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An Issue of Equity: Assessing the Cultural Knowledge of Pre-service Teachers in Teach for America

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Critical Education

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Abstract

This literature review examines the research on the development of "cultural knowledge" for preservice teachers in Teach for America program. "Cultural knowledge" refers to a teacher's awareness of the sociopolitical contexts of education and the development of critical consciousness about issues of educational equity. After a brief introduction to the organizational structure of TFA, I will discuss some of the recent research on the organization--much of which has focused on achievement, teacher preparation, and the public policy implications of the program. Then, I will examine themes in the research on the cultural knowledge of preservice teachers' in traditional preparation programs, which I will contrast with an overview of the literature TFA's evolving diversity training. Finally, I will consider possible avenues for research on the cultural knowledge of TFA teachers and discuss programmatic changes that will prepare corps members with the cultural competence necessary to work in communities of color.

Introduction

Teachers in today's schools must be prepared to teach a diverse population of students. In 1972 students of color constituted just 22 percent of the school population and by 2000 this proportion had increased to 39 percent (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). By 2035 demographers project that students of color will make up a majority of the student population in the United States (Hodgkinson, 2000). However, recent federal data from the Schools and Staffing Surveys (1999-2000) indicate that teachers of color constitute about 16 percent of the national teaching force—an increase from only 10 percent in 1986 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003). This discrepancy between the increasing diversity of student populations and the largely white, middle-class, female teaching force (Zumwalt & Craig, 2005; Shulte, 2009) has led some scholars to speak of a "demographic imperative" that requires educators and others to take action to reduce educational disparities for students of color (Banks et al., 2005; Darling-Hammond 2007; Ladson-Billings & Brown, 2008).

In this literature review, I will be examining the cultural knowledge of a particular group of preservice teachers—recent college graduates preparing to become educators through Teach for America (TFA). According to numbers released by the organization, teachers of color constitute 35% of the TFA "corps" of teachers (Yu, 2011), but critiques of the program (see Darling-Hammond, 1994; Popkewitz, 1998; and Veltri, 2010) raise questions about whether TFA's approach is sufficient to meet the needs of students of color in high-need communities. In this paper terms like "cultural knowledge," "cultural competence," and "capacity to teach diverse populations" are used interchangeably to describe what Howard and Aleman (2008) called a "core knowledge" that includes an "awareness of the social and political contexts of education and the development of critical consciousness about issues such as race, class, gender, culture, language, and educational equity" (p. 158). After a brief introduction to the organizational structure of TFA, I will discuss some of the recent research on the organization—much of which has focused on student achievement, TFA's teacher preparation, and the public policy implications of the program. Then, I will examine major themes in the research on the cultural knowledge of preservice teachers' in traditional preparation programs, which I will contrast with an overview of the literature regarding TFA's evolving diversity training. Finally, I will consider possible avenues for research on the cultural knowledge of TFA teachers and discuss programmatic changes that will better equip corps members with the cultural competence necessary to work in communities of color.

Teach for America in Context

Teach for America (TFA) is a non-profit organization whose aim is to eliminate educational inequity by selectively recruiting recent college graduates to teach for two years in under-resourced schools that generally include large populations of students of color. Modeled on the Peace Corps, TFA was started in 1990 and has gone from a relatively small organization of 500 "corps members" in six communities to one that trains between 6000-7000 in over 35 regions including places like Chicago, Oakland, and the Mississippi Delta (Heilig & Jez, 2010). Since the vast majority of the college graduates who join TFA do not have a background in teacher education, TFA candidates are trained over the summer in five-week "institutes" where they learn basic lesson planning, management, and pedagogy while helping to teach summer school. Upon successful completion of the summer institute, TFA corps members are "placed" in

their respective elementary and secondary school settings based on the needs of the local district. Since they are not certified teachers, TFA corps members attend classes at local cooperating universities to get a teaching credential or a master's degree that can be partially subsidized with AmeriCorps funding. Although TFA teachers are paid through the district like regular teachers, each school district is also required to pay several thousand dollars per year to the organization for each placement (Heilig & Jez, 2010).

