

Executive Summary

A Redesigned Training Program for New Teachers Findings from a Study of Teach For America's Summer Institutes

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March 2019



Funding for this report came from a Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED) grant from the U.S. Department of Education. The goal of the SEED initiative is to increase the number of highly effective educators by supporting the implementation of evidence-based preparation, development, or enhancement opportunities for educators. Teach For America received a SEED grant to redesign its summer training for corps members, and MDRC conducted an independent evaluation of the implementation and impacts of that training.

Dissemination of MDRC publications is supported by the following funders that help finance MDRC's public policy outreach and expanding efforts to communicate the results and implications of our work to policymakers, practitioners, and others: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation, The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, Ford Foundation, The George Gund Foundation, Daniel and Corinne Goldman, The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, Inc., The JPB Foundation, The Joyce Foundation, The Kresge Foundation, Arnold Ventures, Sandler Foundation, and The Starr Foundation.

In addition, earnings from the MDRC Endowment help sustain our dissemination efforts. Contributors to the MDRC Endowment include Alcoa Foundation, The Ambrose Monell Foundation, Anheuser-Busch Foundation, Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Ford Foundation, The George Gund Foundation, The Grable Foundation, The Lizabeth and Frank Newman Charitable Foundation, The New York Times Company Foundation, Jan Nicholson, Paul H. O'Neill Charitable Foundation, John S. Reed, Sandler Foundation, and The Stupski Family Fund, as well as other individual contributors.

The findings and conclusions in this report do not necessarily represent the official positions or policies of the funders.

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Overview

In summer 2015, roughly six years after the Great Recession of 2007-2009 ended, the American media began reporting on an emerging teacher shortage. Public schools were reinstating programs and classes that they had cut during the recession, and student enrollment was increasing. Meanwhile, enrollment in teacher training programs was decreasing. Teacher shortages are especially problematic for schools serving mainly students from low-income families and communities of color.

Teach For America (TFA), founded in 1989, has grown to become one of the largest providers of educators in the country for high-needs, underresourced schools. TFA recruits high-performing college graduates and professionals and prepares them for teaching during five to seven weeks of intensive training at its regional and national summer “institutes” before their first teaching job. In 2015, TFA was awarded a Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED) grant from the U.S. Department of Education to redesign its summer training for new teachers, or “corps members” (CMs). In summer 2016, TFA piloted a redesigned training model, developed specifically for adult learners, that incorporated more rigorous academic standards and training methods and practices with an eye toward college and career readiness. The new model differed substantially from TFA’s traditional training, most notably in the *method of delivering training* to CMs and the use of *content-based instructional activities*.

This report presents the findings from a study that examined how the redesigned training was implemented in a TFA training site (program group) and how it compared with the usual training at other TFA sites (comparison group). It also examined the promise of the redesigned training to improve the short-term outcomes of the first cohort of TFA teachers to receive it — that is, CMs’ use of the new instructional strategies and teaching practices, their perceptions of the value of the training, their commitment to teaching and to equity, and their retention rates in the TFA program. Not surprisingly, given the complexity of the new training, TFA encountered a number of implementation challenges:

- It was more difficult to implement the redesigned training than anticipated, as it involved preparing TFA summer staff, in less than one year, to use radically different methods from those of TFA’s traditional training to teach corps members.
- Lead instructors in the program group did not consistently or deliberately model the new teaching strategies and practices, and as a result, no differences were found between CMs in the program group and the comparison group in their use of these new strategies and practices.
- CMs in the program group did not have more positive perceptions of the value of their summer training than did those in the comparison group.
- The redesigned training does not appear to have improved CMs’ commitment to teaching and educational equity, or to have improved their retention rates in the TFA program.

Although the hoped-for outcomes did not materialize, the first cohort of CMs who received the redesigned training performed no better or worse than CMs who received TFA’s usual training. The lessons from this study have helped TFA address the challenges that were encountered during implementation and to strengthen the redesigned training model. TFA has now revamped the model and in summer 2017 began to scale it up at their national institutes.

Acknowledgments

This evaluation of Teach For America's (TFA's) redesigned training model and the resulting report reflect the efforts of a great many people. Our first debt of gratitude is to the corps members and TFA training staff who took time out of their busy schedules to participate in focus groups and interviews and to complete logs during the study. The assistance and cooperation of these individuals were vital for enabling the study to move forward and for providing the rich and detailed information on which this report is based.

