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## “I want to *do* Teach for America, not *become* a teacher”

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### Abstract

*It's common to hear a student say, “I want to do Teach For America, not become a teacher.” Though the implied terse sentiment about teaching is something we increasingly hear on our liberal arts campus, the way students articulate and emphasize a difference between doing and becoming is telling. In this paper, we focus on how Teach For America (TFA) has and continues to compromise the way many think about K-12 education and teacher education programs. Specifically, we seek to highlight the contradictions between the way TFA trains their corps members (doing) and the role the liberal arts can play in teacher education programs (becoming). As many of TFA corps members come from liberal arts campuses, articulating these contradictions is important so that we are able to speak back to the allure of TFA and popular narratives about teaching and education.*



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## Introduction

On its face and given prevailing ideas about intelligence, achievement, and merit, the following ideas seem intuitively correct: High-performing liberal arts graduates, especially those from institutions with highly selective admissions procedures, and especially those with leadership experience, would make terrific teachers. These are students who have exhibited a disciplined work ethic and whose curriculum was structured with an intentional intellectual trajectory towards breadth and depth in the natural sciences, social sciences, humanities, and all of the interdisciplinary spaces in-between (e.g., Menand, 2010). “Smart” young adults, with a keen awareness of their places within a globalized world and the tools to be connected within it, are exactly who we want to take our younger students into that competitive frontier called the future. If anyone can help to close that thing called the achievement gap, it must be them (e.g., EduShyster, 2012a; Miner, 2010).

Let’s add this popular narrative to a present-day political climate saturated with a vitriolic, yet now common sense, rhetoric about current teachers. This rhetoric, constructed and funded by the uber-wealthy such as the Walton, Broad, and Gates Foundations, attempts to make causal links between student test performance, teacher effectiveness and America’s place in a global world (e.g., Kumashiro, 2012; Lipman, 2011; Saltman, 2010; among many others). The way it’s presented to the public is watered-down and simplified: *Children suffer and fail because unions protect bad teachers who aren’t effective in producing results in the form of test scores. This undermines accountability and the quest to make real progress for equity and equality in education. This is evil and without drastic changes in the realm of education, America is going to become obsolete.* This is presented to the public as fact, despite peer-reviewed research suggesting otherwise (e.g., Au, 2009; Kumashiro, 2012; Weiner, 2012; among many others).

From the failure of schools and students as a result of *bad teachers*, the popular/vitriolic rhetoric next critiques the institutions/programs where most teachers get their training. These are referred to as traditional certification programs (i.e., certification through a teacher education program at an accredited university or college). If schools are failing, then these traditional certification programs must be doing a poor job in training teachers.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the rhetoric suggests, we need alternative “pathways” or “routes” to bring competent and energetic folks into the classroom. Given the “failure” of past and present teachers, this new and alternative population, most without formal education about education or teaching, might bring the energy and ingenuity to finally close the achievement gap—a gap that social scientists for the past 60 years have been suggesting has less to do with what goes on inside of schools as to what goes on in relation to poverty, health care, nutrition, and other public policy issues (e.g., Rothstein, 2004).

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<sup>1</sup> See Klonsky (2013) for a critique of the recent report by the National Council on Teacher Quality, which argues that traditional certification programs turn out failing and bad teachers.

The poster child for these new pathways is Teach For America (TFA). And, in conversation with the narrative from the first paragraph, many TFA Corps Members (CMs), which is how they refer to their teachers, are high-performing students with leadership experience who come from highly selective liberal arts institutions or backgrounds. As Barbara Miner (2010) suggests, TFA works to "recruit smart, hard-working graduates from Ivy League and other highly competitive universities, and asks them to take a hiatus from their future careers to commit two years to teaching in a low-income or rural school." TFA, who is funded by the same organizations that fund the critique of traditional teachers, offers a solution to the bad teacher problem. More, and what is both deceptive and malicious about TFA, is how it synergistically uses the cache of highly selective colleges to push a powerful political ideology and policy objective in current education debates.

These policy objectives, which we describe in more detail below, frame standardized skills and human capital as the ends of education. Teachers have been cast as agents of transmission of these skills, responsible for overcoming any and all political and social obstacles in order for students to score well on standardized tests. Teachers today, trained and certified, are failing to get the job done. They are, as stated above, *bad teachers*. Therefore, it's assumed that untrained, but high achieving and determined, "smart" kids must be able to *do* this job. Most TFA applicants have little or no formal education about education or teaching. The logic, as critiqued by Linda Darling-Hammond (1994), is that "TFA assumes...beyond subject-matter knowledge and general intelligence, no serious preparation is needed to teach effectively" (p. 24). Or, as Johnston and her colleagues have put it, "Alternative routes seem to promote the idea that not much beyond a liberal arts degree is necessary in order to teach well" (Bjork, Johnston, & Ross, 2007, p. 2).

The tension, for us, and we imagine for others in similar positions, is the following: How do we articulate how the liberal arts can be a crucial resource for teachers by providing ways of engaging with our political worlds and human conditions and, at the same time, counter the now prevailing narrative that the "best and brightest" liberal arts graduates without proper training would benefit our poorest classrooms? This is the question this paper seeks to address.

We are two professors who work in a department of Educational Studies at Colgate University, a highly selective liberal arts institution that produces more than a few TFA CMs. Our department has liberal arts-based majors and minors who learn "disciplined yet creative habits of mind...[and] develop...the capacities for critical inquiry" about education and educational institutions broadly conceived (Roth, 2008). Our majors and minors do not get certified to teach. However, in addition to our Educational Studies majors and minors, we also proudly run and house undergraduate and M.A.T certification programs. In these programs, we facilitate a process that can lead to the emergence of critically competent teacher-intellectuals (e.g., Giroux, 1985). We strive to do more than prepare our future teachers to meet the demands of an increasingly bureaucratic system. We also strive to help them understand the politics of this system, while remaining personally and intellectually self-reflective and committed to the civic and moral demands of being an educator.