Although Teach for America comprises only 0.2% of the US's 3.5 million K-12 educators (Heilig & Jez, 2010), many factors make it a compelling site to examine preservice teacher cultural competence. First, TFA has an outsized influence on the national conversation about educational equity for diverse students (Darling-Hammond 1994, 2000, 2009; Heilig & Jez, 2010; Laczko-Kerr & Berliner 2002; Larabee, 2010; Popkewitz 1995, 1998; Ravitch 2011, 2012). Additionally, much of the research conducted on TFA within the last 10-15 years has focused on the organization's effects on students and student achievement (Decker et. al, 2002, Glazerman et al, 2006; Raymond et al, 2001), TFA's teacher preparation (Darling-Hammond 2000, 2009; Darling-Hammond et al, 2005; Veltri, 2010), or TFA as public policy (Helig & Jez, 2010; Lackzko-Kerr & Berliner, 2002; Larabee; 2010). While some scholarship addresses preservice TFA teacher attitudes toward diverse students (Popkewitz 1995; 1998), less is known about the steps that the program takes to ensure that it's corps members develop the cultural knowledge necessary to work in communities of color. Teach for America's stated goal of ensuring educational equity for all students, the controversy over its effectiveness, and the cost of the program to districts and taxpayers all raise the important question: "What steps does the program take to develop the capacity of TFA teachers to work with diverse populations?" As previously indicated, Teach for America has increased its total enrollment of corps members of color to 35 percent in 2011—about twice the percentage of the general teaching force (Yu, 2011). What influence has the relatively higher percentage of teachers of color had on preservice teacher preparation within the organization? Are TFA's demographic shifts sufficient to develop corps members' cultural knowledge or do they need to be accompanied by structural changes to the larger program as well? Teach for America's influence over the education diversity conversation, the lack of research over corps members' cultural knowledge, and the program's increasing diversity all make Teach for America an important setting to examine preservice teacher cultural competency.

Themes in Research on the Cultural Knowledge of Preservice Teachers in Traditional Preparation Programs

Research on the cultural knowledge of TFA corps members must be contextualized within existing research on the cultural competence of preservice teachers in traditional programs. Much of the research on cultural knowledge and preservice educators addresses the preparation of White teachers to teach students of color. Sleeter (2008) describes four interrelated problems that emerge from the research on preparing White preservice teachers for cross-cultural settings. First, citing research by Avery and Walker (1993), McIntyre (1997), and Su (1996) Sleeter indicates that they bring little awareness or understanding of discrimination and racism. Second, citing Marx (2003), Shultz, *et al* (1996), and Richman (1997) Sleeter indicates White preservice teachers bring virtually no conceptual framework for understanding visible inequalities other than the dominant deficit framework. Third, as evidence that White preservice teachers are generally ignorant and fearful of communities of color and fearful of the

topic of race Sleeter cites work by McIntyre (1997), Valli (1995), O'Brien (2004), Powell *et. al.* (2001)*,* and Smith *et. al.* (1997). Fourth, citing Schmidt (1999), Barry & Lechner (1995), Gilbert (1995), Hlebowitsh & Tellez (1993), Larke (1990), and Taylor & Sobel (2001). Finally, Sleeter indicates that White preservice teachers commonly lack awareness of themselves as cultural beings and the tools for viewing another community as a cultural cite (p. 560-561). After reviewing the research on different features of various teacher preparation programs, Sleeter imagines an ideal program that includes (1) community-based learning connected with professional coursework emphasizing reflection; (2) early field experiences in culturally diverse classrooms tied with coursework that examines culture, language, and learning; (3) foundations and methods coursework designed around teaching diverse students; and (4) student-teaching at schools in historically oppressed communities designed according a "collaborative resonance" model that connects critique with practice (p. 572-573).

Villegas and Davis (2008) take a different approach from Sleeter and address research on the preparation of teachers of color. They cite three common arguments for diversifying the ranks of teachers as (1) that teachers of color can serve as role models for students of color (Stewart *et. al.* 1989), (2) that teachers of color tend to have higher expectations for students of color (Irvine, 1990), and (3) that teachers who are racial/ethnic minorities have unique first-hand knowledge about the backgrounds and everyday experiences of students of color (Irvine & Armento, 2001; Villegas and Lucas, 2002) (p. 584). Villegas and Davis cite six studies that, using student outcomes on test scores as the main measure, show a definite benefit for students of color who are taught by teachers of color (p. 587). Five studies examining other outcomes like absenteeism and students of color, second-generation discrimination, Black student enrollment in Algebra II, college matriculation, and minority student dropout rates were also positively affected by a higher percentage of teachers of color. After reviewing research on the challenges that white teachers have in developing the capacity to teach students of color (Irvine, 1990; Casteel, 1998; Oates, 2003; Dee, 2005) Villegas and Davis discuss the minority teacher shortage problem and propose several solutions. Important to this paper, they indicate that alternative certification programs (like Teach for America) can be an avenue for diversifying the teaching ranks. With regard to the preparation of teachers of color they acknowledge that the literature is "scant" but propose some general areas of improvement. They indicate that teachers of color need to be prepared to be agents of change, to be culturally-responsive pedagogues, and that racial/ethnic minority teachers need a "safe environment" in their preparation programs for critical dialogue. Finally, Sleeter and Villegas conclude by reiterating that teacher race/ethnicity can make a positive difference for students of color and advocate for a "comprehensive effort" to recruit, prepare, and retain people of color in teaching (p. 601).