At TFA, Hana Merkle, Jamila Singleton Munson, Rita Zota, Jennifer Salman, and Jessica Besser-Rosenberg spent countless hours giving us a strong understanding of the redesigned training model and making it possible for us to be observers at conferences in which TFA lead instructors and coaches were trained to work with corps members. They were also unfailing in their availability to answer questions and provide support. Grant Van Eaton, Hana Merkle, Chrissy Heyne, and Kristen Lambertz-Berndt at TFA provided useful critiques during the report drafting process. Throughout the project, Shane Traister, Amirah Patterson, and Semra Malik answered our many questions about the surveys and administrative data collected by TFA, and they provided several well-organized datasets that were used to describe the characteristics and outcomes of the corps members in this study.

Stephanie Levin from IMPAQ, as a technical assistance provider for the Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED) grants, offered thoughtful and welcome advice about all aspects of the study design and the findings.

At MDRC, Elena Serna-Wallender led the operations work to recruit research participants and support data collection efforts; she also conducted some of the focus groups. Sonia Drohojowska was the resource manager during the proposal stage and during the first few months of working on the report. Andrea Shane, Kelly Quinn, Nicholas Commins, Deborah Van Kummer, Bulent Can, Usha Krishnan, Jaye Song, Zachary Pinto, and Laura Wang provided programming and analysis support. Larissa Saco, Christopher Boland, and Joseph Quinn contributed in various ways to the qualitative research, including the collection and coding of data and its analysis. Larissa and Nicholas also coordinated the production of the report, including making sure that deadlines were met, preparing exhibits, and verifying the accuracy of the report content. Fred Doolittle, Alice Tufel, Jean Grossman, Leigh Parise, Michelle Maier, and Janet Quint carefully reviewed earlier drafts of the report and offered helpful critiques throughout the writing process. Christopher Boland edited the report, and Carolyn Thomas prepared it for publication.

The Authors

Executive Summary

In summer 2015, roughly six years after the Great Recession of 2007-2009 ended, the American media began reporting on an emerging teacher shortage. Public schools were reinstating programs and classes that they had cut during the recession, and student enrollment was increasing after years of little or no growth. Meanwhile, enrollment in teacher training programs was decreasing, giving rise to concerns about an impending teacher shortage.¹ Teacher shortages are especially problematic for schools serving mainly students from low-income families and communities of color. These schools are generally underresourced and usually have the highest attrition rates and the most vacancies for teachers.²

Founded in 1989, Teach For America (TFA) has grown to become one of the largest providers of educators in the country for high-needs schools. Since its inception, TFA has trained over 50,000 teachers, also known as corps members (CMs), who are placed in high-needs schools to fill vacancies. CMs commit to teach in underresourced schools for at least two years. The majority of CMs have never taught and have no background in education; however, they receive intensive training during the summer before beginning to teach, at what is familiarly known as an “institute,” that includes teaching summer school students. Several studies, including three large randomized controlled trials (RCTs), have found that TFA teachers are either more effective than or as effective as the non-TFA teachers with whom they were compared.³

Nonetheless, similar to many novice teachers, CMs face many challenges as they enter the classroom for the first time, and the institute is where TFA can have the biggest impact on how well CMs are prepared to teach effectively and to have positive effects on their students. One of TFA’s core values is to learn continuously.⁴ In this spirit, TFA applied for — and was awarded — a Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED) grant from the U.S. Department of Education to redesign the way it trains CMs before their first year of teaching by enhancing the rigor and the relevance of the institute training. This new approach was piloted at one of TFA’s institutes in summer 2016.

¹Leib Sutchter, Linda Darling-Hammond, and Desiree Carver-Thomas, *A Coming Crisis in Teaching? Teacher Supply, Demand, and Shortages in the U.S.* (Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute, 2016).

²Frank Adamson and Linda Darling-Hammond, *Addressing the Inequitable Distribution of Teachers: What It Will Take to Get Qualified, Effective Teachers in All Communities* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education, 2011).

³Paul T. Decker, Daniel P. Mayer, and Steven Glazerman, *The Effects of Teach For America on Students: Findings from a National Evaluation* (Princeton, NJ: Mathematica Policy Research, 2004); Melissa Clark, Hanley S. Chiang, Tim Silva, Sheena McConnell, Kathy Sonnenfeld, Anastasia Erbe, and Michael Puma, *The Effectiveness of Secondary Math Teachers from Teach For America and the Teaching Fellows Programs* (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, 2013); Melissa Clark, Eric Isenberg, Albert Liu, Libby Makowsky, and Marykate Zukiewicz, *Impacts of the Teach For America Investing in Innovation Scale-Up* (Princeton, NJ: Mathematica Policy Research, 2017).