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And so on the one hand, with our slightly defensive liberal arts hats on,<sup>2</sup> we thoroughly believe that a liberal arts background provides modes, methods, and theories of inquiry that should inform our students as they enter into their post-graduate, employed, civic, and globalized lives. In an era marked by instrumental reason, the liberal arts can provide alternative ways of engaging with pressing issues. In conversation with Catharine Stimpson (2008), we see the liberal arts—“taught with passion and care”—as being a fundamental resource to thinking through social justice and the horizons of possibility. And, we believe, the liberal arts can and must serve as a critical resource for the future of teacher education programs.<sup>3</sup>

However, with our Educational Studies hats on, we also uncompromisingly resist the narrative that a liberal arts degree is sufficient to teach. To be sure, we do *not* argue that the liberal arts can do away with poverty, hunger, war, famine, the achievement gap, or evil in the world. The liberal arts alone are “insufficient,” to use Stimpson’s (2008) term, to prevent or control those issues. In no way do we think a degree in History or English or Women’s Studies *or* Educational Studies alone is adequate for the responsibilities of classroom life, especially classrooms filled with some of the country’s poorest children of color or those kids in special education classrooms.<sup>4</sup>

In this paper, and in what follows, we address the tension between the liberal arts and Teach For America by critically examining a line we hear a lot from students on our campus: *I want to **do** Teach For America, not **become** a teacher.* This difference, between *doing* and *becoming*, speaks loudly to our critiques of TFA and our defense of the liberal arts as a foundation for teacher education and pedagogy.

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<sup>2</sup> We say we are defensive of the liberal arts as, since the early 1970s, the number of degrees conferred in liberal arts departments has been on the decrease. As Louis Menand (2010) writes, “Most of the roughly 2,500 four-year colleges in the United States award less than half of their degrees in the liberal arts. Even in the leading research universities, only about half the bachelor’s degrees are awarded in liberal arts fields. The biggest undergraduate major by far in the United States is business...Only 4 percent of college graduates major in English. Just 2 percent major in history” (p. 53-54). We are defensive as there has been a material and ideological shift in how society values the liberal arts.

<sup>3</sup> Just to be clear, we are not suggesting that liberal arts colleges or institutions must serve as critical resources for a universal idea of teacher education programs. We do not believe that liberal arts colleges or universities do teacher preparation better than other institutions. Our argument in this paper, as it will be constructed below, is not intended to be comparative in regard to non-liberal arts institutions.

<sup>4</sup> Moreover, and perhaps more forcefully, we think it downright irresponsible and shameful that TFA and other organizations promote and facilitate a process that sends mostly white and mostly middle/upper-middle class young adults into some of the poorest classrooms in the United States (TFA, Diversity, 2013). The unwritten narrative of this unequal relationship is that TFA and their CMs are there to save poor kids and communities from their own demise as opposed to serving them (Royal, 2012). We see the saving/White Knight narrative as being in bad faith, and, among other things, ideologically within a colonialist mindset of racism and classism (e.g., Darling-Hammond, 1994; Hartman, 2011; Veltri, 2010; among many others)

## Doing TFA

### *To Do*

In regard to TFA, we want to think about what it means *to do* in three ways. First, *do* is a transitive verb. Transitive verbs are actions and imply that an object receives that action. They do something to something. For example, in "I kicked the ball," *kick* is the transitive verb/action and *the ball* is the object on the receiving end of the action. Our example, however, isn't quite so simple. In "I want to do Teach For America," *do* is the verb and TFA is the object on the receiving end of the action. Though TFA is the literal receiving object in the sentence, in practice TFA isn't really the object that receives the act of doing. As we will explain below, the real objects who receive the action of *doing* TFA are the CMs, the students in their classrooms, and, insofar as TFA pushes for policy changes, many other students, teachers, and administrators as well.

Second, and using Denise Clark Pope's (2001) definition in her *Doing School*, we identify doing as "going through the correct motions" in order to be deemed effective by the institution setting the parameters (p. 4). Pope uses *doing* in contrast to "learning and engaging with the curriculum" (what we'll call becoming) in ways meaningful and politically relevant to students' own lives and the lives of others. And so in order to understand what it means to *do* TFA, to go through the correct TFA motions, we will need to understand the ideological underpinnings of the organization to see what it determines effective and why.

Third, *do* has a sense of temporality that is important for this paper. The future of doing something is to have done it, after which one *did* something and it is *done*. That one finishes something—*I did TFA*—will be important to how we frame the politics of TFA and the current educational policy environment.

### *Getting People To Do*

Toward the beginning of *Learning on Other People's Kids*, Barbara Torres Veltri's (2010) richly qualitative account of her and her students' experiences of the TFA program and process, Torres discusses the five-week training institute all new participants must attend. Colloquially referred to as "Institute" or "boot camp" by those involved with TFA, it is a standardized crash course that runs in nine sites throughout the country that, in 2011, served 5,200 new recruits (Johnson, 2011). Of Institute, Heilig and Jez (2010), in the most thorough analysis on the "effectiveness" of TFA to date,<sup>5</sup> write:

Rather than the extensive preparation traditionally educated teachers receive over four years as education majors in undergraduate credentialing programs, TFA candidates attend a five-week training program in the summer between

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<sup>5</sup> By effectiveness, the authors of the report are using TFA's language and variables for assessment, namely test scores. Though most critical education scholars reject the claim that one can assess effective teaching with the kinds of standardized tests given today, even when we use these tests and this mindset to assess TFA, the results suggest that TFA Corps Members are less effective than credentialed beginning teachers with similar experience. See, for example, Heilig and Jez (2010) or Kovacs (2011).

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graduating from college and beginning their teaching assignments. While the program includes a brief stint of student teaching, the experience is not comparable to that provided in traditional teacher education programs...Also included in the summer training are short lessons in pedagogy, content and classroom management. (p. 1)

During this time, only a small percentage of time is actually spent co-teaching mostly minority students in summer school. “In all,” writes certified teacher and TFA critic/alum Jameson Brewer, “corps members spend 125 hour in ‘sessions’ in addition to the *18 hours of teaching* before they are sent into the nation’s worst schools. As a student teacher [in a traditional certification program], I amassed approximately 640 hours of lead teaching before I was cleared to graduate” (Brewer, 2012a; emphasis added). And it’s here, at Institute we suggest, where CMs learn both explicitly and implicitly what it means to *do* TFA.