Departing somewhat from the "lens" of teacher race/ethnicity, Castro (2010) conducted a review of general themes in the research on the preservice teacher beliefs on diversity between 1985 and 2007. Based on differing trends in the 55 research studies he examined he divided the articles into three time periods: 1986-1994, 1995-1999, and 2000-2007. According to Castro, the three major themes that characterized research from 1986-1994 were "a lack of complexity in understanding multicultural issues," "a lack of tolerance for multicultural groups," and "gaps in learning to teach in multicultural contexts" (p. 200). Castro cites as characteristic of these themes King's (1991) notion of "dysconsiousness" or the "uncritical habit of mind (including perceptions, attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs) that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as given (p. 135). The major themes that characterized the 1995-1999 time period included the aforementioned "lack of complexity," but added "Deficit

views/prejudice regarding students of color" and "Importance of personal background on attitudes beliefs, and multicultural concepts" (p. 200). Some scholarship that Castro cited as representative of this time period included work from Montecinos and Rios (1999) that noted that preservice teachers adopted a "logic of individual differences" that saw cultural differences as individualistic and ignored aspects of racism and institutional inequity. Similarly, research cited by Smith, Moallem and Sherill (1997) proposed that those who resist multiculturalism may simply lack cross-cultural experiences like travel or multicultural friendships (p. 202).

Contemporary research between 2000 and 2007 was also characterized by the "lack of complexity" and "importance of background" themes along with "contradictory attitudes/perceptions concerning diverse populations and social justice" and "instructional practices that foster changes in preservice teachers' beliefs about diversity, social justice, or multicultural education" (p. 200). Research cited by Castro as representative of this time includes Baldwin, Buchanan, and Rudisill's (2007) work that found that most of their students participating in an urban-based service learning project held stereotypical beliefs that children of color are difficult to teach or unmotivated toward school and Brown's (2004) work on methods of teaching multicultural education courses (p. 204-205). He concludes with a discussion of the unique characteristics of the millennial generation and recommends three areas for further research: (1) the relationship between preservice teachers' prior experiences and their openness to diversity, (2) the teaching practices and curricular components that change attitudes and beliefs, and (3) the way that preservice teachers of color interact with critical multiculturalism (p. 206-207).

Although Castro's research provides a thorough overview, it does have some limitations. First, he excludes alternative certification programs like Teach for America and other "Teaching Fellow" programs from his review—even though the number of teachers entering the field through such programs has increased over the same time period that he examines (Mitchell, 2010). Second, his review implies a certain amount of "promise" in the millennial generation as more demographically diverse and accepting of cultural diversity than previous generations. While this may be true to a certain extent, there are also indications that millennials simply appropriate the diversity discourse to manifest more complex forms of white supremacy than previous generations. For example, according to a study on millennial attitudes by the Public Religion Research Institute and Georgetown University, a majority of white millennials, 56 percent, say that "the government has paid too much attention to the problems of blacks and other minorities." A larger majority, 58 percent, say that "discrimination against whites has become as big a problem as discrimination against black and other minorities" (Survey, 2012). In this context, developing a curriculum that fosters critical awareness (Sleeter, 2008, Castro, 2010) with programmatic changes to diversify the teaching force (Villegas, 2008) and research on the competencies and experiences of preservice teachers of color (Villegas, 2008; Castro, 2010) will be a crucial part of advancing teacher preparation programs for current and future college students.

