not one of my colleagues, either in the College of Arts and Sciences or in the College of Education, was ever asked to speak to the TFA Corps Members.

The primary focus of the summer, as Steven recalled, was listening to testimony from TFA recruits who were now in their second or third year in teaching. They advised the recruits on working with students, planning lessons, and the tremendous amount of work required, as well as trying to inspire the new members. TFA at that time also invited some veteran teachers to explain the context of the district and their advice on how to begin the school year. But what Steven remembered most was the way the program instilled the belief that he and the other recruits would succeed in the classroom:

They kept telling us, "You're going to be amazing, you are going to have such an impact on the kids." I mean, no one said that you're going to be an expert. But they helped us to believe that you are going to have what you need. There was nothing in our minds that led us to believe that we were doing anything other than what was a different route to teaching.

Of course he had questions about how difficult a job it would be, if he would experience the same success in teaching that he had had in other life endeavors, but because he was unaware of the day-to-day challenges of teaching, he entered with a confidence asymmetrical to his experience. As he expressed it, “You didn’t know what you didn’t know,” and although questions lingered, he and the majority of his peers were certain that they could also do well. After his TFA summer experience, Steven was placed at a middle school in Houston’s largely Latino East Side, in the fourth largest school district in the nation: Houston Independent School District (HISD). He remembers the school as far more unkempt than those he attended, and the library was hardly sufficient for its size, but in spite of the lack of physical resources, he felt certain in his ability to help the students.

He was assigned to teach mathematics, which he found somewhat surprising because it was a subject that he had not studied thoroughly in college. He was told that mathematics was the most pressing teaching need at the school, and the principal convinced him that he would quickly master the sixth- and seventh-grade concepts. He accepted the position with reservations but believed that with hard work – a personal quality he had always relied upon – he could teach and teach well. Besides, he thought, if the alternative was a series of substitute teachers, some of whom lacked a bachelor’s degree, what harm could be done? I can safely say that owing to the severe teaching shortage in Houston in the late 1990s, especially in mathematics, Steven’s position could not have been filled by a credentialed teacher.

Year 1

As Steven began his teaching, he reported being somewhat overwhelmed with the workload and came to realize the importance of good lesson planning. He also shared in an early interview that he believed that he was as good and in some cases much better than the other teachers at the school, many of whom he reported were “burned out.” It is important for me to point out that I did not investigate this claim. I cannot say that Steven was indeed better than the other mathematics teachers at the school, but an informal interview with his principal suggested that Steven’s enthusiasm and insights into the needs of his students made him a real asset.¹¹ The important point here is that Steven *believed* that he was as good or better than the other teachers. He readily admitted that he struggled with plenty of teaching tasks, but what beginning educator does not?

What about other new teachers, whom we might assume shared Steven’s enthusiasm? That is, teachers more like him, closer in age, learning to teach, and perhaps not so worn down? Did he find allies in them? More specifically, did their more extensive preparation intimidate him and raise doubts about his effectiveness? I asked Steven if he had felt less prepared than other new teachers at the school, and he replied:

Well, there weren’t any new teachers at the school other than TFA or other alternative certified teachers. We [the new teachers] all believed that the teachers who were traditionally certified weren’t teaching at schools like ours. They were off in the suburbs, I guess.

As a teacher educator whose goal at the time was preparing urban teachers for Houston’s schools, it saddens me to admit that Steven was right. The city’s credential programs, which included Texas Southern University, a historically Black university, were so under-funded and understaffed that even together we could not have hoped to

produce enough teachers for the burgeoning student population in the city. In spite of developing a set of urban professional development schools, some of which were located in HISD, our contribution to the teacher pool was a drop in a very large bucket. Our graduates, who would typically be hired over alternatively certified or TFA teachers because they had already completed their license, often chose to teach in the ring of “mid-urban” districts that surrounded the behemoth HISD. And although they often served a student population similar to those in HISD, their smaller size seemed to help new teachers feel less isolated. Further, these mid-urban districts were closer to where most beginning teachers had been raised and to the less expensive suburban homes teachers seem to favor (cf., Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2005).

The TFA summer immersion had clearly stressed, at least from the veteran teachers’ point of view, the importance of classroom management, and Steven felt comfortable in the role of a manager and motivator, perhaps the result of his experiences in athletics. He believed that if he could motivate the students, they would be less likely to “goof off.” He also credited some success to the fact that he was teaching mathematics, pointing out that one could follow the textbook.

I knew enough about motivating kids. I knew enough about the TAAS,¹² at that time, that I knew I could improve the kids’ scores. Not necessarily knowing a whole lot about math instruction, but just knowing how to indoctrinate kids into the idea of working hard towards a goal. But to be a master math teacher, I knew I would have to get more training to do that well.

The Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) was the state achievement test at the time. Schools were ranked based on the percentage of students at a school who passed, and Steven immediately embraced the notion of helping his students meet the state criteria; he even had a standing wager with the students that if they all passed, he would shave his head. Steven remembered that TFA planted in the minds of its Corps Members a reliance on student achievement – measured by standardized tests – as an important metric of their success. He used the district’s practice tests to measure his students’ progress and worked especially on those areas in which they seemed to lack competence. Confidence in his teaching was also raised by the fact that his students’ scores were higher than all the rest of the mathematics classes at the school. Steven understood very well that test scores do not by themselves indicate a teacher’s quality, but without any other reliable measure of his teaching skill,¹³ he once again grew in the belief that his lack of professional preparation was not a great concern. Again, I cannot claim that Steven was a superior teacher, or even better than the other teachers at this school, only that his perception of himself as “at least as good” had been reinforced. Interestingly, Steven’s success in the sixth-grade mathematics class mirrors the research findings indicating that TFA teachers are generally more successful in raising mathematics achievement scores than traditionally certified novice teachers (Decker, Mayer, & Glazerman, 2004).

As he completed his first year of teaching, Steven felt confident that he had genuinely helped his students’ mathematical learning. However, his efforts at the school went beyond mathematics teaching. Steven recognized that his students, like low-income students everywhere, had traveled very little; some had never been outside the city limits. Without experiences in the wider community, Steven thought that his students might not be able to contextualize their learning. So in the middle of his first year, Steven responded by initiating a program he called “*Clases sin Paredes*” (Classroom without Walls) and took a group of students to Washington, DC. Other

destinations included camping, where students learned more about Texas ecosystems, and local museums, designed to augment the school's weak fine arts program. All his extra work on behalf of the students drew the attention of administrators and parents who routinely praised Steven's efforts. It was clear by the way he described his program that he was very proud of the *Clases* program and used it as another benchmark of his success as a teacher.

In summarizing Steven's first year, what stands out for me is how he convinced himself that he was at least an adequate teacher. In a cognitive adaptation that social psychologists call "downward comparison" (Wheeler & Miyake, 1992), Steven knew that while he would be challenged as a teacher, he absolutely believed that the students would be worse off without him, even if he had no professional preparation. The evidence he gathered (e.g., test scores) served to augment this view.

Year 2

As he entered his second year, HISD began to pressure all its emergency certificate holders to become certified, and it became clear to Steven and his principal that he would not be able to take all the courses necessary to qualify for the mathematics credential. So Steven applied for a secondary social studies credential, for which he had the coursework, and began to teach a block of scheduled social studies classes for beginning English Language Learners (ELLs). With this new assignment, Steven found himself in a new and confusing teaching context. His Spanish was weak but improving, the school's social studies curriculum was terrible (the ELLs he taught could not read the book anyway), and he knew nothing of second language instruction. Nevertheless, he was certain that his instruction would be no worse – and likely better – than what the ELLs at the school had been receiving. After spending a few months in his new assignment, Steven noticed that the program for beginning English speakers, in particular, was very weak:

These kids [ELLs] are getting screwed. Every class they go to, they understand nothing. And the advice from the school in the workshops is simply to pair them up with a kid who speaks both languages.¹⁴ When that's held up as the best strategy ... I mean, I'm not like an expert in this, but that just doesn't seem like a strategy at all.

In response, Steven decided to seek his ESL endorsement¹⁵ at the university, which is how we first met. Steven conveyed his interest in learning more about how he might help his students learn English more effectively. I explained that our department's four ESL endorsement courses would count towards a master's degree, and we developed a degree plan that eventually led to earning his master's in Curriculum and Instruction. Steven continued his teaching and took courses in the evening and summer.

University work

Steven's first courses focused on the theories and methods of English as a Second Language. As part of a course assignment in his methods class, Steven learned of a method of teaching ESL known as Total Physical Response, or TPR (Asher, 1981). One of the course assignments was to consider a method of teaching ESL, incorporate it into a videotaped lesson, and share it with the class. I had viewed Steven's videotaped lesson when he took the class, but I revisited it for the purposes of writing this article. In retrospect, I found that Steven had demonstrated a reasonable command of

both TPR and a generalized pedagogical skill that seemed precocious. Each and every student was engaged, he used choral responses to encourage participation, and he created a casual and witty environment. He made good progress in using the strategies of TPR, even to the point of saturating the lesson with almost too much activity, a point made by a colleague of mine who also viewed the tape.¹⁶ This lesson showed that Steven could utilize newly learned strategies while also relying on the considerable talents that he had already developed for teaching.