### *Explicitly*

Explicitly, as Veltri (2010) points out, the TFA “philosophy and mission statement, ‘One day every child will attain an excellent education’ was reinforced [at Institute] through anecdotes, testimonials from TFA alums, supporters, and founder, Wendy Kopp” (p. 54). This rhetoric, which intentionally and audibly resonates with a civil rights discourse, is, seemingly, in good faith. Who doesn’t want all children to attain educational excellence?<sup>6</sup> However, what *an excellent education* is, and how it should come about, is neither obvious nor self-evident.

In using the rhetoric of the Civil Rights Movement, Kopp attempts to eschew critical dialogue about questions of what she means by *an excellent education* by alluding to that which is sacrilegious to question in the United States—Dr. King’s determined activism for justice. Those especially not willing to question the genuineness of this goal are young, most probably liberal-minded, recent graduates who have grown up with certain ideas about Dr. King’s dream (i.e., absent his scathing critiques of class inequity, imperialism, and war (e.g., King, 1967)). We have no doubt that many TFA participants want genuinely to “do good” and believe that, “by teaching disadvantaged students for 2 years, as a kind of domestic Peace Corps,” they are (Labaree, 2010, p. 48). However,

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<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that Kopp and like-minded reformers continually suggest that critics of TFA and other policy initiatives like the charter school movement *are* against all children attaining excellence and support the status quo. This accusation launched at critics is completely unsubstantiated and false. It merely works to paint a picture in the public imaginary that people who critique TFA or charters are bad people who don’t support children. Nothing could be further from the truth. What critics who don’t support TFA and charters actually believe, as we have been arguing for a very long time, is that there are real problems that face public schools in the United States. These issues have to do with racism, classism, genderism, ableism, sexism, nationalism, and capitalism, among many other issues. These issues have to do with equity and resources. These issues have to do with content and pedagogy. These issues have to do with how institutions of education have continually reproduced the status quo and privilege certain kinds of knowing and knowledge and how TFA continues this process. More, critics also point out that there are many examples of extraordinary and critical education going in schools like those that TFA serves that look and sound much different than TFA discourses (e.g., Schultz, 2008).

without really having a critical understanding of what an excellent education is or how public education can be used to achieve multiple definitions of democracy, we believe that Kopp and the TFA public relations machine take advantage of their recruits' desire to do good. By making connections between their own organization—an organization with at least 16 administrators making six-figure salaries and that has raised close to \$1 billion dollars over the past five years (EduShyster, 2012b)—and a civil rights movement that was mostly grassroots, mostly locally organized, and fundamentally made up of poor people of color, TFA exploits most of their recruits' well-intentioned pursuit of rights and justice for their own ends.

The TFA working platform to meet the "excellent education" aspiration is explicitly represented throughout their promotional literature. First, TFA is helping to solve "Our Nation's Greatest Injustice" (TFA Brochure, 2009 cited in Labaree, 2010, p. 49). Second, "Poverty is not destiny" (TFA, A Solvable Problem, 2013). And third, "[f]illing high-need classrooms with passionate, high-achieving individuals who will do whatever it takes to help their students succeed is...critical...but not enough to close the achievement gap. Success relies on the work corps members do as alumni after their two-year commitment..." (TFA, Building a Movement, 2013). If Kopp's civil rights discourse makes up the heart of the TFA ideology, these three points provide the head and backbone. The product of all this is a type of Venn diagram that TFA puts before their recruits and uses it as affective bait to get them on board. In the table below, we outline this narrative as a list of points on the left side of the page. On the right side of the page, we provide a few critical responses that go unaddressed for each point of TFA's platform. Many of these points are addressed in more detail later in the paper.

TFA Ideology	Some Critical Responses
<p>1. Because education is the hinge for future success in meritocratic America, then educational inequality is the nation's greatest injustice</p>	<p>1. Success is narrowly defined in terms of employment and money. Merit is used as a discursive trope to legitimate the CMs own success and casts a racialized and classist shadow on all those who don't succeed, despite working quite hard.</p>
<p>2. However, and despite anyone who says otherwise, poverty is not destiny. And, if poverty isn't destiny, then there must be a variable that can be changed to unleash previously untapped achievement as defined by test scores in poor students.</p>	<p>2. This of course is true. Poverty isn't always destiny, or at least it's not biological or deterministic destiny. However, and given social life in the United States, poverty can be viewed as a type of social/educational destiny as supported by 60+ years of research (e.g., Rothstein, 2004). Researchers have continually provided data suggesting an inverse correlation between academic success and poverty. However, when someone tries to bring this up in conversation with a TFA devotee, they make it seem like the questioner is Charles Murray, co-author of <i>The Bell Curve</i>. What critics of TFA who bring this up are saying is that, given social inequity and the way most schools function, it's impossible for education to act as the only form of social welfare that will enable fundamental, if not normatively construed, social change (e.g., Wells 2009).</p>

