



WORK HARD, BE HARD

JOURNEYS THROUGH "NO EXCUSES" TEACHING

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enemy," a "constant surveillance" workplace where teachers felt like they were "being used up" without any opportunity to "replenish" or maintain family ties."

Though it is not uncommon to find a continuing belief among these KIPP teachers that they were doing, or attempting to do, important work at KIPP, there remains a consensus among the teachers I talked with about organizational parameters, hidebound rules, and inexperienced, political leaders stood in the way of getting much of that important work done. When one teacher near the end of her second and final year was asked why she would change her KIPP experiences if she could, she said she would have signed earlier:

I feel like I tried my hardest and I tried my best, but the thing that is frustrating about it is that I always felt like no matter how hard I worked and no matter how hard the kids worked, that it was never good enough. Like I am never being like a professional, even though I am working as hard as I possibly can, and I am putting in a lot of energy and effort into it, I feel like I am not appreciated and I feel like it is never good enough.

I think that is just something that I have recently realized is that I will, to my eyes, I will never be good enough, so I just have to not care so much as to what they think and just kind of do things the way that I think they need to be done in my classroom.

But a constant infusion of new teachers to replace all those who burn out is only under such grueling conditions and all those who come to believe that they will never be good enough to meet expectations, KIPP would have to have a new model. The role of Teach for America and programs based on Teach for America's hyperabbreviated preparation are crucial, then, for the continuation of the total-compliance No Excuses charter schools built on the current model. We turn, then, to an examination of Teach for America's place in the current education reform's paternalistic agenda for pre-K-12 schools.

Chapter Nine

Teach for America's Socialization and Manipulation

Barbara Veltri

It's like the Peace Corps. But, you know, creepier.
—D. Chermicoff, *Yale Daily News* (2006)

This chapter chronicles the evolution of Teach for America's (TFA) rebranding, from a teaching-as-service nonprofit, to a leadership network with a voracious appetite for expanding and creating new revenue streams. I examine how Teach for America's Corps Members are selected and socialized to support the organization's revamped trajectory away from teacher supply to leadership expansion. Data for this chapter included a range of sources, from insider interviews to TFA annual reports, business plans, tax returns, websites, public records, and other documents. A cautionary tale illuminates how private venture philanthropy and "public good" corporate education reform initiatives are managed and manipulated.

THE MISSION DESIGN OF AMERICA'S #1 EDUCATIONAL NONPROFIT

Twenty-five years ago Princeton University sociology major Wendy Kopp founded Teach for America. Its mission: recruit, train, and place recent college graduates without education credentials into poor rural and urban schools for two-year teaching commitments (Kopp, 2003). The new nonprofit organization, subsequently dubbed America's National Teaching Corps (Veltri, 2010), was charged with addressing the shortage of qualified teachers in underserved regions of the United States (Kopp, 2003; Veltri, 2010). In

1994, Teach for America was granted 501(c)(3) status as a nonprofit organization, which permitted donors to claim exemptions from income taxes, too.

Teach for America targeted areas to field-test the education reform agenda in America's poor communities, where high populations of children of color reside. These urban and rural areas were never properly funded in any way imaginable, and they had gone mostly unnoticed by the business community until Ms. Kopp recruited recent grads from select colleges to begin teaching there.

With substantial financial support from corporations and foundations in hand by the mid-1990s, Ms. Kopp focused her attention on garnering support from the federal government. This ongoing support from the federal government was provided principally through the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), commonly referred to as AmeriCorps (Kopp, 2003). Under an arrangement with AmeriCorps, TFA teachers may receive up to \$11,290 during their two-year stints to repay student loans. Too, TFA has received generous federal grants. In 2010, alone, TFA and KIPP (Wendy Kopp is married to KIPP's president and CEO and TFA alum Richard Barth) each received separate \$50 million Investing in Innovation grants from the U.S. Department of Education.