⁴Teach For America, “Our Values,” accessed October 16, 2018, website: www.teachforamerica.org.

This report presents the findings from an independent, quasi-experimental evaluation that examined TFA’s efforts to implement its new training model and its effect on CMs’ perceptions of the value of the training, their commitment to teaching and equity, their use of instructional strategies aligned with college- and career-ready standards,⁵ their use of teaching practices that were part of the redesign, and their retention in the TFA program. MDRC — a nonprofit, non-partisan education and social policy research organization — conducted the evaluation. The study found that the implementation of the redesigned summer training was a complex undertaking and more difficult to accomplish than anticipated, especially given that TFA had less than one year to prepare. (The pilot began 10 months after TFA was awarded the SEED grant.) It required preparing staff to train CMs in the use of methods that were radically different from TFA’s traditional training, as well as restructuring the training process at the pilot institute. Some of the TFA staff who trained CMs were not sufficiently trained themselves for their role and reported that they felt inadequately prepared to support CMs during training at the institute. Moreover, they reported that the restructuring of the training process at the pilot institute did not take into account the additional time needed for staff to collaborate in order to align their curricula and goals. Not surprisingly, given these implementation challenges, the redesigned training does not appear to have had an effect on any of the outcomes that were examined (listed above). Although the hoped-for outcomes did not materialize, the outcomes of the first cohort of teachers to experience the redesigned training were not affected adversely. Moreover, lessons from the first year of implementing the redesigned training were invaluable for helping TFA strengthen the new model, which was scaled up to all TFA institutes beginning in summer 2017.

Teach For America’s Redesigned Summer Training Model

Once they are selected, CMs are assigned to one of over 50 TFA regions throughout the United States.⁶ CMs then look for teaching positions within their assigned regions.⁷ In the summer before their first year of teaching, CMs receive five to seven weeks of intensive training from TFA, and as part of that training they have the opportunity to teach summer school students.⁸ The training takes place at regional and national institutes and is typically led by TFA alumni, or “lead instructors,” many of whom teach in schools during the academic year. The regional institutes host CMs from one region each, while each national institute — of which there were six in 2016 — hosts

⁵The college- and career-ready standards that TFA used were based on the Common Core Standards and the Next Generation Science Standards.

⁶In 2016, there were 53 TFA regions; in 2018, there were 51 TFA regions. Unlike in the past, CMs now have considerable say over the regions to which they are assigned. This gives CMs the choice to live and work in an area where they may decide to stay, increasing the likelihood that CMs will continue to teach beyond their two-year commitment and in a community where they can more easily advance educational equity and serve as leaders.

⁷TFA supports CMs in their endeavors to find teaching positions through its partnership with districts and by helping CMs create resumes and attend job fairs.

⁸CMs are responsible for teaching their own classes, but the teacher of record, who works for the school district (and not for TFA), is often present in the classroom and may help support CMs.

CMs from several regions. Where and when CMs are trained depends on the region to which they are assigned.

In summer 2016, a redesigned training model was piloted at the national institute in Tulsa, which trained CMs from eight TFA regions. The training was radically different from TFA’s traditional training, as mentioned above and explained in more detail below. The goal of the new training was to better address the needs of students in schools that serve mainly low-income students by enhancing the rigor and the relevance of the summer training. TFA’s traditional summer training was offered at the other five national institutes.⁹

The Learning Cycle

The redesigned training piloted in Tulsa included several specific features that differentiated it from the traditional training offered at the other national institutes, the most notable being the *method of delivering training* to CMs and the *content of the training*. With respect to its delivery, the training in Tulsa was conveyed via the Learning Cycle — a four-step process in which teachers observe, practice, teach (in this case, to summer school students), and then receive feedback on how they implement different types of content-based instructional activities, such as engaging students in a discussion about a book or counting out loud according to a pattern.

CMs in Tulsa received their training in cohorts where all of the members would be teaching in like subjects and grade levels. Lead instructors conducted the Learning Cycle sessions, and coaches provided support (for instance, giving feedback to CMs as they practiced the lessons they would teach, observing CMs teaching, and helping them to reflect on their practice) within the Learning Cycle sessions and in small groups outside of those sessions.