I asked him at one point if the courses he took at the university had given him any insights into teaching. What came to mind first for him was the idea of varying methods of instruction:

I began to consider that there are different ways to teach this. It opened up multiple choices in the toolbox. Learning about the methods for teaching different language objectives. And talking with peers and bouncing ideas off them, that really helped. There was a lot of benefit in just talking about what you do.

In a particularly interesting statement, Steven contrasted the relative ease of teaching mathematics with the challenge of ESL instruction:

Probably what I didn't learn [before university work] was *what* to teach, and I think that's something I still struggle with. At least with math, there's a textbook you can follow, at least you have a starting point and you could jump off. In ESL, I was completed naked. There was no curriculum. Okay, obviously I needed them to work on reading, writing, speaking, listening, but that in itself was an epiphany, just realizing that language is broken down into these four parts. Teach them to read, write, speak, listen. That's good stuff!

And

I never realized that there were specific methods of teaching. That you could do more than show them how to do it, do it with them, and then do it by themselves. I also had a better understanding of the importance of group work.

Learning the elements of language offered Steven a way to choose curricula and prepare his lessons, and he mentioned at three points in various interviews how he used them to create balanced activities. Other insights he gained at the university included a few technology “tricks” as well as additional teaching methods.

Steven was enthusiastic about some of the university courses he took, noting that others did little to improve his teaching. I cannot say whether he was completely open in critiquing the courses he took with me, but he did report that the methods courses were genuinely helpful. I must admit that the instructional insights he gained were not always what I expected or perhaps even hoped for, but assisting him in gaining knowledge for his new teaching assignment is probably enough success for any teacher educator in my place.

I asked Steven if the timing of his university coursework worked in his favor. For example, I wondered if he could reflect upon whether those university courses he believed to be interesting and useful would have helped him prior to his experience in the classroom. Fully recognizing the speculative nature of the question, Steven suggested that his professional development worked well for him. From his perspective, he had begun teaching mathematics, a subject for which a clear curriculum direction could be found. Although the district-adopted curriculum was

more skills-based than many mathematics educators might promote, its clarity and specificity did allow Steven to work through the general challenges in learning to teach without developing a curriculum at the same time.

I suggested to Steven in one of our interviews that in spite of his success in teaching mathematics he would have gained much from engaging in a deeper study of pre-algebraic concepts, for example. He agreed, but again pointed back to the success he had in helping each of his students pass the statewide test.

In summary, teaching ELLs presented a new set of challenges for Steven. With no programmed mathematics textbook to guide him, he had questions about how to structure the curriculum for students who could not understand the books or other materials. Although I think it is folly to suggest that teaching mathematics is easier than content-based English language development in the social studies, moving from mathematics teaching to social studies for ELL was fruitful for Steven. I suspect he would have had less success had he begun in the social studies class of ELL. The progression worked for him on another level as well: he was able to use the knowledge he gained in his university classes almost immediately. With many classroom routines, procedures, and management under his control as a result of his first year, he was capable of focusing on the subtler aspects of language teaching.

Links to teacher education

Steven's teaching has revealed themes linked to his development as a teacher that might be of interest to teacher educators. First, one of the questions posed at the start of this article asked what might beginning teachers miss by not participating in a professional program. Steven invoked the success of his first year in response to this question and pointed out that, by his account, his first year was successful in spite of his lack of preparation. A second theme suggests that Steven's work in a largely unfamiliar cultural context was aided by his willingness to learn about his students' families outside of the school context. Finally, owing to potential increased funding by the federal government, TFA (and other alternative routes to teaching) may grow rapidly. What issues does this research bring to bear on this important policy question?

“What did you miss?”

Of course, this question might be better answered in a large-scale study comparing alternatively and traditionally certified teachers, and even then each group would be speculating (how do we know what we missed?), but Steven's comments in this regard are enlightening because he entered the classroom without professional coursework and later attended the university.

In an early interview, I asked Steven about what he thought he missed by not participating in preservice teacher education, and he considered the question carefully before answering with the following:

I can't think of anything that I would have wanted ahead of time that I didn't get. I think what I had going in was the ability to problem-solve.

Steven often described the existing talents he had for teaching “going in”, and this quote is emblematic of those views. I also questioned whether he thought he would have benefited from an apprenticeship model, where he might have student-taught

prior to teaching. He again mentioned Jane's unhappy and unproductive student teaching experience.¹⁷

However, I pressed Steven further, wondering what features of teacher education might have benefited him. I mentioned that his informal observations as an undergraduate seemed to both help him know what teachers did and inspire him into the career. Perhaps more observations in a middle-school mathematics class, where a strong teacher was working with the same students he would be teaching, would have enhanced his start. Steven agreed.