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<p>3. If the common denominator with all poor kids is that they have teachers, then we can deduce that teachers must be the problem.</p>	<p>3. Why is the deduction that all poor kids have teachers and this is the problem? Why isn't the common denominator that all poor kids are poor, and therefore poverty is problem, which research supports?</p>
<p>4. If teachers are the problem, and if teaching has historically failed to attract those that go into politics, medicine, and law, then bringing these "bright" kids into the classroom will be revolutionary.</p>	<p>4. There are unspoken racial and class discourses at work here. Given the history of the United States, the implicit suggestion is that we need wealthy white students in classrooms with poor students of color. TFA is here playing on a white-person's burden theory of change, which has been taken up by post-colonial scholars for some time (e.g., Césaire, 1972/2000; DuBois, 1920/2004). The idea is that the colonizer should take pity for the colonized and offer the aesthetic of charity in order to make a kind of confession for their sins without needing to cease complicity in and benefit from the imperial project. It is, the theory suggests, in the best interest of the colonized that the colonizer acts.</p>
<p>5. However, and because classrooms are embedded within schools, and schools within districts, and districts within states, and states within the nation, and each of these levels is saturated with layers of politics, TFA also needs those who have done TFA to use what they've learned and experienced to move into real careers, and effect change at the political level.</p>	<p>5. At least they are honest about the fact that they don't want their own staying in schools as teachers. They want their CMs going into positions of power, where they can effect change from the top, down. This reifies an epistemic hierarchy situating those in power and their knowledge as having intellectual and moral legitimacy and superiority.</p>
<p>6. TFA's theory of change, as stated and embodied by Kevin Huffman, former TFA vice-president in charge of public affairs and now appointed COMMISSIONER of the Tennessee Department of Education, is to "bring in great people [to TFA] who will have a tremendous impact on the kids they are teaching and who will go on for the rest of their careers to have an impact on the root causes that cause the gap in educational outcomes in this country" (cited in Miner, 2010).</p>	<p>6. Diane Ravitch has been closely following Huffman's tenure as commissioner. Not surprisingly, he has pushed for charter schools, vouchers, and drastically cutting the budget for districts that don't agree with his decisions. See the Tennessee section of Ravitch's (2013) blog:<a href="http://dianeravitch.net/category/tennessee/">http://dianeravitch.net/category/tennessee/</a></p>
<p>7. The root causes of the gap have nothing to do with political economy or the means by which the billionaire funders of TFA accrue surplus capital. They also don't have to do with rising</p>	<p>7. Andrew Hartman (2011), in a stunning critique of TFA's liberal ethos, is worth quoting at length here: "[N]owhere does Kopp reflect upon the patent ridiculousness of her expectation that loads of cash donated by corporations that exploit inequalities across the world—such as Union Carbide and</p>

<p>inequality. They are about bad teachers, their protective unions, the suffocating bureaucracy of public schools, and the fact that there aren't enough smart people, like TFAers, trying to solve educational issues.</p>	<p>Mobil, two of TFA's earliest contributors—will help her solve some of the gravest injustices endemic to American society. Kopp shows some awareness of the absurdities of her own experiences—including a 'fundraising schedule [that] shuttled me between two strikingly different economic spheres: our undersourced classrooms and the plush world of American philanthropy'—but she fails to grasp that this very gap is what makes her stated goal of equality unachievable. In short, Kopp, like education reformers more generally, is an innocent when it comes to political economy. She spouts platitudes about justice for American children, but rarely pauses to ask whether rapidly growing inequality might be a barrier to such justice. She celebrates twenty years of reform movement success, but never tempers such self-congratulatory narcissism with unpleasant questions about why those who have no interest in disrupting the American class structure—such as Bill Gates and the heirs to Sam Walton's fortunes, by far the most generous education reform philanthropists—are so keen to support the TFA insurgency. Kopp is a parody of the liberal do-gooder."</p>
<p>8. And so it's up to TFA, and their like-minded allies, to save the less fortunate. And when people critique TFA, it's only because they don't and can't understand the important work that TFA does and how they do it. Critics aren't the best and brightest for a reason.</p>	<p>8. Nobody asked to be saved by Wendy Kopp, Michelle Rhee, or the KIPP founders, who are ex-TFA CMs. People have demanded and been activists for justice. Two years and then a career in politics or law doesn't bring about justice, at least not for those who need it.</p>

TFA is smart about how it gets its recruits to believe the narrative on the left without question. They put scores of 20-somethings who don't know each other together in one place—in Institute. Then exhaust and overwhelm them, telling them that this will be the most difficult challenge they've ever faced, while at the same time telling them they are the best and the brightest.<sup>7</sup> Mix in a TFA staff full of former CMs, who the new recruits identify with. The staff members tell the new CMs how great they are and how transformative their own experiences were. Add all this to the heroic narrative infused with liberal ideas about "doing good" by helping the less fortunate, and you've got yourself a ripe environment to lay down the framework for what it means to do TFA. The portrait painted by Donna Foote (2008), in her journalistic and TFA-approved, account, *Relentless Pursuit*, seems somewhere between cultish, militaristic, and theatrical. Describing the welcoming ceremony at the Los Angeles Institute, Foote writes that new CMs were marched in with "each lot shouting louder than the last, until the noise was literally deafening...Corps members were clapping and chanting 'TFA!...TFA!...TFA!'" (p. 44).<sup>8</sup> Later in this particular evening, before Kopp had spoken in a manner that Foote

<sup>7</sup> The yield rate for the 2011 incoming TFA class was 11% (Johnson, 2011). A 2010 *New York Times* article reported that 18% of both Harvard and Yale seniors applied to be CMs (Winerip, 2010). This does not go unnoticed or unspoken by TFA and their recruits.

<sup>8</sup> Foote's journalistic account of a few different TFA CMs is one of, if not *the*, only time the organization has granted an outsider sustained and seemingly unrestricted access to the machinery of the

says “could have been mistaken for those of a commanding officer sending troops off to battle” (p. 44), five institute staff people appeared on a darkened stage, heads bowed, standing in a row. “Suddenly,” Foote writes, “a single speaker stepped forward into a spotlight, head now raised, and began to read from a diary chronicling the personal travails and triumphs of a TFA recruit...[which] concluded with the refrain ‘Why I Teach For America.’ This was repeated, with each speaker providing equally stirring testimon[y]...and each person had shared a personal epiphany that underscored the need and urgency of the battle—not to mention the quiet satisfaction attained from joining it” (p. 45-46). Explicitly, these are the ways TFA tells you what it means to ideologically do TFA.

### *Implicitly*

Implicitly, the way in which Institute runs sets a base for how TFA thinks about doing teaching and about education more generally. Veltri’s (2010) informants told her that through the five-week program, “recruits were exposed to the organization’s model of content, pedagogy, and classroom management” (p. 54). In other places, this is what critical educational theorists call the hidden curriculum, or how norms, values, tastes, and beliefs get transmitted implicitly through the structure of schooling and pedagogy (e.g., Anyon, 1983; Giroux, 1977).

