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In a Nutshell

The contradictions in rhetoric are phenomenal. All of the rhetoric from the Commonwealth Government is about raising the status of the teaching profession and providing high quality teachers for all schools - but particularly for the disadvantaged students / families / schools. The dominant rhetoric has been that this can be achieved by raising professional teaching standards and then by increased payment to outstanding teachers determined by some performance indicators.

But at a time when other professions - e.g. Medicine and Dentistry etc - have moved to an undergraduate degree in, say, Science followed by several years of a graduate degree - we have the quite indefensible proposal that Education be moved back from, what has already been shown to be a too brief period of 2 university semesters, Diploma in Education qualification, to a 5 weeks / 6 weeks / 12 weeks 'model'.

It would be equivalent to setting up a scheme whereby after an undergraduate degree in Science, ‘doctors’ could be trained in 5 / 6 / 12 weeks and then sent out as doctors to service the health needs of people in disadvantaged areas. This would not be tolerated as far as the medical profession is concerned; it must not be judged to be acceptable as far as the teaching profession is concerned. And thereby prepare 'teachers' to be imposed upon the most disadvantaged students.

Such an absurd proposition demeans, not raises, the status of the teaching profession!

It is one thing to have expert knowledge in a subject - even a PhD. It is quite another thing to have the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and professional values to teach it. For example, the Department of English at UNE where I was a Senior Lecturer appointed a young chap who had just graduated with a PhD in English from Cambridge University and had already had one book published and another in print. But he couldn't teach to save himself!! He became a public embarrassment to the Department and the Faculty. We got him to supervise research students on a one to one basis. And we enabled him to keep on researching and publishing. Full stop.
So why, in particular, must this proposal be strenuously opposed?

1) It ignores the depth and breadth of knowledge, understanding and skills required to be a teacher.

For example, in the 4 year B Ed, or a 5 year Master of Teaching (eg. USyd) or the one year Dip Ed courses students, in addition to acquiring / possessing the relevant subject(s) knowledge, those preparing to become teachers in NSW need to:

- have a comprehensive understanding of all of the NSW BoS syllabuses - depending on whether they are being prepared to be primary or secondary teachers - in the subjects they will be teaching; and a comprehensive knowledge of the pedagogical strategies appropriate to those subjects

- meet a comprehensive set of standards of knowledge, skills, and understanding articulated by the NSWIT for pre-service teacher education students by completion of the course and prior to these people being appointed to schools as new teachers

- have a comprehensive knowledge of major DET policies such as *Quality Teaching*

- have a thorough knowledge of relevant national policies, eg the Adelaide Declaration (to be replaced by an approved new Declaration by the end of 2008)

- have a comprehensive understanding of child / adolescent developmental psychology

- have a comprehensive understanding of educational sociology to enable them to understand the diverse range of socio-economic and cultural contexts within which they will be teaching throughout their career

- become thoroughly familiar with a whole range of strategies to help them cope with the behavioural issues and problems of classroom management

- have, in particular, the comprehensive knowledge, understanding, and skills to prepare them thoroughly to teach significant cohorts of students - for example, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students whose first language is not English, and students with physical or intellectual disabilities

- be very familiar with the history of education in NSW in order to better prepare them to understand the 'culture' of the NSW teaching profession

- have a deep grounding in the theory and practice of developing the Numeracy and Literacy skills of all students

- participate successfully in a number of supervised practice teaching 'blocks' in a variety of schools
• be mentored in the art and craft of teaching their relevant subjects in the classroom -
  this is achieved in basically two ways; by having lecturers with that subject specific
  expertise; and by experiencing supervision by experienced teachers during their
  number of weeks of practice teaching

• understand and be able to abide by the legal requirements and responsibilities of
  being a teacher.

There is no way in the world that these basic requirements can be met in 5 weeks, or 6
weeks, or 12 weeks - as being proposed by both the PM and the Deputy PM.

2) The Evidence of Research

Perhaps the stand out seminal research on these issues has been conducted by Professor
Linda Darling-Hammond - the Charles E. Ducommun Professor of Education at Stanford
University, where she has launched the Stanford Educational Leadership Institute and the
School Redesign Network - who is internationally recognised as one of the genuinely
pre-eminent researcher and scholar in the field.

That mammoth research project, published in 2000, examined the differences between
fully qualified teachers and not fully qualified teachers as reflected in student learning
outcomes within and across every state of the United States. She showed that: "
Quantitative analyses indicate that measures of teacher preparation and
certification are by far the strongest correlates of student achievement in reading
and mathematics, both before and after controlling for student poverty and
language status." (Teacher Quality and Student Achievement: A Review of State Policy
Evidence, Education Policy Analysis Archives, Vol 8 No 1, January 1, 2000).