THE SOCIALIZATION OF TEACH FOR AMERICA'S CORPS

Socialization of corps members-as-future-leaders in the reform pipeline depends heavily on incorporating a unifying message and philosophy to its incoming teacher trainees (Kopp, 2003; Kopp & Farr, 2011; Brewer, 2014). Teach for America safeguards the training of its recruits at a dozen Corps Training Institute locations across the country. A singular, robust, and paternalistic socialization of its Corps Member teachers remains a foundational element to the mission of TFA.

Toward this end, Teach for America espouses its own brand, image, logo, color scheme, scripted training program, division of labor, sanctions and rewards, and public persona. In 2014, Teach for America accepted 15 percent of its applicant pool (Teach for America, 2014). Corps applicants are selected based upon particular TFA-identified criteria, and principal among them is the crucial measure of "fit" (Dobbie, 2011), a metric based largely on belief and commitment:

The last TFA measure is fit, which measures whether an applicant believes TFA's goals are attainable through the TFA approach. The fit variable is scored using overall interviewer impressions of knowledge, and commitment to the belief in the ability of children to achieve, and the belief in the TFA focus on raising student academic achievement. (p. 6)

TFA encourages a oneness mind-set that relies upon an expectation that a singular, unifying belief will be commonly held as a prerequisite for success and belonging (Veltri, 2015) within a "community of feeling" that breeds "identical judgment" (Lyotard, 1991). Teach for America's insiders recognize this "community of feeling" as the crux of the enculturation into the TFA philosophy (Brewer, 2014; Sondel, 2014; Veltri, 2010). This socialization most often leads to an ongoing commitment that persists beyond one's two-year teaching affiliation with the organization.

Teach for America's socialization efforts promote (1) corps conformity, (2) corps identity, (3) corps competition, (4) corps collaboration, (5) corps cohesiveness, and (6) corps cliques. Insiders are adept at perceiving contradictions between TFA's official narrative and the methods used to attain its ends:

TFA is an incredibly hierarchical organization where there is a tremendous amount of leadership by passive-aggressive use of fear. You can really see this at Institute, particularly with the school directors who are under intense pressure from the Institute's managing director to produce "transformational gains" from students in, literally, 10 days of teaching. (Andrew)

Teach for America's "truths" refine, streamline, and reinforce a singular message, and that message speaks often, speaks louder, speaks to a network of supporters in high places, and rarely allows for differing viewpoints. Many TFA insiders face a dualism in how they respond to and/or acknowledge their own self-efficacy as Corps Members and alumni (White, 2013).

Some comply, embrace, or cope during their committed affiliation with TFA, doing what they have to do to get by (Brewer, 2014; White, 2013; Veltri, 2010; Veltri, 2015). Others subvert surreptitiously and are determined not to lose themselves in the TFA enculturation, and these Corps Members "see" through the information presented to the public. Corps Members who assume personae that remain compliant and eager to embrace TFA methods and nonteaching duties during the two-year TFA teaching assignments find favor in post-teaching roles within the TFA organization.

THE ROLE OF THE TFA CORPS MEMBER IN EDUCATION REFORM

TFA adheres to a strategic policy of recruiting young, recent college graduates who generally do not challenge the organization during their first two years, while they "learn the ropes" in order to later reap the benefits of "being a good Corps Member." "Good" Corps Members complete the task at hand with enthusiasm and later recognize financial advantages of their TFA affiliation, post teaching. Teach for America also employs niche recruiters who

target evangelicals, dreamers, veterans, Native Americans, and LGBT candidates (Teach for America, 2014).