TFA had first tried using the Learning Cycle in 2014 at one of its regional institutes, in partnership with the Teacher Education by Design program at the University of Washington, where the Learning Cycle was developed. TFA used its adaptation of the Learning Cycle independently for the first time during the 2016 pilot for the redesigned training. It incorporated several “andragogies,” or training methods, meant specifically for adult learners. For example, the CMs had many opportunities to practice what they would teach in front of their peers and they were given time to reflect on their teaching of students with their coaches and peers. The emphasis of the training in Tulsa was on *how* to teach with equity and according to their students’ needs. CMs there were also introduced to rigorous *content-specific* lessons with predictable structures that were both appropriate for their summer school students and manageable for novice teachers to use while learning how to teach. For instance, while practicing the teaching of a lesson on counting according to a pattern, CMs were asked to consider strategies to get students’ attention, to make sure that directions were clear, to include all students, to get students engaged in rigorous discussion with each other, and so forth. Taken together, the strategies that CMs were asked to consider make up the *core practices* they would need to incorporate into their teaching for it to be successful — how to create and maintain a productive learning environment, position students

⁹The other five national institutes were located in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Houston, Texas; Greater Delta (comprising Mississippi and Arkansas); Phoenix, Arizona; and Atlanta, Georgia.

so they can make sense of what is being taught, and teach toward an instructional goal and do this with equity.¹⁰ In contrast, CMs attending the other traditional national institutes — the comparison sites — received training on discrete, content-neutral topics such as classroom management and lesson planning largely through a lecture format, with fewer systematic opportunities to practice teaching in front of peers or students.

Because the redesigned training differed from the traditional training, TFA had to develop new training for the lead instructors and coaches. Lead instructors and coaches at the other five national institutes (the comparison sites) also received training beforehand. However, their training was the training traditionally provided by TFA.

The underlying logic model for the new training posits that the training and coaching received by the CMs in Tulsa will enable them to effectively teach rigorous lessons grounded in core practices via the Learning Cycle. The training was expected to help the CMs start the school year feeling well prepared and confident in their teaching skills. The CMs' bolstered confidence and instructional abilities were, in turn, expected to strengthen their commitment to teaching and to TFA's mission, and to make them more likely to remain in the program for the duration of the two-year commitment.

Evaluation Design

The evaluation of the redesigned training had two objectives: (1) to examine how the redesigned summer training was implemented at the national institute in Tulsa, and how it compared with the traditional training that TFA offered at the other national institutes; and (2) to examine the effects of the new training on the short-term outcomes of the first cohort of CMs to participate in it.

Several types of data were collected to achieve these goals. In summer 2016, the study team visited the institute in Tulsa, as well as two of the five national institutes that offered the traditional training. During the visits to Tulsa, the study team observed the training and the CMs' summer school teaching. In Tulsa and in the two comparison sites, the team conducted focus groups with CMs, their lead instructors, and coaches. To learn about CMs' experience teaching in the classroom, open-ended logs were sent to CMs in the 2016 cohort every two weeks during their first year of teaching, to capture their use of the core practices taught at the institute. The study team also conducted follow-up phone interviews with a sample of CMs at the end of their first year of teaching. To measure outcomes for CMs, the study team leveraged TFA's administrative records; teacher surveys that TFA administered regularly; and biweekly, closed-ended teacher logs that the study team administered during CMs' first year of teaching.

A comparative interrupted time series (CITS) design was used to look at the effect of the redesigned training on most outcomes (perceptions of the training, commitment to teaching, and retention). The study compared CMs in two groups of TFA regions: One group trained at the national institute in Tulsa where the redesigned training was offered (the program group, which

¹⁰The core practices stem from a research-based collaboration among many teacher preparation programs that make up the Core Practices Consortium. See www.corepracticeconsortium/corepractice.

included CMs from 8 regions) and another group trained at the five other national institutes where the traditional summer training was offered (the comparison group, which included CMs from 13 regions). The study followed the outcomes of five cohorts of CMs in these regions: four “baseline” cohorts that were trained before the pilot at the national institute in Tulsa began (2012 to 2015 cohorts), and one follow-up cohort that was trained the year in which the pilot was implemented (2016 cohort). Using information from the baseline cohorts, the study team compared the estimated trends in the outcomes of CMs in each region with their expected outcomes had the regional baseline trends persisted (“deviations from baseline trend”). The effect of the redesigned training was then estimated by looking at whether deviations from trend were larger on average (and more positive) for the program regions than the comparison regions.

Due to data limitations, the effect of the redesigned training on CMs’ use of standards-aligned instructional strategies could not be examined using a CITS design. Instead, the study team used a cross-sectional comparison group design to compare the self-reported instructional strategies used by CMs in the program and comparison regions in the 2016 cohort, controlling for CMs’ characteristics.