In terms of TFA, the hidden curriculum comes out in the way Institute is organized and how new members are treated. This treatment follows punitive measures such as having no-excuses (in meeting the demands of TFA), zero-tolerance (in regard to the task at hand), and a policy of no questioning (the reasons of how or why TFA operates the way it does). Veltri (2010) writes that, “Institute was not intended to be an interactive or participatory-based learning experience ... [and the] training model ... appeared to adopt a corporate-like framework” (p. 54). Corps members were not treated as knowers who might have something to offer TFA. Instead, “[t]he heightened involvement of former TFA alumnae, along with the high-level corporate and media supporters, resulted in TFA novices’ failure to question (especially publicly) the prescribed program” (p. 54). All of this, we argue, is intentional and used by TFA to both ascribe itself as in charge and instill a sense of obedience among its new recruits. One party knows, the other is seen as deficient, which then translates to how the CMs engage students in their own classrooms.

Increasingly, there are more and more former TFA members who are beginning to publish, blog, and speak out about their experiences of this process. Neha Singhal (2012), a former TFA recruit who was supposed to teach kids in the Rio Grande Valley in Texas, has written about being told at Institute not to ask questions about what immigration and living at the U.S.-Mexico border might mean for her students or her pedagogy. The implication was that these things didn’t matter for the classroom and Singhal left the organization before even starting her teaching out of disenchantment. Jameson Brewer

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organization. The book is one that TFA supports and, at least the last time when one of the authors visited, is displayed with pride around the TFA home office in Manhattan. For an account of the protective nature of the TFA publicity machine, see Miner, 2010.

(2012b), a former Atlanta CM, has written about how, at Institute, CMs "are told that TFA has studied the characteristics and practices of good teachers for the last twenty years and that they now have the recipe for reproducing quality teachers...[CMs] are told that if they simply follow the TFA system and work really hard that success will be had...[and] at the root of every student's success or failure is solely a teacher."<sup>9</sup> As Bernadette, a former CM, suggests, "You're (as a CM) so afraid that you have signed up to teach, that you believe in your heart that whatever they are doing must be the way that you are going to be trained. And if you just get up when they tell you, and go to sleep when they tell you, that you will become a teacher...And so you do whatever they say, whatever that is" (Veltri, 2010, p. 55).

Exhausted and anxious new recruits, who know little about education and teaching and who look up to a prestigious organization, adhere to obedience and groupthink, making TFA's ideas about education and teaching their own. Given the pressure put on them by TFA and their lack of formal education about education, students who might have cultivated skills for critical thinking and questioning through their liberal arts backgrounds are forced to fold. One former CM, in a very insightful remark, stated that Institute "immersed [new recruits] in the procedures and aspects of '*thinking like a TFA corps member*,' which seemed to be prioritized over '*thinking like a teacher*'" (Veltri, 2010, p. 54; emphasis added). Thinking like a corps member means, on the one hand, thinking you're the best and the brightest and on the other hand, being obedient and not questioning what you are being told or why you are doing things in this particular way—an equation that speaks loudly to the technocratic nature of education today. Teaching and learning isn't something you explore and about which you think critically, but something you are told how to do.

### *Thinking and Doing TFA*

At Institute, new recruits are told what excellent education is and how to teach rather than engaging in a dialogical teaching and learning process about these issues. It is important, then, that we briefly look at how an excellent education is defined by TFA and what steps are taken to get there in the classroom.

Because of the research that TFA cites as proof of its effectiveness, we can deduce that Kopp's mode of assessment for talking about an *excellent education* is standardized tests. For TFA recruits and for TFA as an organization to be deemed effective, they need to be raising student test scores, or at least be raising them more substantially than other beginning teachers. As Brewer noted in an interview, "TFA [is] very much interested in testing and the standardization of testing...Corps members are required to track the student data of standardized tests, not only in the classroom, but also everything is geared toward whatever the state test is...your worth is judged on how good your students do on the [state test]" (Education Radio, 2012). Effective teaching is measured instrumentally by and through a student's ability to score well on a

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<sup>9</sup> For others, see Rubinstein (2011) or <http://reconsideringtfa.wordpress.com>. For critiques from parents of TFA recruits, see <http://ednotesonline.blogspot.com/2012/11/another-parent-vents-at-teach-for.html>.

## 12 Critical Education

standardized test. This narrow measure of success and achievement stands in incredibly stark contrast to progressive theories about democracy and education that position success and achievement in relation to critical thinking, and social, political, and economic justice (e.g., Au, 2009; Au & Bollow-Tempel, 2012; Garrison, 2009; Kohn, 2000; Sacks, 2001; Sleeter, 2005, 2007; among many others).

Causal thinking, that a student's test score determines teacher effectiveness, paves the way for what is called accountability. The idea is that teachers are solely accountable for their students' success. Policies such as merit-based pay and tying teacher evaluations and tenure processes to their students test scores both emerge from this mindset (e.g., Gerson, 2012). Moreover, accountability is used by TFA and reformer-friends, most specifically by the well-known TFA alumni Michelle Rhee, as a means to get around talking about politics and larger structural issues that we know affect the classroom and learning. "Poverty isn't destiny," as TFA likes to say, here comes to mean something much different in regard to the way TFA clandestinely pushes a political ideology. Heidi Pitzer (2010), in an insightful study of how discourses used by TFA maliciously critique teachers' unions, shows how Rhee and TFA align, on the one hand, accountability with "what's actually best for kids" and, on the other hand, politics with unions and what gets in the way of accountability. Pitzer writes, "[For Rhee and TFA] 'politics' is a dirty word..., usually referring to the interests of unions, and usually set up in simple opposition with the best interests of students. In terms of accountability, there were no comments about a D.C. [where Rhee was chancellor] district-wide problem with the system of accountability and evaluation, and there was no context given to employees who were overworked and had too many students. Instead...teachers and staff were held individually responsible for systemic problems" (p. 67). In this context, poverty isn't destiny means that teachers should stop making excuses, or talking about class-size, or inequitable resources, and be accountable for their students' test scores.<sup>10</sup>