Teach for America's applicants are not recruited just for the short-term teaching positions they accept but are, in effect, recruited for their future worth to the TFA network and its agenda. Many TFA teachers are groomed by the organization and vetted for leadership positions following their two years of service. Regardless, all Corps Members are expected to remain loyal to the cause:

So like yes, we're supposed to keep it, education reform, in the forefront and no matter what you do after the 2 years are up, you're supposed to stay focused on education because you've been there. So you can take any influence you may have in your future and use that towards education reform. (Jackie)

A barrage of emails inundates Corps Members with opportunities for leadership and policy roles within the TFA alumni network of charters, including KIPP and other total-compliance schools. Teach for America has become the feeder system (Taylor, 2010) that is crucial to sustaining charter management organizations: "Simply put, Teach for America, Inc. has become an employment agency for charter schools" (p. 1). One TFA teacher said,

Of the most touted alumni in a particular community, how many work in public school districts in a position that has a direct impact on teaching and learning? Most of the heroic tales of TFA alums come from charter systems, "education reform" groups, and roles in government bodies that are undermining public education. For example, here in _____, the alums who are most held up as examples of the power of TFA are charter school founders and leaders, people who work for the state's charter school association, or head up not-for-profits focused on education reform that are very cozy with those who most threaten our schools. (Caryn)

With five weeks of pedagogical preparation that includes practice teaching time, Teach for America attempts to drive home the message to power constituencies and legislative bodies that TFA novices should be considered as highly qualified and effective beginning teachers. This mantra reverberates as TFA "truth," even as novice Corps Members struggle in out-of-field teaching assignments, special education or resource placements, and other site-based duties for which they are not qualified.

The program is atrocious—the TFA training is completely worthless and inadequate when it comes to actually preparing people how to teach, they are so full of biased/worthless statistics, the staff is a bunch of cliché-spouting TFA robots, etc., and the list goes on. (Darrell)

Corps Member insiders report that the organization creates lists of those considered for leadership positions, and leadership begets privilege. Elisa Villanueva Beard, co-CEO of Teach for America, states, "Civic leaders call regularly and say, 'We want to know who is available and ready to take on a bigger role' . . . And we will always have names at the ready" (Simon, 2013, p. 2). TFA acts as an incubator for education-industry business and educational governance organizations, political offices, NGOs, nonprofit corporations, foundations, and think tanks.

Tracy-Elizabeth Clay, TFA's General Counsel, addressed Teach for America's alumni at Harvard Law School, focusing on the organization's initiatives to better harness TFA's alumni in law: "The long-term vision is to create a 'talent pool' from which school districts, CMOs and legal advocacy groups can draw from" (Teach for Us, 2012). Corporate education insider Rick Hess predicts, "Five, ten years out, we're going to be talking about hundreds of TFA [political] candidates in all likelihood" (Wieder, 2012).

ALLIANCES WITH FRIENDS IN HIGH PLACES

Teach for America did not work in isolation to achieve its goals. Its "mission" was, and continues to be advanced, by a network of supporters from the corporate, legislative, university, media, and political spectrum. For over a decade, Teach for America has directed its efforts toward expanding the donor pool and to deepening political leaders' commitment to TFA's policies. It has also concentrated on quadrupling leadership placement of TFA alums across the entire political landscape, while protecting the brand and successfully contributing to the stream of alumni-led Charter Management Organizations (CMOs).

TFA has continued to grow by charging fees for teachers it delivers to school districts in poor communities, while urging network alliances to help TFA continue its rhetorical campaign to eliminate educational inequity—even as childhood poverty in the United States of America grows worse (Wieder, 2012; Jehlen, 2012).

Those who capitalize on education innovation propel Teach for America's mission. Quazzo, Cohn, Horne, and Moe's (2012) Global Silicon Valley Advisors report that the global education market is worth \$4 trillion and have partnered with Teach for America: "Talent has poured into the sector from leading not-for-profits like Teach for America and elsewhere where bright, talented young people have witnessed educational inequity and can visualize solutions" (p. 24).

Most TFA post-teaching educational careers projectile is classroom based. Evidence suggests that TFA has become less of an alternative pathway to teaching children in poverty and more of an insulated training ground

for corporate, media, and philanthropic hierarchies motivated to reform public education across the PK-16 landscape (Kamenetz, 2014; Kovacs, 2006; Simon, 2013; Wieder, 2012; TFA, 2012). Increasing numbers of TFA's alumni are leading large-scale school districts, state education departments, and virtual and charter school networks (Simon, 2013).