Steven's claim that he had much "going in" as he started his teaching assignment raises a fundamental and enduring question in teacher education: is there a "natural talent" for teaching and, if so, how can it be recognized? I cannot claim that Steven has more natural ability for teaching than anyone else because the field has no workable theory to assess a teacher's initial capacity.¹⁸ Nevertheless, it makes no sense to argue that everyone who wishes to be a teacher comes to the work with an exactly equal set of skills and dispositions. For my part, I believe that Steven's background and experiences equipped him with a set of skills (e.g., communication) and personality traits (e.g., empathy) that placed him above the average. But until we have a more developed theory of the capacities for teaching, teacher educators may find recent writings on the ontogenesis of teaching very compelling (e.g., Strauss, 2005). In any event, I would never argue that teacher education "screen" applicants for their native teaching abilities, selecting only those who demonstrate the proper admixture of background experience and personality prior to professional preparation. I would further argue that teacher education is quite capable of developing important pedagogical skills as well as altering preservice teachers' fundamental beliefs about culturally different students and the democratizing power of public schools, for instance. But I do not believe teacher education can develop or perhaps even enhance each and every nuanced, human quality needed to be a successful teacher. I think it is these mysterious capacities that Steven describes as what he possessed before he began teaching (what he had "going in").

Connection to Mexican-American culture

When Steven arrived in Houston to begin teaching, he had known few Mexican-Americans. Growing up in Pittsburgh where only 0.7% of the population is Hispanic, the majority of whom are of Puerto Rican descent, he knew very little about the cultural life of his middle-school students. Steven's capacity to teach "culturally diverse" students might be the most engaging part of the study, primarily because the preparation for diverse students is one of the hallmark themes in contemporary teacher education (Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Lesko & Bloom, 1998), and Steven had had none of it. In addition, TFA has been roundly criticized for inviting White teachers with little or no preparation to work with children of color (Darling-Hammond, 1994). These issues thus framed many of our lengthy discussions about his capacity to teach culturally different students.

In an early interview, Steven reported that he had been struggling with whether he was serving his own ego by helping his lower-class students or if his motives were genuine. Was he in fact assisting his students to become independent learners (Proweller & Mitchener, 2004)? His role as a middle-class, White teacher among working-class Latinos complicated teaching for Steven, and he had not given the issue

much thought until after he started teaching (he mentioned that teacher/student cultural discontinuity warranted only a brief discussion in his TFA summer). However, as he pressed forward with his *Clases sin Paredes* program, he found himself making home visits in an effort to convince the parents of his students to allow them to go on the extended field trips he was planning.¹⁹ As he began to spend more time with his students and their families, especially time outside of school, he realized some fundamental differences between the culture of Mexican-American working-class families and his own. And although he did not initially intend to learn more about his students and their families (he wanted only to get permission from them for his cross-country field trips), he began to understand, indeed acquire, Mexican-American culture. And as anyone knows who has acquired a second culture, Steven also learned something about himself:

In Mexican-American culture, the importance of the family was something that I noticed immediately. Without getting too psychological or anything, I mean, I had a great experience with my family. But I didn't have any cousins nearby, just one aunt, and then my own parents divorcing. To me, I guess it was something that I longed for. The families and their closeness was something that intrigued me. I guess that it's typical of middle-class White America, that family isn't that important. You know it could be, but it certainly has lost its potential along the line with ... I don't know, it's just that the priorities are different.

As his first year went on, Steven described a friendship with some of the families that went beyond the teacher/student relationship. It seemed that the more he gave of his time, the more the families trusted and respected him:

There was so much respect for what I did. Didn't anyone tell these parents that I was 24 years old? I mean, in my second year of teaching, I was taking kids across the country, putting kids on airplanes. The trust they had in me was kind of scary. Now that I'm a father, I'm not so sure that I would have trusted me!

As the families gave Steven more responsibility for their children, he, in turn, began to see them in a new light. He reported that some of the teachers at the school described parents as uninterested in their children's education and unwilling to serve the school, the common litany railed against working-class Latino parents, but Steven learned otherwise, and any initial stereotypes simply faded away. He came to view the families as resourceful, caring, loving, and hard-working *friends* rather than "clients" or merely the parents of his students. In this way, Steven was not merely learning about the culture of his students as if it were a cognitive exercise designed to enhance instruction. He was becoming part of the community, which is probably the most authentic way to gain valid cultural information. Steven's experience corroborates a finding I uncovered in another study (Télez, 2008); that is, beginning educators who embrace unfamiliar cultural groups (and thereby gain any measure of pedagogical advantage) do so only when they have a genuine desire to become a part of the culture, insofar as it is possible. Culture cannot be learned in any traditional sense; it must be absorbed, and evidence suggests that teachers absorb it best when working with students outside of the traditional boundaries of school (Foster, Lewis, & Onafowora, 2003), just as Steven had.