All of the emphasis on testing and accountability effects what type of education students are getting in the classroom. As many have argued, the emphasis on high-stakes tests and accountability has created watered down curriculum, filled with rote memorization and simplified skill-based learning (e.g., Meier & Wood, 2004). This affects most teachers, especially those in urban or non-wealthy schools. Within a political paradigm that places the goals of education as a means for future employment in a global economy, tests take the place of critical thinking and a more empowering notion of education that emphasizes, on the one hand, how education has been used as a means of social reproduction, and on the other, how education can be used as a process for real economic and political social justice (e.g., Ayers & Ayers, 2011). Being against accountability in relation to high-stakes testing and using scores to evaluate teachers does not mean that those critical of the current use of accountability, like ourselves, are against any notion of accountability. However, what teachers are accountable for, who determines that, why they are accountable for that, how that is measured, and how that

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<sup>10</sup> It shouldn't be surprising, then, that the two founders of the KIPP schools, whose mantra is "No Excuses," are both TFA alums (e.g., Lack, 2009).

informs pedagogy are questions that must be revisited and answered with input from teachers, community-members, and students, alike.

Not having a background in education or teaching, and being persuaded by the TFA head-and-heart messages, CMs are particularly vulnerable to engage in a punitive type of pedagogy, where there are no-excuses (in meeting the demands of TFA, i.e., test scores), zero-tolerance (in regard to the task at hand; i.e., test scores), and a policy of no-questioning (the reasons of how or why TFA operates the way it does; i.e., test scores). This is, of course, how CMs were taught at Institute. This is what it means to think like and do TFA. Moreover, in an environment such as the one TFA creates, where you have predominantly poor students of color in classrooms with generally white and generally middle/upper middle class CMs who have not had time to think critically about what it means to teach/be a teacher and are obsessed with test scores, you create an environment ripe for race-contingent deficit thinking and blaming (e.g., Darling-Hammond, 1994; Winfield, 2012). Having been successful at education, and having been told that their students are mostly unsuccessful, the power dynamic between CM and student creates a didactic situation which, as Thomas Popkewitz has noted, draws a line between "the normal child who succeeded in schooling and the child of color who was in opposition to the normalities" (cited in Darling-Hammond, 1994, p. 25). Arguing that TFA views the poor black child as "pathological," Popkewitz goes on to suggest that TFA teaches its CMs to deal with this by "using prescribed procedures and strategies" as poor students/students of color learn best when "psychologically managed" and "positioned as deviant and pathological in relation to the norms that are privileged in schooling" (p. 25). Having been successful in school and accepted into TFA, CMs are aspirational figures in this equation, which justify the remediation of their students. This is where critiques as being in line with colonial and imperial projects come to play out.

What people who believe this ideology don't seem to understand is that scores on a standardized test do not promote critical thinking or social justice. Instead, a society obsessed with test scores for poor kids is a society that will actively reproduce social inequity. The not-so-funny irony of the relationship between TFA and standardized tests is that the more our educational institutions focus on tests, the less social change will actually occur. And the less social change that actually occurs, the more that people who do TFA will benefit from their experiences in ways socially, culturally, and economically. "When we think of the transformative possibilities inherent in more progressive, student-centered approaches to the craft," writes Winfield (2012) in an analysis of the relationship between eugenics, Social Darwinism, and today's educational policies, "we can see that the kind of curriculum required by testing is perfect for maintaining the status quo. Students who are perceived as failures, and who too often internalize that message, are less likely to be a threat to the current system" (p. 155). Those who are perceived as successes perpetuate this cycle in their *doing* of TFA. And so, it might be tentatively concluded, that those who really benefit from doing TFA are the recruits themselves. Whereas some commit their professional lives to teaching and have to deal with increasing demands of accountability and testing, CMs do TFA and then are done. At some point, a CM says that they *did* TFA and uses that capital to pursue other things.

*Doing after Did*

Though there are some CMs that will go on to stay in the classroom longer than their two-year agreement, and there are some CMs that leave the program before their two-years are up, most TFA recruits spend about two to three years in the classroom and then move on to other professional worlds. TFA has set up agreements with companies and institutions that give recruits a two-year deferral on their job or graduate school acceptances so that TFA can make sure it doesn't get turned down by those who also got a job at Goldman Sachs, Google, Harvard Business School, or the Woodrow Wilson School of Public Policy at Princeton, to name a few.<sup>11</sup> As noted above, TFA is explicit about their institutional theory of change. CMs are not supposed to stay in the classroom for longer than their term. Instead, TFA is creating a "growing movement of leaders" who work "at every level of education, policy and other professions to ensure that children can receive an excellent education" (TFA, Fueling Long Term Impact, 2013). The point being that after you have *done* TFA and are out of the classroom, you can then go on to *do* more of TFA's real work, which is to affect policy. As former TFA CM-turned-critic Gary Rubinstein (2011) writes, "TFA likes to point to these leaders as the true effect of TFA. Even if they haven't really fixed the training model much and the first years are pretty awful teachers, and even if those first year teachers aren't 'needed' anymore to fill any teacher shortages, it doesn't matter since as long as a fraction of them become these 'leaders' TFA will have a positive impact in a big way on the education landscape." Rubinstein's next few lines are the ones that are telling:

Which sounds great except these leaders are some of the most destructive forces in public education. They seem to love nothing more than labeling schools as 'failing,' shutting them down, and blaming the supposed failure on the veteran teachers. The buildings of the closed schools are taken over by charter networks, often with leaders who were TFA alums and who get salaries of \$200,000 or more to run a few schools.

After a few years in the classroom and maybe a degree in policy, former TFAers are making their way into positions of power. The way they think about education has been shaped by the ideology of TFA and its elitist mentality. And, to again cite Rubinstein, "destructive TFA spawned leaders suffer a type of arrogance and overconfidence where they completely ignore any evidence that their beliefs are flawed.

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<sup>11</sup> There are many institutions that have these types of agreements. Some others include: Ernst and Young, Columbia Business School, Stanford School of Business, Yale School of Management, University of Virginia Curry School of Education, New York University Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development, Harvard University Graduate School of Education, Doctorate in Education Leadership (Ed.L.D.), Brown University Masters Program in Urban Education Policy, University of Michigan School of Law, University of Pennsylvania Law School, University of Chicago Law School, Duke University Medical School, Cornell University Weill Medical College, Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health, Tulane University School of Medicine, Harvard University John F. Kennedy School of Government, Monterey Institute of International Studies, Syracuse University Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs. (TFA Graduate School and Employer Partnerships, 2013).