With generous support of their alliance of policymakers, corporations, foundations, and philanthropists, Teach for America has remained flush with cash as it has grown its network of teachers and former Corps Members dedicated to the TFA mission. So what happened to America's *teaching corps*? The nonprofit's energies today are more directed toward recruiting potential leaders; building an enduring movement; and seeking and finding funding and favor from corporations, lobbyists, university presidents and deans, the media, philanthropists, and national and state policymakers. As one source reported, "What is happening beyond the 2-year commitment seems to be much more important now than ever before. What has changed is how much emphasis TFA places on this goal (at the expense of the shorter-term goal of developing successful classroom teachers)" (Teach for Us, 2012).

At the same time, TFA has grown increasingly focused on countering document concerns and criticism (Joseph, 2014) through "obsessive PR games to cover up its lack of results in order to justify greater expansion." Teach for America perpetuates a revolving teacher syndrome and "disruptive turnover cycles" (para. 1) that does nothing to limit the educational inequity to which TFA pays lip service. Teach for America is not a solution to what ails education in America's poorest communities, yet policymakers and the public are persuaded to believe so.

From the U.S. Department of Education to Congress to the Office of the President, and across state executive and legislative bodies, TFA finds favor. As one former head of Florida's Office of Evaluation and Assessment told me, "TFA are the sweethearts of education policy. People fall over themselves to support them." That favor translates to a burgeoning financial base. Teach for America reported \$1.15 billion in revenue for 2009 to 2013. Teach for America invests millions in public relations to keep its critics at bay.

Teach for America runs a conveyor belt of new teachers in and out of communities who learn to teach on poor people's children (Veltri, 2010). The overwhelming and overwhelmed TFA novice teachers enter communities and schools in underresourced areas, across America, without strategies, support, or training. One mentor of special education said,

Everyone of our E.D. (Emotionally Disabled) kids is taught by TFA. I went into a class of emotionally disturbed middle schoolers. The teacher is TFA, a very bright, recent grad, top-tier school, TFA. The kids were very quiet when I walked in. I sensed that something was wrong. The teacher imploded on the

kids. They were not permitted to eat in the cafeteria. They are E.D. You cannot threaten the kids, but she was doing that in front of me. So, why is the district hiring them? 43% are new TFA, and 23% are the 2nd year TFA. (Dr. B. mentor, SPED teachers)

Teach for America does not address the pressing demands and needs of its novice teacher-trainees, who are *still* learning on children in the most impoverished and segregated schools in the country. An Atlanta public school teacher (fourth year) was surprised to find a first-year TFA teacher sitting on the floor outside her classroom, crying in the hallway. She asked supportively, "Which one [student] would you like me to take out of the classroom for you?" The novice Corps Member sobbed, "Take them all, I can't do this."

Sadly, rookie CMs (Corps Members) often have to reach out to friends and family in education for help, or go under the TFA radar to seek help from credentialled teachers. Corps Members find fewer veteran educators at their schools, because in far too many classrooms, especially charter-managed urban schools that recruit high populations of minority children of color, TFA rookies are often the *only* teachers hired. As one CM told me, "Those TFA teachers who are doing 'well' are those placed at some of the best charter schools in the area, so their success has nothing to do with the support TFA offers" (Jaquese).

Sara noted that eleven of the twelve teachers at the Phoenix-area charter school, where she worked as a bilingual teacher, were TFA. The biology teacher shared that she was leaving in May. Unsure of what that meant, Sara asked innocently, "But you just got here last year, right? Where are you going?"

"My plan is to go to medical school," the biology teacher replied emphatically. "I'm not here to be a teacher for more than I have to."

Sara shook her head. "It all makes sense now. They are all going somewhere, and the kids are just a means to advance *their* plan, for *their* life. They might know biology, but they are not really teaching it. It's more like they are commanding the kids to learn it. I'm in their classrooms. I see what's going on. Some of them are trying, and many of them are smart, but they are not really teaching. I can tell that their heart isn't in it, you know?"

Between 1 and 5 percent of Teach for America teachers are certified educators who majored in elementary, secondary, or special education in a college or university program.