Steven also found that his knowledge of the students' families worked to provide a context in the classroom:

As I got to know the families better, I found there is definitely a culture that told you what you did inside of your home with your family and at church and all that, but at school, you can be the thug that everyone kind of expects you to be. I mean my kids would do gang signs and write their letters and they had no clue what it meant. Their parents would kill them if they knew, but it was just their attempt to be a part of their peer group. But I would tell them, “I know how you really are and I know that you are this sweet little kid who’s not going to hurt a fly. You and I both know that. And I know about what your parents and grandparents have sacrificed so that you can you be in this school.” That always helped them get back on track.

Steven’s desire and capacity to live the culture of the families in the school community, emerging from a complex interaction of psychological and pedagogical sources, allowed him to interact with them in a way that was partnering, but also authoritative. This is admittedly a delicate balance, but most Mexican-American families are quite willing to take directions from a trusted teacher, as Ensle (1996) has also documented. Steven’s commitment to the families and his desire to be part of the culture promoted both effective teaching strategies and a trust with the families that allowed him to engage them in ways an “outsider” could not.

TFA effects

This article was never intended to render a judgment on TFA. To my mind, we do not, and likely never will, have the data needed to assess its true effects. To begin, serious sample biases can never be fully overcome in a direct comparison between TFA and traditionally prepared teachers. Further, TFA is unlikely to share the attrition rates of their recruits (i.e., those who, unlike Steven, never make it to even the second week of teaching). Nevertheless, a few recent research reports offer evidence that certification status is a poor predictor of student test scores, especially with regards to literacy achievement. These studies find that the vast bulk of the test score variation is *among* teachers in the same “certification” group rather than systematic differences *between* the groups (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2006b; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Kane, Rockoff, & Staiger, 2008). More influential in the policy world are the anecdotal stories surrounding TFA, which range from portrayals of dismal schools where TFA teachers worked diligently in the interests of oppressed youth (e.g., Foote, 2008; Johnston, 2002), to testimonials supporting TFA’s impact on students’ lives (Ness, 2004) to the entirely self-congratulatory (Kopp, 2003). The present study might signal additional qualitative studies of alternatively prepared teachers. In particular, case studies could help to move us past the indeterminacies of the quantitative research as well as providing a more objective analysis of TFA than the descriptive literature – really best described as novellas – to date.

I admit to a bias against TFA from the beginning, and looking back over the years, I recall many times when my questions about TFA’s role in his development were unfairly phrased. In fact, I fully admit that over the course of the study, I secretly hoped that Steven would deny TFA’s influence on him as an educator and see it as I had: as a ham-handed, unprofessional, unprincipled project that harmed children’s education. As the interviews and the years wore on, I think he came to see TFA in a slightly less positive light while I grew to understand better its power. In an interview near the conclusion of the study, he described the intersection of his ability and TFA’s capacity for motivating him and others:

Maybe it was my personality, but I had never spent time dwelling on anything negative. I always tried to see the positive, tried to be as optimistic as possible. And part of that was this huge, you know, idealism that, yes, maybe TFA fed into. But I brought that, you know, just like a lot of us. You know, we brought some of that idealism, but I think TFA supported us to think that way.

This comment suggests that the TFA message corroborated Steven's life history, which convinced him that he could teach without initial preparation. He knew he could motivate his students – perhaps owing to his participation in sports – and he had a genuine interest in helping underserved youth, a commitment that came as a consequence of his observations in an urban high school and his upbringing in a family that valued service to community. TFA did not confer these views, but neither did it contradict them or suggest he was going to need much more work before he could be a teacher. Of course, the realities of teaching proved to be far more difficult than portrayed, but the innocent “you-can-make-a-difference” message was crucial to his development.

TFA also opened genuine doors of opportunity for Steven. After he left Houston, partly at the urging of Jane, who was ready to move back home to Pittsburgh to take a teaching position, he worked for the New Teacher Project²⁰ in Cleveland, commuting between the two cities. The New Teacher Project, an extension of TFA, worked to locate new teachers for urban schools. After one year in Cleveland, Steven heard of an opportunity to earn his school administration certificate at Carnegie Mellon University through a program linked to TFA. Because so many former TFA recruits had stayed in education, the organization obtained funds to support its former teachers who wanted to become school administrators, and half the program costs at Carnegie Mellon were paid for by Steven's TFA sponsorship. As might be expected from a TFA endeavor, the administrative certificate program was not located in a school of education, but rather took a generalized approach to management, assisting Steven and his classmates with a business and nonprofit approach to organizations. In spite of the lack of a school-based focus, Steven was generally pleased with the program, suggesting that it taught him several important technical skills (e.g., budgeting) he uses routinely as a principal.