Research on the Cultural Knowledge of Preservice Teachers in Teach for America

Early Research

Although there is a fair amount of scholarship on TFA corps members in the classroom, only a small amount of it addresses the topic of cultural knowledge and even less addresses the cultural knowledge of preservice TFA corps members. Popkewitz conducted a study during the first year of the program in 1990-1991 and noted some disconcerting messages about multiculturalism from the interviews, classroom observations, and observations of TFA training that he conducted. He reported that distinctions were made between the "normal" child who succeeded in schooling and the child of color who was in opposition to normality. In a variety of ways, children of color, their families, and their communities were framed in pathological terms as the "other" who lacked the motivation, behavioral characteristics, and self-esteem to achieve. According to Popkewtiz, during training sessions corps members learned that children of color learned best when 'psychologically managed' and were best taught using prescribed procedures and strategies (Popkewitz, 1995).

In his (1998) *Struggling for the Soul*, Popkewtiz identified a deficit discourse of the "urban and rural" child that emerged from corps members' speech and discussed how these, "historical discourses about the capabilities of children…function to place the urban and rural child outside reason" (p. 48). Closely related to the existence of the child "outside reason" is a discourse of "rescuing" or "saving" the child that Popkewitz characterizes in quasi-religious terms as "pastoral care." For the TFA teachers, the notion of being a "role model" was closely related to that of "saving" the child by bringing them "hope" [and] becoming a model of what they needed but lacked" (p. 51). Although Popkewtitz's work is mainly a poststructuralist critique of the discourses surrounding the teaching of "urban and rural" children, his analysis clearly reveals a savior mentality among the corps members he interviewed that was closely tied to deficit perspectives of their students.

Another early critic of the (lack of) cultural competence training in TFA is Linda Darling-Hammond. Like Popewitz, her descriptions of the cultural knowledge of corps members are embedded in a larger critique of the program. She quotes former corps members that describe the program's appeal as a "selfish idealism, a wish to tour the authentic, a sense of service [that is] deeply racialized (1994, p. 23). Among the many examples that Darling-Hammond (1994) gives of TFAers' lack of preparation are the comments of one principal who indicated that they "didn't really identify with the community and culture of the students" (p. 25) and parent complaints about "racial insensitivity" (p. 26). This lack of preparation in cultural knowledge and other skills seems to stem in part from the early model of the TFA's five-week summer institute. According to Darling-Hammond, early institutes were based on what Wendy Kopp called a "learner-driven" model with no required curriculum or set of concrete experiences. For example, the 1993 institute was made up of a collection of one-hour workshops that took place in the lounge areas of dormitories, from which recruits could choose any or none, ostensibly depending on the areas of development that corps members were interested in or felt they needed to work on. Corps members averaged about 30 hours in workshops, which were not designed cumulatively or connected, and completed reflective journals, portfolios, and self-designed projects that were merely suggested and not explicitly evaluated (Darling-Hammond, 1994)

Recent Curriculum Redesign

In recent years Teach for America has redesigned its Institute and the cultural competence training that goes along with it. Since 2004, the training has been called "Diversity Community, and Achievement" (DCA) and is the "institute programming designed to help new corps members understand how biases and prejudices about race and class can affect the decisions they make as teachers" (Yu, 2011, p. 35). Although the DCA program has changed from year to year, it has been, by the admission of TFA's own alumni magazine, a "sore spot" for corps members with only 35 percent saying the sessions were helpful in a 2007 survey (only one in five African-American corps members rated it effective the same year). Anecdotes from the corps members provide some insight into why it received such low ratings. A 2001 corps member described it as a "discussion for the corps members of color to really unleash their frustrations around race and equity in general. The implied benefit...was for any corps members who were white or wealthy." A 2002 corps member further described how, "People were coming in at all different levels of self-awareness...people would say offensive things, not realizing they were offensive. People in the majority did not realize they had biases or stereotypes...People would come back...deeply disturbed, questioning who Teach for America was, and how realistic we were about the work we're doing" (Yu, 2011, p. 35).

A big part of the difficulty in DCA session stemmed from a lack of consensus about what issues should be addressed. According to a 1993 corps member who oversaw institute curriculum from 2001 to 2005, it was difficult to agree on objectives because some advocated moving corps members along a continuum of self-awareness about bias and prejudice while others thought the session should be aiming at a clear outcome. The resources utilized ranged from Peggy McIntosh's (1992) classic essay on white privilege to Lee Mun Wah's documentary *The Color of Fear* to having sessions run by an outside consultant. Although there were attempts to ground programming in the work of Sonia Nieto, Lisa Delpit, and Beverly Daniel Tatum, reactions remained largely negative among corps members. Two factors that DCA designers discovered had a large impact were the skill of the facilitators (which often varied widely) and the racial diversity of the institute sites. The more people of color were present for the sessions, the higher the level satisfaction reported in surveys (Yu, 2011, p. 35-36).