Because both the CITS and cross-sectional comparison group study designs are quasi-experimental, the findings presented in this report cannot definitively be interpreted as the *causal* effect of the redesigned summer training. The observed changes in CMs’ outcomes could have been caused by other confounding factors (rather than the redesigned training). For this reason, the findings in this report are referred to as *estimates* of the effect of the redesigned training. However, it is more plausible that the estimated effects found using the CITS design can be attributed to the redesigned training because this design makes it possible to control for more of the factors that could be confounded with the effect of the redesigned training.

Key Findings

Implementation of the Redesigned Training Model

Overall, the study found that evaluating the redesigned summer training during its pilot year was premature, as strong implementation required more time for planning, practicing, and perfecting the model.

- **At the national institute in Tulsa, the lead instructors, who trained the CMs, reported that they felt prepared to teach via the Learning Cycle, while the coaches did not feel prepared for their role. The lead instructors and coaches in the comparison institutes said they felt more prepared for their training responsibilities than their counterparts in Tulsa.**

Lead instructors attended numerous training sessions led by TFA staff who were familiar with the new model, in which they were introduced to the Learning Cycle as “learners” (via role play) and given time to practice its teaching approach. That is, lead instructors played the part of CMs as TFA staff taught them the same content they would be expected to teach to CMs. They

then had opportunities to practice presenting the same content via the Learning Cycle with the coaches role-playing as CMs.

Coaches only experienced the Learning Cycle as learners. While they learned about the instructional activities when role-playing as CMs during the time that lead instructors practiced, they did not have the benefit of practicing teaching the content and the deeper learning that comes from that experience. In fact, they had a very limited understanding of what their responsibilities as coaches would be. Most coaches felt that they had not received adequate training.

- **Lead instructors at the national institute in Tulsa used some of the analogies to train CMs via the Learning Cycle, but their incorporation of the core practices was minimal.**

CMs had opportunities to observe the instructional activities being modeled by the lead instructors and to discuss and practice some basic ways in which the core practices might be integrated into the instructional activities. However, because so many CMs were working with one lead instructor or coach at the same time and because the coaches were unclear about their role, CMs were often rehearsing for other CMs and they did not receive feedback from their lead instructors or coaches, who were much more experienced. While CMs had daily opportunities to teach summer school, they very rarely had the opportunity to get feedback from or reflect on their teaching with their coaches.

Lead instructors and coaches were not successful in helping CMs use the core practices to guide and shape the instructional activities. A possible explanation for this could be that lead instructors were directed to use their own judgment regarding which and how many core practices to feature in any Learning Cycle session. In addition, the lead instructors were not given specific instructions about how and when to incorporate the core practices in their sessions. Thus, the use or mention of the core practices varied considerably across Learning Cycle sessions, and, in general, CMs were not observed integrating the core practices into their summer school teaching. The teaching strategies that CMs deployed during the subsequent school year did not look very different regardless of whether they had received their training in Tulsa or at a comparison site.

Effect on CMs' Experience During the School Year

This study also examined the first-year teaching experience of the first cohort of CMs to participate in the redesigned training. The study team looked at different aspects of the school-year experience for both CMs trained at the national institute in Tulsa (program regions) and CMs trained at the other national institutes (comparison regions), to better understand how the experiences of CMs in these two groups differed.

- **CMs who participated in the redesigned training did not have more positive perceptions of the value of their summer training than CMs in the comparison national institutes.**

CMs' perceptions of the overall value of their summer training provides a broad measure of their satisfaction with it as preparation for their teaching placement. The study team collected

information about CMs' perceptions from surveys that TFA regularly administered at different points during CMs' first year of teaching (beginning, middle, and end) and in the fall of their second year.¹¹ Estimated effects were examined using a CITS design. Overall, the findings suggest that the redesigned training may have had a statistically significant negative effect on CMs' perceptions of the value of the summer training during their first year of teaching, but this effect ultimately dissipates in the fall of CMs' second year. By their second year, CMs may have figured out how to perform the tasks they initially found difficult (such as lesson planning and classroom management), which in turn may have improved their perceptions of the training.

- **Although CMs in the program regions used standards-aligned instructional strategies in the classroom, they did not use these strategies more often than CMs in the comparison regions.**

Information about CMs' use of instructional strategies aligned with college- and career-readiness standards comes from closed-ended logs that the study team administered every other week to CMs in the 2016 cohort who were teaching English language arts (ELA), mathematics, and general education during the first year of their placement. The items in the closed-ended logs asked CMs to report on their use of instructional practices that are commonly recognized as effective. The study team prioritized the following three instructional strategies that are most aligned with the redesigned training: CMs' use of culturally responsive texts (cultural responsiveness domain), the extent to which CMs asked students to cite text evidence (ELA domain), and a composite measure of CMs' use of standards-aligned math practices (math domain). The study team estimated the effect of the redesigned training by comparing the practices used by CMs in the program and comparison regions. Overall, it does not appear that the redesigned training increased CMs' use of standards-aligned instructional strategies. (See Table ES.1.) CMs in the program regions did use strategies aligned with college- and career-readiness standards; however, they did not use them more frequently than CMs in the comparison regions. Across all three measures, no statistically significant difference was observed between the program and comparison regions in the CMs' use of these strategies.