As a final note on TFA, I want to remind readers that Steven is not necessarily typical of all TFA recruits, because most do not stay in education for long. After all, TFA asks only for a two-year commitment, and research has shown that perhaps only 20% of TFA teachers remain after four years (Humphrey, Wechsler, & Hough, 2008). Yet it seems that TFA teachers like Steven are held up as the model. For instance, a legislative sponsor of a recent Congressional amendment that would allow TFA to apply for \$20–30 million in yearly federal funds reported: “It is my hope that this amendment will enable Teach For America to grow farther and help *develop life-long leaders for education*” [*italics mine*] (source: http://www.teachforamerica.org/newsroom/documents/020808_HEA_Amendment.htm)

General conclusions

Teacher education has no defensible position against beginning teachers such as Steven: energetic and bright young people who appear to have a natural capacity for teaching and, perhaps most importantly, choose to begin their careers in the kind of schools that educational researchers and teacher educators have had little success in improving. Does it matter that he began his career without preservice

teacher education? Does his success suggest that professional-school teacher education could or should be eliminated? These questions require speculation beyond any reason. Further, I would suggest that asking questions of such little nuance misses the point of the story, and in their place, I would put to teacher educators the following queries, all of which emerged from the present study:

- (1) Are there teachers-to-be who might not benefit from preservice courses or student teaching? Teacher educators might gain legitimacy if they routinely recommended that some preservice teachers were ready to begin classroom teaching without a preservice program. Abandoning all professional development is never advised, but could some beginning teachers grow in their pedagogical skill after they have begun full-time teaching? In my own experience, I have found that beginning teachers like Steven who began teaching prior to any coursework were more engaged and directed than their counterparts in the preservice program when they began to take methods courses. (I state this with full recognition that these two groups cannot be compared directly.) This is a question of the *timing and intensity* of professional development, not whether it is necessary.

This view recalls the continuum of the learning to teach process suggested by Feiman-Nemser (1983) over 25 years ago. In her model, teachers do not begin their professional growth at a common starting line, and in supporting her view she invokes Stephens' (1969) position, which suggested that human development itself, widely varied and vastly complicated, may be the best (and worst) teacher educator.

If teacher educators can agree that teaching capacity is distributed in their students (i.e. some have immense "natural" talent for teaching whereas others need more experience and guidance), then we might not insist that everyone does the same work, at the same time, with the same materials. Student teachers who are simultaneously taught to value individually designed (i.e. differentiated) instruction for children should question the hypocrisy when their own program allows for no individual variation.

- (2) Are we acting *efficiently* in our preservice programs? Efficiency is not a common goal in many educational enterprises, and although the use of such a construct could be harmful in the K–12 context, adult learners are keenly aware of when their time is not being put to good use. For instance, teacher educators might ask how many weeks of student teaching are absolutely necessary, or if perhaps methods courses could be combined to reduce redundancy. Those of us who have spent years in teacher education often hear student teachers say, "It'll be different when I have my own classroom." When student teachers say this, the learning switch is off and the dreaming has begun. They are not giving much thought to tomorrow's lesson, they are thinking six months to a year ahead, when they will be in complete control of their own classroom. Does their view indicate that they are ready to teach in their own classroom? No. Have they learned all they could from their cooperating teacher? Again, probably not, but 10 more weeks of student teaching will not help much. *They want to do it for themselves.* Steven's start in education allowed him to explore and engage his students as their teacher. He certainly made missteps, but they were not more egregious than those of other first-year teachers.