In 2007-2008 Teach for America decided to redesign DCA with a narrower focus that had a more explicitly concrete application to the classroom. One of the new focuses was to move beyond the goal of creating emotional breakthroughs and focusing how knowledge of issues concerning race and equity would change potential interactions with students and families. In order to achieve this goal, curriculum designers at TFA established four "diversity competencies" that included: 1) suspending judgment, (2) asset-based thinking, (3) growth mindset, and (4) interpersonal awareness. In order to develop these competencies corps member are encouraged to talk about biases and prejudice in six 90-minute sessions and are given video and audio clips of different "case studies" to show differences in the perspectives of parents, teachers, and students. After institute, the support that corps members receive in the field is directed by individual regions and can include activities like multimedia "learning experiences," weekend professional development and role-playing "poverty simulations." Although the corps member satisfaction with the new version of DCA jumped to 60 percent in 2008, the current focus on "skill-building" has caused some corps members and staff to complain that the approach is too "sanitized," that it lacks "emotion," "open-ended conversation," and doesn't

develop "a broader understanding of racism and racial dynamics in America" (Yu, 2011 p. 35, 37-38).

An examination of the 2012 version of the "Diversity, Community, and Achievement" manual, which is available digitally on the corps members and alumni website, reveals a lot about the current "sanitized" approach to training for TFA preservice teachers. Encouragingly, the introduction, chapters, and sub-sections of the manual have titles like "The Undeniable Correlations Among Race, Class and the Achievement Gap," ""Kind-Hearted Prejudice' Prejudice: Lowering Expectations Out of Concern and Sympathy," and "Exploring Your Own Bias." The manual also references a range of supplementary readings that include John Ogbu's (2003) study of Black student disengagement in affluent suburbs, Nieto's (2000) work on the sociopolitical contexts of multicultural education, Noguera's (2003) work on racial identity and school performance, as well as classic texts on race and culture by Beverly Daniel Tatum (2003) and Lisa Delpit (2006).

However, a closer look at the text raises questions about the way that the topics and scholarship are presented and received by the many TFA alumni and preservice teachers who lack formal university training in researching and teaching about areas of sociocultural difference. A brief examination of the chapter entitled "The 'Knowledge Base' of the Self: Uncovering Hidden Biases and Unpacking Privilege" demonstrates how the text and training attempt but ultimately fail to develop deep understandings of key ideas like privilege. In the chapter the authors claim that "…the process of considering one's unearned privilege is arguably more applicable to White, male, straight, and affluent persons than to African-American or Latino, female, homosexual, or poor persons, simply because the former groups are more likely to have experienced…societal preference…" (TFA, 2012, p. 61) Without thoroughly explaining why unearned privilege "is arguably more applicable" to those groups, the text continues with language that further qualifies and minimizes the experiences of minoritized groups by stating, "On the other hand, an argument might be made that…all of us, no matter what our primary or many identities, experience identity-based privileges in various contexts—that is, being Black, or Jewish, or female, or gay can and does confer elements of privilege in certain, specific contexts" (p. 61). The example used to demonstrate this "contextual" privilege is a "Spanish-only speaker" who struggles to work within the dominant language and culture in an English-speaking community who "might find that he or she enjoys the 'privilege' of language dominance while in a different, Spanish-speaking community—where an English-only speaker might lose his or her privilege." (TFA, 2012, p. 61)

The discourse that "everyone has different privilege in different contexts" is a "common-sense" way of whitewashing the topic and it is ultimately problematic. Perhaps the best way to demonstrate the problems with the TFA definition of privilege is to compare it to the definition given in another primer on diversity and social justice written for preservice teachers by scholars in the field. Sensoy and Diangelo's (2011) "Is Everyone Really Equal: An Introduction to Key Concepts in Social Justice Education" defines privilege as "systemically conferred dominance and the institutional processes by which the beliefs and values of the dominant group are 'made normal' and universal" (p. 57). The key idea embedded in Sensoy and Diangelo's definition is that dominance of the privileged group in power is "universal" and that power relations do not magically switch in different contexts. Anticipating the types of "common-sense" understandings included in the TFA manual the authors take care to point out that, "While in some cases, the privileged group is also the numerical majority, the key criterion is social and institutional

power…" Drawing on their years of experience teaching and researching these topics, Sensoy and Diangelo also make the distinction between lay definitions of privilege as simply "to be *lucky,* to have *fortunate* opportunity and to *benefit* from this luck and opportunity" and the more scholarly definition that identifies privilege as, "the rights, advantages, and protections enjoyed by some *at the expense* of an beyond the rights, advantages and protections available to others" because of structural inequities.