MANIPULATION OF EDUCATION FOR THE PUBLIC GOOD

The corporate, governmental, and philanthropic supporters of Teach for America publicly claim to advocate for children, but with checkbooks and

legislative directives, they choose instead to pledge allegiance to a nonprofit wolf in sheep's clothing that has ransacked the educational landscape. George Soros (2010) cautions,

The trouble is, that special interests also seek to disguise themselves as protectors of the public interest, and it takes a discerning eye to discriminate between the genuine and the phony, especially since both sides are forced to resort to similar methods of persuasion. (pp. 93–94).

But whose interests does Teach for America protect? My research tells me that veteran educators across the country (particularly those of color), children of color in high-poverty communities, and struggling corps trainees are *not* benefiting from Teach for America's expansion, leadership, and movement building. Corps Members confirm that they are required to lobby their own legislators with scripted correspondence prepared by TFA to ensure the organization's best interests are retained, a duty not advertised by TFA's recruiters when canvassing campuses (Veltri, 2015).

Teach for America's operationalizing strategies lack transparency, and they play fast and loose with the facts. As Duke psychology professor Dr. Dan Ariely (2013) points out, however, "collaborative cheating" is not uncommon among ideological altruists who arrogantly rationalize the misappropriation of both public trust and public dollars: "We found that altruism is a strong motivator for cheating. Based upon these results we could speculate that people who work for ideological organizations such as political groups and not-for-profits might actually feel more comfortable bending the moral rules—because they are doing it for a good cause and to help others" (p. 232).

Teach for America's network hides behind the TINA thesis (There Is No Alternative) (Saltman & Gabbard, 2003, p. 6). The favor granted to TFA is repeatedly justified by those who claim Teach for America *uniquely* addresses educational inequities through recruitment of bright and innovative applicants for service that is tantamount to a civil rights campaign. But the lack of transparency appears to be catching up with America's Teacher Corps.

TFA alumni have interrogated the Teach for America "truths" for a decade and are organized and vocal. The #ResistTFA social media movement deconstructs the organizational rhetoric presented in the public domain, and alumni researchers offer significant and solid evidence of inconsistencies in the TFA "mission" rhetoric and outcomes (Brewer, 2014; Kretchmar, Sondel, & Ferrare, 2014; White, 2015). College seniors at elite universities such as Penn, Harvard, and Berkeley increasingly scoff at being patronized by an organization that dangles a charter network affiliation prize upon completion of teaching for two years in an underresourced school (Jehlen, 2012; Wieder, 2012; Fischer, 2013).

In 2014, the United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS), a nationwide coalition of savvy university undergrads, became TFA's worst nightmare. Operating on college campuses, the USAS traveling program, "The TFA Truth Tour," exposes the dark side of corporate education reform (Ascherman & Li, 2014). USAS seeks to remove TFA from campuses nationwide. They are aware of TFA's promises and rhetoric, and know that their peers will serve as the human capital fueling TFA's pipeline of corps teachers to public and charter schools in poor communities (Ascherman & Li, 2014).

To add to TFA's public relation woes, many stakeholders are no longer willing to give TFA a free pass. District administrators, school boards, parents, students, teachers, researchers, TFA alumni Corps Members, and savvy college seniors (the real game changers) are onto the nonprofit's "hide and seek" schemes and practices. Offering temporary teachers with minimal preparation for poor children of color seems like an inadequate corporate solution to a very public problem, especially when it is funded by hundreds of millions of dollars in corporate and federal charity that could be spent on efforts to end poverty or to create diverse schools. Manipulating a legitimate desire for public good to fit narrow corporate objectives is not meritorious. The time has come; the rules, consequences, and alliances could be about to change.

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"KIPP is

If you were in I
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Teach for America ideological bond a KIPP teachers who its total-compliance to maintain their own for leadership benefits without KIPP and their two years of move into school leadership traits.

Some KIPP Mc TFA, while others don't have to understand that TFA alumni do have "the mindset" before we can build Seven of the for corps members, and