Below I have provided, in detail, recent relevant research about Teach for America. The
document, prepared by the United States National Council for Accreditation of Teacher
Education (NCATE), can be found at:

For the sake of 100% accuracy in citation, I have not changed the occasionally different American spelling - eg. "favorable".

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**Research on Teach For America**

At least five studies have been completed that include data on *Teach for America*, three of which have been published in peer-reviewed journals. As a group, the studies find the students of uncertified TFA teachers do significantly less well in reading than those of new, certified teachers, with the negative effects most pronounced in elementary grades. In math, three of the studies also report significantly lower scores for beginning TFA teachers’ students than for prepared teachers. When TFA teachers obtain training and certification, their students generally do as well as those of other teachers and sometimes better in mathematics. However, most TFA teachers leave after 2 or 3 years (more than 80% are gone after three years), so the benefits of their training are lost.

Looking across the studies, TFA comparisons are favorable only when the comparison group is even less prepared than the TFA recruits.

**Studies published in peer-reviewed journals:**

[http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v10n37](http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v10n37)

This study compared student achievement for 110 matched pairs of recently hired uncertified and certified teachers from five low-income school districts in Arizona. Elementary teachers whose students took the mandated state achievement test (3rd grade and above) were matched within schools and districts according to the teachers’ grade level and highest degree. The study found that 1) students of certified teachers significantly out-performed students of teachers who were under-certified on all three subtests of the SAT9 – reading, mathematics and language arts; and 2) students of TFA teachers did not perform significantly different from students of other under-certified teachers. Effect sizes favoring the students of certified teachers were substantial. In reading, students of certified teachers outperformed students of under-certified teachers, including the students of the TFA teachers, by about 4 months on a grade equivalent scale. Students of certified teachers were also ahead of students of under-certified teachers by about 3 months in mathematics and about 3 months in language arts. This study did not control for prior year achievement at the individual student level. However, other studies that included these controls obtained similar findings (see below).

This study looked at data from Houston, Texas using representing over 132,000 students and 4,400 teachers in grades 3-5 over six years on six achievement tests: the TAAS, SAT-9, and Aprenda (for Spanish-speaking students) in reading and mathematics. Controlling for students’ prior year achievement and demographic characteristics, classroom and school characteristics, and teachers’ experience and degrees, the study found that certified teachers consistently produced significantly stronger student achievement gains than uncertified teachers, including Teach for America teachers. Uncertified TFA teachers had significant negative effects on student achievement for five of six tests. (The sixth was also negative but not significant.) On 5 of the 6 tests, the negative effect of having an uncertified TFA teacher was greater than the negative effect of having another kind of uncertified teacher, depressing student achievement by between one-half month to 3 months annually compared to a fully certified teacher with the same experience working in a similar school.

TFA teachers’ effectiveness improved when they gained certification. TFA teachers who stayed long enough to obtain standard certification did about as well as other similarly-experienced certified teachers on 4 of 6 measures. Their students did significantly better than those of other certified teachers on the TAAS test in mathematics, but marginally worse on the Aprenda in mathematics. There was no difference on the SAT-9 in mathematics. Although TFA teachers appeared to improve when they became certified in their second or third year, few of them stayed in the district. On average, over the years studied, 69% of TFA teachers had left by the end of their second year of teaching, and 88% had left by the end of their third year.


This study examined the effectiveness of 3,766 new teachers who entered teaching in grades 4-8 through different pathways in New York City. The study found that, compared to the students of new teachers who graduated from teacher education programs, students of new TFA recruits scored significantly lower in reading / language arts and about the same in mathematics (worse in grades 4-5 and better in grades 6-8). These results were similar to those of other teachers from non-traditional routes, including the New York Teaching Fellows, temporary license holders, and teachers from out-of-the-country.

Like the Houston study, TFA teachers’ effectiveness generally improved as they became more prepared. By the 2nd year, when most were certified, the negative effects disappeared for elementary math and middle school reading. However, TFA teachers continued to exert a significant negative influence on their students’ reading scores. By their third year, the effect was still negative, but not statistically significant.
Also like the Houston study, most TFA teachers left after their second year. By year three, 73% of Teach for America teachers had left, and by year four 85% had left, as compared to about 50% of other non-traditional entrants and 37% of college prepared teachers.

Other studies:


Using the same data base as Boyd and colleagues New York City study, this study compared entrants into New York City schools by different categories of initial pathway and certification status. Like the Boyd et al., study, this study found that, in math and reading, students of 1st year teachers from TFA, the NYC Teaching Fellows, and other uncertified teachers did worse than those of 1st year teachers who were "regularly certified." (However, the authors include teachers licensed through "transcript review" and temporary permits in the same group as college-prepared teachers, thus minimizing the effect of teacher preparation.)