While the DCA manual fails to distinguish between lay and scholarly definitions of privilege and identifies minoritized groups' lack of privilege as something that is "arguable," the "Is Everyone Really Equal?" text identifies the privilege of "men, Whites, heterosexuals, the able-bodied, Christians, [and] upper-classes" in unequivocal terms (2011, p. 58). By contrast, the DCA manual declines to directly name the dominant groups that enjoy social and institutional advantages and actually creates misunderstandings about the nature of privilege. While such understandings about privilege would be important for any preservice teacher, they are especially vital for undertrained TFA corps members from Ivy League schools who, as graduates from elite colleges, have benefitted from systems of privilege. This gap in key understandings and cultural competence compounds the already inadequate pedagogic preparation of TFA teachers and exacerbates inequities for the students that they will teach.

Discussion and Conclusion

The limitations of TFA's approach are apparent when judged against Howard and Aleman (2008) aforementioned call for teacher preparation that fosters a "core knowledge" that includes an "awareness of the social and political contexts of education and the development of critical consciousness about issues such as race, class, gender, culture, language, and educational equity" (p. 158). While many teacher preparation programs allow their preservice teacher at least one (and sometimes several) semester-long classes and field experiences to develop their cultural competencies, TFA corps member are expected to develop these understandings in a handful of sessions over a five week period. The "diversity competencies" it seeks to develop in its' corps members seem broadly aimed at helping TFAers identify biases and move beyond "common-sense" deficit frameworks toward more positive conceptions of students, their families, and their communities. However, since they lack an in-depth critique of power, privilege, and, by TFA's own admission, "a broader understanding of racism and racial dynamics in America" (Yu, 2011, p. 35), it seems doubtful that corps members are able to develop anything approaching the "critical consciousness" that Howard and Aleman (2008) and others have advocated.

A review of the research and program training materials demonstrates serious gaps in Teach for America's ability to develop the necessary cultural competence in its teacher recruits. Although the program has made attempts to design (and re-design) it's curriculum in order to move away from the haphazard, deficit-oriented curriculum originally documented by Popkewitz (1995, 1998) and Darling-Hammond (1994), TFA's current curriculum demonstrates a failure to disrupt the common (mis)understandings that their predominantly white, middle-class teaching force brings with them to diverse classrooms. While efforts to recruit more teachers of color and curriculum redesigns might marginally increase the cultural competence of TFA corps members, the problems with the program are fundamental and won't be solved with a quick fix. Teachers from traditional programs often find themselves at a loss when confronted by a school community that suffers from macro-economic issues like the inter-generational poverty, urban blight, and joblessness. Substituting teachers with several years of training for TFA corps

members with five weeks of training only worsens the existing challenges in high-need schools with diverse populations.

At the heart of Teach for America's inability to design a culturally competent curriculum is the way that the program has been historically situated within larger structures of power. In his ethnographic study of the TFA's first year of operation, Popkewitz (1998) notes how the early success of the program and the fascination that it held within the American media, business, and philanthropic communities stemmed from the way that TFA, "claimed legitimacy within a wider American discourse about privatization and choice as a practice of policy" (p. 8). He notes that the goals and justifications of the organization meshed with several streams of a general American social and political ideology in the 1980's. These included the notion that traditional teacher recruitment was plagued by government ineptitude and that private enterprise and a "can do" attitude could solve grave social problems. Within one year of proposing the program for her senior thesis, Wendy Kopp was able to secure enough funding from private companies and foundations to set up a national organization with 500 recruits from top colleges that were placed in rural Georgia and North Carolina; Baton Rouge and New Orleans, Louisiana; New York City; and the Los Angeles metro area (Popkewitz, 1998 p. 8). It is difficult to believe that Teach for America would have experienced such astonishing financial and organizational support in such a short amount of time without fitting into the existing narrative of neoliberal education reform.