The leaders TFA has spawned are, to say this in the kindest way possible, ‘lacking wisdom.’” These “leaders” consistently push for vigilant accountability, charter schools, and high-stakes testing. They oppose teachers unions and the messiness that is the democratic process in addressing issues in public education. They come into situations thinking they know the answers, despite the facts that TFA and like-minded “reformers” have yet to produce peer-reviewed research that can back up their policies.<sup>12</sup> These movements are what, elsewhere, critics call neoliberal education reform and TFA is one of, if not *the*, major engine behind its push (e.g., Fabricant & Fine, 2012; Lipman, 2011; Saltman, 2012; Watkins, 2012; among many others.) These “leaders” are doing what they have been told works in education, instead of studying the issues and addressing the real needs of a diverse student body and thinking about the fundamental place that education must play in a making the promises of democratic societies come into being. The policies TFA grads promote consist of a *doing* of education, which stands in opposition to, rather than a model for, teachers and students that encourages a type of growth we might call *becoming*.

## **Becoming a Teacher**

### *Becoming*

In contrast to doing, we use becoming in this paper to signify a process that is intentional and conscious about thinking critically as to what it means to teach and educate within the current historical conjecture. Whereas we’ve described *doing* as uncritical automation, becoming, for us, means to develop or grow into a self-reflective knower and practitioner.

For teachers, this means having an understanding of education in its historical, political, philosophical, and psychological contexts and understanding how this knowledge informs one’s practice as educator. This process empowers teachers to be able to understand and engage in the messy process that is education in critically informed ways. In other words, the way we think about *becoming* resonates with Foucault’s (1988) notion of technologies of the self, which he describes as a multitude of actions and knowledges that can “permit individuals to affect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality” in resistance to the oppressive flows of power (p. 18). There must be, as Maxine Greene (1971) and Paulo Freire (1970) have argued in different ways, a critical consciousness as to the oppressive and the

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<sup>12</sup> In 2011, TFA claimed on its website that “A large and growing body of independent [note: not peer-reviewed] research shows that [TFA] corps members make as much of an impact on student achievement as veteran teachers” (Kovacs, 2011). This claim has since been removed and changed to: “[TFA CMs] help their students achieve academic gains equal to or larger than teachers from other preparation programs, according to the most recent and rigorous studies on teacher effectiveness” (TFA, Research, 2013). Using only the research that TFA lists to support this claim, Kovacs (2011) has analyzed the data suggesting that, at best TFA’s claims are “invalid, unreliable and flat out ridiculous” and duplicitous in the way they are used to garner support for the organization and the types of policies/politics it supports.

liberatory potential of education broadly defined. Moreover, part of this critical understanding has to do with how a teacher's own experience and social locations influence the way she thinks about education and her professional self. The combination of theory, practice, and self-reflection allow, we argue, for informed and thoughtful praxis.

Further, the temporal quality of *become* differs from *do*. The future of *do* is done, which infers a sense of finitude and completion. The future of *become* is *became*, which has a present- and future-quality to it. Instead of completion and the implication that something passed, *became* suggests that a transition has occurred and one now *is* what one was trying to *become*. To say, "I became a teacher," can imply that one currently exists as that. *Became* is about growth and has a sense of futurity attached to it—that one moves into the future having transformed from one state to the next. And as we'll discuss later, part of what it means to have *become* a teacher means understanding the continual work that it implies. To become a teacher does not mean one stops learning to teach. Instead, and defiantly, to become a teacher means understanding its lifelong commitment to process and learning. This notion of a process as always being incomplete and under construction resonates with the humanistic ethos of a liberal arts education. As a moral and political project, a liberal arts education attempts to instill an understanding of the personal, civic, and global responsibilities that come along with knowledge/s. For many of us in the liberal arts, we believe that this type of broad-based learning can offer a wealth of ideas and methodologies that can help to think about the pressing issues of the day and future—perhaps even teacher education.

### *Liberal Arts Institutions and Teacher Certification: One School's Story*

The next section of this paper describes teacher education in the context of scholarship about teacher education carried out in liberal arts institutions (e.g., Bjork, Johnston, & Ross, 2007; Beyer, Feinberg, Pagano & Whitson, 1989; Travers & Sacks, 1989). Such programs are uniquely situated to make explicit the tension of meeting standards to meet state and national objectives and allowing education to be a place where imagination is developed – the kind of education Greene (1988) argues for. The difference in examining this tension while thinking about becoming a teacher over four years of education and deciding to teach during the last term of school is illustrated by the experiences of students and teachers who work and learn in a certification program at one liberal arts institution.

In 1996, Johnston wrote a paper with three of the teachers who had worked with her to develop the elementary certification program at Colgate University. One of those teachers said, "A small population of this university's students decide to move outside the mainstream and ... become certified teachers. Their very decision is a barometer of the degree of dedication these students bring to their student teaching semester" (Johnston, Duvernoy, McGill, & Will, 1996, p. 174). That statement is worth examining in relation to the lack of requirements necessary for students to enter TFA.

All certification programs do not meet state requirements in the same way, but students in certification programs in liberal arts institutions have to plan from the start of

their college career to meet the requirements of the state, their major, and at schools like Colgate University, the requirements for the liberal arts CORE. There is no possibility to decide to teach in the spring of their senior year. Students in the certification program need to plan their course work carefully. The best of them are organized and planful; many of them go on study abroad programs, earn Latin honors, and some even participate in varsity sports, but they do all of this with the goal of student teaching and becoming certified. In four years, or five years if they are in an M.A.T program, they make important connections with faculty and are counseled out of the program if they seem like they will become unsuccessful teachers.