- (3) Must standardized tests be avoided as evidence of teaching success? Like his TFA peers, Steven was not exposed early on to the prevailing views of many educators and teacher education faculty who, by and large, are very suspicious of test scores as a measure of teaching effectiveness (e.g., Allington, 2003).²¹ Consequently, Steven relied upon a state standardized test to gauge his success, a strategy promoted in his brief six-week TFA summer program. I am not suggesting that higher test scores provide direct evidence that Steven was an effective teacher. Teaching effectiveness, without question, is much more than raising test scores, but should we bifurcate the two? In my view, I do not believe that Steven compromised his deep interest in his students' well-being for higher test scores. In fact, he saw them as adjuncts. By working to raise their test scores, Steven believed that he was working in his students' interests. Now, as an elementary principal, Steven continues to use test scores as a way to assess the success of his school's initiatives. I would point out that Poplin and Rivera (2005) recommend that the link between accountability (in the form of academic achievement) and social justice be more clearly drawn, a position corroborated by Steven.
- (4) Do teacher educators have a moral ground to stand on when teachers lacking professional preparation are better than veteran teachers? At several points in Steven's story, he matches up his teaching to the instruction he saw around him, concluding that even if he is inexperienced and largely untrained, he is still better than the majority of the teachers at the school. The fact that Steven, and TFA writ large, could make such comparisons gave him a clear moral path to teaching, and he could enter the field guilt-free, in spite of lacking professional preparation. The teaching pathos in our urban schools makes it easy for those who oppose teacher education to make the case that content knowledge, motivation, and hard work are all one needs to "have an impact." As Ng (2003) has suggested, the problems facing urban school districts are far greater than how their teachers earn certification. Until teacher educators can demonstrate clearly that preservice preparation has a measurable effect on student achievement, and that they are clearly preparing their students for urban schools, the moral argument against TFA and other alternative programs will carry little weight.
- (5) How might we reappraise multicultural education/cross-cultural education coursework? Steven's desire to know the families of his students was key to his success. The question teacher educators must face is whether any degree of coursework could inspire a teacher to adopt a similar strategy. Forging the deep and abiding connections to culture is not a question of learning; as Steven demonstrated, it is a question of acquisition, which is guided by one's own moral path and the available time. At the very least, it seems that teacher educators should carefully consider how they present models of culture learning to prospective educators. How might teacher educators help to engage preservice teachers in culture acquisition in ways that do not rely solely on books or interacting with culturally different students in schools only? To my mind, teacher education might do well to truncate the time preservice teachers spend in schools and reallocate it to cultural acquisition in the community.

Recently, the unrelenting critique of teacher education has crossed into new territory. As Zeichner (2003) has pointed out, today's policy stances against teacher education are more comprehensive and more likely to attack specific programmatic

features of teacher preparation (e.g., a bias towards theoretical positions such as constructivism) in favor of instructional approaches the critics favor (e.g., more subject-matter knowledge; less multiculturalism). Not content simply to “deregulate” or eliminate teacher education as conservative commentators have historically suggested, the new breed of policy analysts have been emboldened by increased funding in support of their work (Abell Foundation, 2001). More ominous still, Levine (2006) has recently pointed out that the professional schools in education are in serious jeopardy of losing their licensing “monopoly.” Teacher educators may have a difficult choice if the options are either: (a) more regulation and direction at the hands of the neoconservatives; or (b) the elimination of preservice teacher education altogether, the position held by most neoliberals.

University-based teacher educators must play a role in developing teachers’ skills, but a narrow focus on the number of course hours and weeks in student teaching erodes our credibility. Perhaps a reconsideration of the professional growth of *all* teachers, at every stage of their development, could initiate a new vision for the field. Steven’s story may be only a single data point to support such a renewal, but teacher educators who care about serving our most fragile youth must reckon it. For my part, Steven has convinced me that a teaching life should be judged not by how it begins, but rather by how it unfolds.

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Notes

1. As an example, the Texas State Board of Educator Certification lists the Web-Centric Alternative Certification Program (<http://www.online-distance-learning-education.com/articles.php/tPath/12>) as an approved licensing entity.
2. In wealthier communities, parents demand that their child’s teachers have both experience and expertise, thus making it unlikely that many non-credentialed teachers would be hired.
3. Although it was almost a decade ago, the school’s demographics were similar to its present characteristics: in the 2004–05 school year, 11% of the teachers were in their first year (according to Steven, it was higher when he taught there); of the roughly 800 students, 91% of the students were Hispanic and almost all the rest were Black; 96% received free or reduced-price lunch (no change); and 17% were classified as Limited English Proficient (Texas Education Agency Data, 2005).
4. I should point out that Steven had a few thousand dollars of Americorps money that could be spent only on university tuition. Would he have come to the university for coursework if he had not had this funding? He could not say yes or no.
5. I fully admit that Steven was a “convenience sample” for this biographical study. My decision to study his career arc was motivated mostly by his interest in taking courses at the university, something that no other TFA participants at the time chose to do. I was also intrigued by his descriptions of his instructional success at the school. Although he was never boastful, Steven was proud of his work, and I wanted to learn more about where his success came from. Before studying Steven, I had hoped to study a TFA teacher who had failed and left well before the two-year commitment. For obvious reasons, neither TFA nor the school district would allow me to engage in such a study. My personal contacts to TFA “early leavers” never yielded a willing participant.
6. I want to emphasize that data from these final lengthy interviews augmented my earlier data. While it is true that his reflections by this point seemed more sophisticated, they

formed but a portion of the full data I used to develop the conceptual categories that appear in the results section.