Interviews with CMs conducted in the spring of their first year of teaching support the quantitative findings. Most CMs felt that they learned the most about instruction by teaching during the school year. One among many possible explanations could be that teaching is hard and it is difficult for anybody — particularly for those teaching in underresourced schools that serve high-poverty populations — regardless of their training, to feel prepared for their first year.¹² Another explanation could be that the particular expectations of the schools in their assigned

¹¹TFA also administers surveys in the middle and end of CMs' second year, but these were not examined because, at the time of the analysis, the 2016 cohort of CMs had not yet had a chance to complete their second year.

¹²See, for example, Amanda Bowsher, Dinah Sparks, and Kathleen Mulvaney Hoyer, "Preparation and Support for Teachers in Public Schools: Reflections on the First Year of Teaching," *Statistics in Brief*, NCES 2018143 (April 3, 2018); OECD, "Do New Teachers Feel Prepared for Teaching?," *Teaching in Focus*, No. 17 (2017).

Table ES.1

**Estimated Effects on Self-Reported Instructional Strategies
Aligned with College- and Career-Readiness Standards**

Outcome	Program Regions	Comparison Regions	Estimated Difference	Effect Size	P-Value
English Language Arts					
Text used for the lesson featured an author, characters, and/or a community with similar background to focal student (% of classes)	38.33	49.25	-10.92	-0.21	0.118
Students were asked to cite text evidence in their writing (% of classes) ^a	75.82	81.17	-5.35	-0.12	0.447
Number of regions	8	12			
Number of corps members	87	138			
Number of logs	739	1143			
Mathematics					
Math instructional practice composite (z-score) ^b	-0.15	-0.04	-0.11	-0.12	0.415
Number of regions	8	13			
Number of corps members	80	151			
Number of logs	628	1197			

SOURCE: Closed-ended teacher logs administered by MDRC.

NOTES: Online teacher logs were administered to corps members (CMs) in the 2016 cohort in the program and comparison regions. CMs teaching English Language Arts (ELA), mathematics, or general education, in the first year of their teaching placement were eligible for the logs. Secondary school teachers, as well as elementary school teachers in departmentalized schools, were sent the log for their content area and level every two weeks (about twice per month). Elementary school teachers teaching both content areas (general education teachers) were sent the ELA log or the math log every two weeks, with the content area alternating between logs (about one log per content area per month). At the start of each log, teachers were given a randomly selected letter of the alphabet and asked to report on their instructional practices with a focal student whose name starts with that letter (or the closest letter) on a particular day that week.

The values in the "Program Regions" column are the observed mean outcome for teachers in the program regions. The values in the "Comparison Regions" column are the regression-adjusted mean outcome for teachers in the comparison regions, using the mean covariate values for the program region as the basis for the adjustment. The values in the "Estimated Difference" column are the difference between the program and comparison regions, adjusted for differences in the characteristics of the focal students and teachers. Values in the "Effect Size" column are the estimated effect divided by the standard deviation for the sample. A two-tailed t-test was applied to estimated differences. The statistical significance of estimated differences is indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent. Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in calculating sums and differences.

Sample sizes in this table are the number of teachers in the log sample. A CM is included in the log sample if the CM completed at least one log during the school year.

^aThis item is only available for upper elementary and secondary teachers. The number of teachers included in this analysis is 60 in the program group and 93 in the comparison group.

^bThis composite combines the items in the math logs that map onto college- and career-readiness standards for math instruction. The scale of the items differs, so each item was first z-scored based on the mean and standard deviation of the comparison group logs; these z-scores were then averaged across items, and the average score was z-scored, again, based on the mean and standard deviation for the comparison logs. Because some of the log items differ across levels, the composite score was created separately for the lower elementary school and upper elementary or secondary school logs. The reliability (Cronbach's alpha) for the composite is 0.71 at the lower elementary school level and 0.75 at the upper elementary or secondary school level.

regions did not align perfectly with the expectations of the national institute. Or perhaps the CMs in Tulsa were not given specific instruction on how to incorporate the strategies leading to the core practices into their teaching. (For example, they were not sure how to engage their students in the content, sustain classroom discussions, or manage their classrooms.)