As a non-profit that currently receives hundreds of millions of dollars from private foundations and companies, it seems unlikely that the TFA leadership would be able change it's organization or teacher education curriculum in ways that critique existing power structures. However, one promising avenue for critique comes from the grassroots mobilization of the TFA alumni who recognize that the organization contributes to inequitable conditions in schools and communities. At the national "Free Minds, Free People" conference in Chicago, alumni from Teach for America recently organized a roundtable titled "Organizing Resistance to Teach for America and its Role in Privatization." (Schonfeld, 2013). While some TFA alumni played a key role in the recent resistance to standardized testing in Seattle (Davis, 2013), others have argued that the program has strayed from its initial role as a teacher shortage stop-gap (Rubenstein, 2011) and that new corps members should quit (Osgood, 2013). While the leadership at TFA has yet to make any official changes to its program structure, reports of an "alumni resistance" in several progressive and national media outlets seems to be having an effect.

The new co-CEOs of the organization recently embarked on a nationwide "listening tour" and have publically acknowledged the resistance to the way that Teach for America engages with local communities. However, a recent Op-Ed about the tour by one of the CEO's entitled "Fighting the Wrong Enemy" (Villanueva, 2013) seems more interested in defending the position of the organization than in considering structural changes that might respond to the criticisms from alumni and scholars regarding the Teach for America model. In order to ensure that its corps members have the cultural competence necessary to work with students of color, TFA must consider fundamental changes to the way the program is structured. Hopkins (2008) has proposed that TFA change its program by 1) extending the commitment period to three years; 2) changing the first year of teaching into a "residency training year" under a master teacher while TFA preservice teacher complete coursework for certification; and 3) Offering incentives for corps members to stay in the classroom longer than three years. This "teaching residency" approach to reforming Teach for America has been supported by other scholars (see

also Darling-Hammond, 2009) and is based both on the successful models implemented in large cities like Boston, Chicago and Denver (Hopkins, 2008 p. 723).

A "teacher residency" model of TFA training would allow for the (1) community-based learning connected with professional coursework emphasizing reflection; (2) early field experiences in culturally diverse classrooms tied with coursework that examines culture, language, and learning; (3) foundations and methods coursework designed around teaching diverse students; and (4) student-teaching at schools in historically oppressed communities that Sleeter (2008) imagines as part of an idea teacher preparation program (p. 572-573). Training under master teachers at successful urban schools for an entire year while completing coursework would also allow corps members time to develop deeper understandings and provide context for the issues discussed in their classes. At the same time, Teach for America should continue to emphasize the recruitment of teachers of color to counteract an overall shortage (Villegas & Davis, 2008) and to ensure that the cultural knowledge of its corps of teachers more closely aligns to the communities where they will work. An increased emphasis on promoting and preserving the cultural knowledge of local communities also means that new TFA recruits should only be placed in shortage areas that lack teachers with more experience or an undergraduate training in education.

Additionally, more research is needed on whether the instructional practices implemented during Teach for America's summer institute actually lead to any meaningful changes in TFA corps members' beliefs about diversity, social justice, or multicultural education. In particular, we should take up Castro's (2010) call to examine (1) the relationship between corps members' prior experiences and their openness to diversity, (2) the teaching practices and curricular components that change attitudes and beliefs, and (3) the way that corps members of color interact with critical multiculturalism (p. 206-207). Part of this process will involve moving beyond research questions that focus on isolated aspects of Teach for America (like training or student achievement data) to an in-depth, qualitative, longitudinal approach that encompass the recruitment, training, commitment, and post-commitment period of TFA teachers. Another relatively simple way to improve the cultural competence training for Teach for America teachers would be to open up their "Diversity, Community, and Achievement" manual up to the process of peer review. Teach for America published their instructional training manual "Teaching as Leadership: The Highly Effective Teacher's Guide to Closing the Achievement Gap" in paperback form in 2010. Putting the DCA manual through a similar process of editing and peer review would help ensure that the text's presentation of concepts like race and privilege is consistent with current scholarship. Such organizational change is unlikely to occur at Teach for America without continued grassroots resistance to the organization's current model by TFA alumni, by the teacher education community, and—most importantly—by the local schools and communities most affected by untrained and inexperienced corps members. If the organization is ever going to truly reflect the principles of social justice and equity that it espouses, it must make fundamental changes to the structure of the program and the way that critical cultural knowledge is developed by new TFA teachers.

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