They also found that the negative effects were generally reduced or eliminated in math as teachers finished their training and certification and gained experience. However, in reading, the initially uncertified groups of teachers continued to have a negative effect for all 3 years (for Teaching Fellows and other uncertified teachers) and for 2 of the 3 years (for TFA). Like the other study, they found very high attrition rates. By year 4, close to 90% of TFA recruits were gone, close to 60% of other uncertified teachers were gone, about 50% of NYC Teaching Fellows were gone, and just over 40% of "regular certified" teachers were gone.


This study examined the student achievement results for 41 Teach for America teachers and 57 beginning and experienced comparison teachers teaching grades 1-5 in the same schools, spread across 6 districts. Pre- and post-tests on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills were given to students in reading and mathematics. Within-district statistical analyses were precluded by the very small sample (only about 7 TFA teachers and 10 comparison teachers per city), and statistical controls were also limited by the sample size.

In this study, the comparison group had even less preparation for teaching than the TFA group. The study's authors note: "Compared with a nationally representative sample of teachers, the control teachers in the schools in our study had substantially lower rates of certification and formal education training." Whereas 100 percent of TFA members had
had some student teaching prior to entering classrooms, this was true for only 47 percent of other novice teachers (with three or fewer years of experience) and only 71% of the overall comparison group. Whereas 51% of TFA teachers were certified by the end of the study year, only 38% of novice control teachers were certified.

Compared to this underprepared group, TFA teachers's students showed gains similar to those of comparison teachers in reading and better in mathematics, though students' scores remained low overall. (The achievement scores in reading for students in the sample went only from the 13th to the 14th percentile for the control group and from the 14th percentile to the 15th percentile for TFA teachers. In math, the students of TFA teachers grew from the 14th to the 17th percentile, while the students of comparison group teachers stayed at the 15th percentile.)

As in other studies noted above, TFA teachers showed a positive impact on student achievement relative to the comparison group only when they had obtained training and certification in their 2nd and later years in the classroom. First year TFA teachers did not have a positive impact in either mathematics or reading. (A negative coefficient in reading was not statistically significant.) TFA teachers had slightly higher rates of absenteeism, disciplinary referrals (suspensions and expulsions), grade retention, and summer school referrals, but these, too, were not statistically significant. This study occurred within a single school year and could not examine attrition directly. It did find that, whereas 69% of non-TFA teachers expected to stay in teaching “as long as possible” or “until retirement,” only 11% of TFA teachers expected to do so.

Copied below, by way of example, is the Abstract of the Laczko-Kerr and Berliner referred to above, i.e. The Effectiveness of "Teach for America" and Other Under-certified Teachers on Student Academic Achievement: A Case of Harmful Public Policy" Education Policy Analysis Archives. The complete article can be found at http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v10n37/.

Particularly salient text that demonstrate the serious inadequacies of the Teach for America program has been highlighted in yellow.

The academic achievements of students taught by under-certified primary school teachers were compared to the academic achievements of students taught by regularly certified primary school teachers. This sample of under-certified teachers included three types of under-qualified personnel: emergency, temporary and provisionally certified teachers. One subset of these under-certified teachers was from the national program "Teach for America (TFA)." Recent college graduates are placed by TFA where other under-qualified under-certified teachers are often called upon to work, namely, low-income urban and rural school districts. Certified teachers in this study were from accredited universities and all met state requirements for receiving the regular initial certificate to
Recently hired under-certified and certified teachers (N=293) from five low-income school districts were matched on a number of variables, resulting in 109 pairs of teachers whose students all took the mandated state achievement test. Results indicate 1) that students of TFA teachers did not perform significantly different from students of other under-certified teachers, and 2) that students of certified teachers out-performed students of teachers who were under-certified. This was true on all three subtests of the SAT 9—reading, mathematics and language arts. Effect sizes favoring the students of certified teachers were substantial. In reading, mathematics, and language, the students of certified teachers outperformed students of under-certified teachers, including the students of the TFA teachers, by about 2 months on a grade equivalent scale. Students of under-certified teachers make about 20% less academic growth per year than do students of teachers with regular certification. Traditional programs of teacher preparation apparently result in positive effects on the academic achievement of low-income primary school children. Present policies allowing under-certified teachers, including those from the TFA program, to work with our most difficult to teach children appear harmful. Such policies increase differences in achievement between the performance of poor children, often immigrant and minority children, and those children who are more advantaged.