In addition, the CMs in Tulsa did not have a good grasp of how to plan their own lessons, as this was not part of their training. Although more of the CMs in the comparison regions felt that they could plan a lesson and were familiar with a particular classroom management system learned at their institutes, they neither knew the content better than CMs in Tulsa nor had a better sense of how to engage their students in the lesson or maintain classroom discussions.

However, CMs did report one aspect of the summer training to be quite useful: what they learned about diversity, equity, and inclusiveness. This was true for CMs who attended the national institute in Tulsa as well as for CMs who were trained at the comparison national institutes.

Commitment to Teaching and Retention

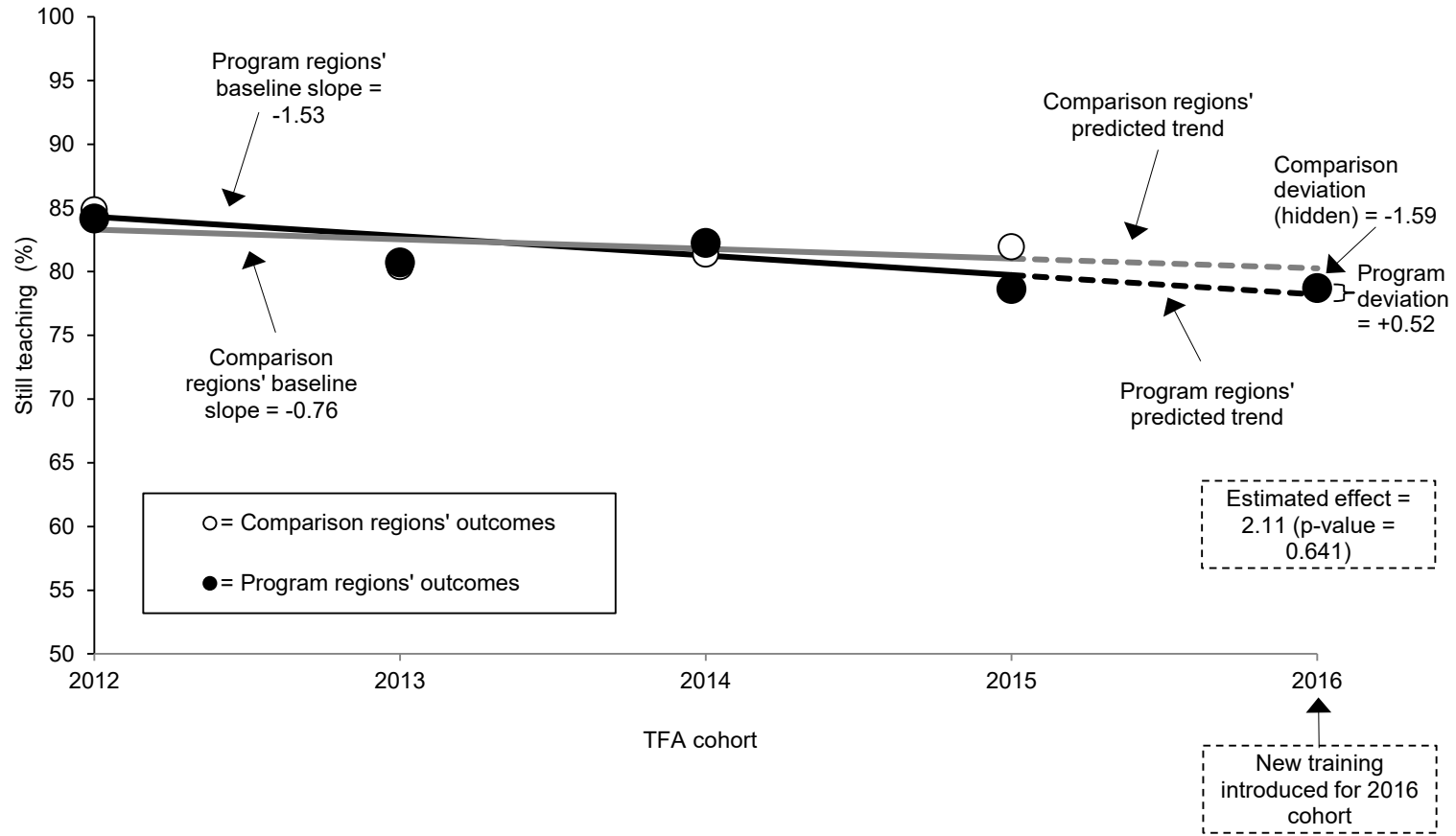
- **The redesigned training does not appear to have improved CMs' commitment to teaching and educational equity. Nor does it appear to have improved their retention rates in the TFA program.**