7. Narrative inquiry of this kind blurs the line between biographic “research” and biography. My interviews with Steven did not have the same contours or boundaries as interviews I have conducted as part of other research studies. After all, we were friends, having known each other for many years near the completion of the study. Nevertheless, I think that the biographic approach I took conforms, at a minimum, to the *Standards for reporting on humanities-oriented research* recently published by AERA Publications. I would also suggest that this type of biographic research conforms to Linde’s (1986) explanation of narrative in which the narrator’s own press toward textual coherence creates the kind of “story” that Steven shared with me. Thus, the researcher is given an account that moves effortlessly from orientation information to coda.
8. After writing the article, I sent a draft to Steven to provide a “member check” of his thoughts. He made only corrections of fact.
9. As a teacher educator who has been tangentially involved with TFA since its inception, I have always maintained that it is impossible to disagree with TFA’s goals. Putting young people in classrooms for which no qualified teacher can be found is an unequivocally good idea. Trying to argue against this simple goal is irrational. Further, those of us who have worked in regions of the country where the teacher shortage is acute know first-hand the consequences of having no teacher at all. Of course, TFA’s early claims about “injecting needed intelligence” into the teaching ranks were both insulting and naïve, but the organization has since tempered that language if not its attitude. However, I am frustrated that TFA continues to tout the undergraduate loan forgiveness program as an exclusive privilege for TFA participants when the truth is that the federally funded Teacher Loan Forgiveness Program is available to anyone who teaches in a qualified school or subject. Yet TFA recruits, in my experience, are never told that they could have participated in a traditional teacher education program, deferred their loans, and had them repaid regardless of their participation in TFA.
10. Although Steven had spent his internship in a high school setting, he lacked the coursework needed to be placed in emergency permit position in the school district and was therefore directed to elementary school teaching. His first position was sixth grade within a middle school, where he could teach with a general elementary emergency certificate.
11. It is difficult to determine whether Steven’s perceptions of his own success are a consequence only of the low qualifications or low performance of other teachers in the school. There is no question that the school district had great difficulty in hiring high quality beginning teachers. If it could have found all the teachers it needed, there would have been no need to recruit TFA teachers. I should also point out that the school district itself had developed the largest alternative certification program in the nation to address the teacher shortages (Dill, 1996)
12. The Texas Assessment of Academic Skills was the original “high-stakes” test in Texas. This criterion-referenced test was used to rank schools and later to determine whether an individual student would move to the next grade or course. It is now known as the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills.
13. I should point out that the administrative staffing levels in HISD schools at this time did not allow for intensive teacher observation or evaluation. No administrator conducted a formal observation of Steven’s instruction until the last month of school.
14. Hess (2001) makes the argument that the study of pedagogy should occur as the teacher begins classroom instruction, making preservice programming unnecessary. In Steven’s case, the “inservice” training he received was very spotty, and, like the workshops he mentions here, weak. In defense of the school and district, the need for teachers, overcrowded schools, and a lack of adequate funding made everything an emergency. When schools are in this state, professional growth opportunities are rarely engaging or sophisticated. I would also point out that Steven’s TFA mentors rarely visited him, and the principal, a caring and thoughtful educator in my view, simply did not have time to make classroom visits, especially to those teachers who were doing adequately.
15. Like several other states, Texas does not offer an initial certificate in ESL, but instead “endorses” an existing subject matter license.
16. I invited my colleague George Bunch to review Steven’s videotape and make an assessment of the instruction. Overall, his comments reflected my own positive assessment, but

- George also pointed out that the lesson, while invoking the fundamental strategies of TPR, seemed too behaviorist in orientation. In his view, Steven's verbal praise was somewhat excessive and the lesson too teacher-directed.
17. I want to repeat that I am not claiming to have evidence that Jane's student teaching experience was poorly supported, but Jane's belief that she received no useful feedback during her student teaching was enough to convince Steven that he could do without it. Unfortunately, the research suggests that Jane's experience is not rare. Although beginning teachers often credit their cooperating teacher with providing significant assistance, Borko and Mayfield (1995) found that few cooperating teachers provide the extensive and targeted feedback that helps student teachers make significant pedagogical growth.
 18. Teacher selection instruments have been used in identifying teachers for many years, but these surveys or interview protocols look for attitudes only. I might also argue that such instruments lack an overarching theory to explain their effectiveness (see Metzger & Wu, 2008).
 19. I once asked him if he had heard about Funds of Knowledge, a program that suggests teachers make home visits as a way to align student interest to the curriculum (Monzo & Rueda, 2003). He reported that he had not heard of Funds of Knowledge at that time. Later in his coursework, one of his professors introduced the concept and he recognized similarities in his own work.
 20. This New Teacher Project should not be confused with the organization that provides assistance to thousands of beginning teachers in California.
 21. I want to point out that I am separating ill-advised accountability schemes such as No Child Left Behind from the judicious use of standardized tests, which can be used quite independently.

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