The study team assessed CMs' commitment to teaching and equity using items from teacher surveys that TFA administered regularly. The measure is a composite score created from eight items about CMs' beliefs in TFA's mission of ensuring that each child has an opportunity to receive an excellent education, and their beliefs in their own capacity to contribute effectively to this mission. The team examined CMs' commitment to teaching at three time points during their first year of teaching (beginning, middle, and end) and at the beginning of their second year. The study used a CITS design to estimate the effects of the redesigned training on this outcome. Overall, the findings suggest that the redesigned training does not appear to have had an effect on CMs' commitment to teaching and educational equity, neither during their first year of teaching nor in the fall of their second year.

The study also examined whether the redesigned summer training that was piloted in Tulsa had an effect on CMs' retention rates in the TFA program. Whether a CM was still a TFA teacher was measured at three points in time: the fall of CMs' first year of teaching, the end of their first year, and the fall of their second year. Overall, the findings from the CITS design suggest that the redesigned summer training did not have an effect on CMs' retention rates. Figure ES.1, for example, shows that before the redesigned training was launched (2012 to 2015 cohorts), second-year retention rates had been generally declining in the program and comparison regions. In both groups, the 2016 cohort's retention rates did not deviate from this trend visibly or statistically. This is true at all three time points when retention was measured.

Figure ES.1

Trends in Teacher Retention Rates in the TFA Program, Fall of Second Year



SOURCE: Teach For America administrative records.

Conclusion

Taken together, the findings from this study are consistent with what is known about the challenges of implementing new teacher training programs. The approach that was piloted at the national institute in Tulsa, which used the Learning Cycle and focused on content and core practices, was not only ambitious in scope but also a stark departure from TFA's traditional approach to training its CMs. The challenges that arose implementing it — and the associated lack of effects on teacher outcomes — are consistent with the complexity of the new training model and the fact that it was being tested for the first time in summer 2016. Nonetheless, the findings suggest that TFA was able to radically change its training approach without adversely affecting the outcomes of the first cohort of teachers to experience it.

Although the hoped-for outcomes did not materialize, TFA responded to the findings by adjusting and strengthening the model, which is now in its third year and is being scaled up to all TFA national institutes. As MDRC researchers observed in 2018, the training that lead instructors at the national institutes now undergo to prepare them to train CMs addresses almost all of the challenges encountered in summer 2016. TFA lead instructors and coaches are trained at a much deeper level about each of the steps of the Learning Cycle. Similarly, lead instructors and coaches are trained to make explicit to CMs how the core practices can be incorporated to guide and shape instruction, help them manage their classrooms, and create more equitable classrooms.

About MDRC

MDRC is a nonprofit, nonpartisan social and education policy research organization dedicated to learning what works to improve the well-being of low-income people. Through its research and the active communication of its findings, MDRC seeks to enhance the effectiveness of social and education policies and programs.

Founded in 1974 and located in New York; Oakland, California; Washington, DC; and Los Angeles, MDRC is best known for mounting rigorous, large-scale, real-world tests of new and existing policies and programs. Its projects are a mix of demonstrations (field tests of promising new program approaches) and evaluations of ongoing government and community initiatives. MDRC's staff members bring an unusual combination of research and organizational experience to their work, providing expertise on the latest in qualitative and quantitative methods and on program design, development, implementation, and management. MDRC seeks to learn not just whether a program is effective but also how and why the program's effects occur. In addition, it tries to place each project's findings in the broader context of related research — in order to build knowledge about what works across the social and education policy fields. MDRC's findings, lessons, and best practices are shared with a broad audience in the policy and practitioner community as well as with the general public and the media.

Over the years, MDRC has brought its unique approach to an ever-growing range of policy areas and target populations. Once known primarily for evaluations of state welfare-to-work programs, today MDRC is also studying public school reforms, employment programs for ex-prisoners, and programs to help low-income students succeed in college. MDRC's projects are organized into five areas:

- Promoting Family Well-Being and Children's Development
- Improving Public Education
- Raising Academic Achievement and Persistence in College
- Supporting Low-Wage Workers and Communities
- Overcoming Barriers to Employment

Working in almost every state, all of the nation's largest cities, and Canada and the United Kingdom, MDRC conducts its projects in partnership with national, state, and local governments, public school systems, community organizations, and numerous private philanthropies.