Part of their preparation for teaching is learning that teaching is not simply "knowing their stuff." They do know their disciplines and they have wide experience in content areas such as math, science, teaching reading, and humanities – all required by NY State. They also learn about what it means to teach and learn. They do this in college classrooms and in field observation hours. They are not surprised by the political and cultural realities that they face in their own classroom. Is studying and observing these realities different from experiencing them in their own classroom? Of course it is, but students in certification programs do know that what they see in their own students can be connected to what they have learned in four years of preparing to teach.

### *What is Learned in a Teacher Certification Program?*

Christine Sleeter (2004) wrote that in order to understand the effectiveness of our teacher education programs we should follow our graduates into the field. This section of the paper does that as an acute contrast to what TFA CMs do when they "graduate" from their two years. Christi Kana graduated from Colgate in 2011 with a major concentration in geography and certification in the elementary education program. Last year Johnston & Kana (2012) presented a paper at the AILACTE conference in Chicago. The topic of that paper is Christi's reflection on her undergraduate teacher education as she worked in her first year teaching.

Christi said that during her student teaching, both her priorities and perception of herself changed. She viewed herself as an adult with students who depended on her. She no longer fretted about formal dates; but instead, lost sleep worrying about a student's family who was evicted or thinking of ways to support positive behavior choices in a challenging student (Johnston & Kana, 2012).

In other words, she internalized the responsibilities that teaching entails. She began to learn those responsibilities as she observed in her field experiences and as she worked with students in those experiences. She talked with teachers and knew what their responsibilities were and how a variety of teachers met those responsibilities in a variety of ways.

The Colgate certification program, like many others, works to build a cohort group that teaches student teachers to learn from each other and to connect theory to practice. While the cohort group at Colgate is small and at larger programs would not be so "family-like," the learning that one does with other students and with the support of teachers both at the university and at the student teaching placement is not duplicated in a five week intensive summer program like that sponsored by TFA. Students in the

certification program not only work with their cooperating teachers, but also meet with a group of area teachers who serve on a Teacher Advisory Council; this TAC serves as informal mentors throughout the student teaching term. Christi said that she felt valued as an individual and used that as a model to value her students. This alone should stand in stark contrast to what CMs have reported feeling at Institute. Christi thinks that “in a profession that can feel isolating” those connections are invaluable. “The collaborative work in my student teaching cohort gave me a foundation for developing open communication between teachers with whom I worked my first year” (Johnston & Kana, 2012).

New teachers often rely on textbooks and “teacher-proof” curriculum to get them through the first difficult years of teaching. Christi felt that she had learned to think about “what knowledge is of most worth?” (Edgerton, 1995) and rewrote and reworked material that she felt needed to be rethought. Again, this was modeled for her by all the public school and university faculty with whom she worked. She said that she learned to take responsible risks and trust her thinking. This was done with the support of the certification program.

“After student teaching, I knew to anticipate tough days, challenging students, and late nights planning throughout my first years as a teacher. I knew not to let the political and social contexts of schools distract me from my passion for teaching. When a student’s behavior frustrates me, I remember what one of my university supervisors told me, ‘you don’t have to like every child, but you have to love every one of them.’ When I stay up late rethinking a lesson, it helps me to remember a saying from another one of my advisors, ‘teaching is hard work if you are smart’” (Johnston & Kana, 2012). Note that this woman does not say you can teach if you are smart because being smart does not make you a good teacher.

In Veltri’s (2010) work, she describes her own initial experience teaching believing that “a degree and desire would suffice” in order to be a teacher. That experience led her to study TFA; she initially believed that having a well-educated motivated young person was “preferable to the alternative [of] a steady stream of substitute teachers.” Yet in her observations she “began to notice patterns that illuminated specific and recurrent needs that most of these beginning teachers brought with them” (p. 5). It is illuminating to compare these patterns to the experience of Christi—a beginning teacher who was educated in a certification program.

Veltri (2010) taught a class on pedagogy for TFA teachers and she describes young teachers who formed cliques in her class rather than by grade level groups. Their ideas were “fed through the ‘TFA grapevine.’ In other words, if something worked for one corps member, it was offered as a solution for others. ... In most cases rookies were helping rookies” (p. 6). Veltri goes on, “After a year or two with corps members, I began to understand how the Institute context, which was all that corps members brought with them to their own teaching, lacked both the ‘go-to’ expert teacher and the reflection and learning of traditionally prepared beginning teachers who had already completed a practicum experience in schools” (p. 63). The TFA teachers only realized that they needed to respond to unexpected events and be flexible in their planning while those events occurred in their class (p. 107).

All new teachers experience high stress levels. A great deal is demanded of them and a naïve idealism is not going to get any teacher through the first year or two. Note above when Christi describes that she learned that she was going to have to work hard during her student teaching experience and that experience prepared her to work quite hard her first year – she wasn't surprised. Christi also learned to have a "go-to" teacher with whom to talk. She learned that from her student teaching experience, too. She already had some ideas about what to do and knew that depending on other novice teachers for what worked for them would not be automatically worth trying in her different classroom.

Christi said that she "chose Colgate knowing that I could earn my elementary certification as an undergraduate" (Johnston & Kana, 2012). In contrast, Veltri (2010) writes that "fewer than 10% of TFA participants ever considered teaching as a career. A small number considered teaching as a field of concentration during their undergraduate program, but they often admitted in private interview sessions that an education major was frowned upon and/or viewed as 'limiting' one's career goals by family members or peers" (p. 28). The difference between selecting a liberal arts college with a certification program in order to become a teacher and learning that teaching is interesting because one tutors or is a place to spend two years before going onto another more prestigious career is a sign of seriousness of purpose in career choice.

Finally, Christi said that she began her first year of teaching "with the goal of being reflective in my teaching. I hoped to practice what I had learned at university by asking myself what lessons or classroom management strategies are going well and what I should do differently" (Johnston & Kana, 2012). This ability to have some experience to draw upon and some habits of reflection to use to monitor what one is doing is in contrast to what Veltri (2010) wrote, cited above. The TFA teachers did not have these habits and if reflection and rethinking are not habits, the fast pace of teaching will become routine, not reflective, behavior.

### *How Certification Helps In-Service Teachers*

All university based, teacher certification programs work with cooperating or mentor teachers in public schools. The experience of working closely with in-service teachers is invaluable in learning to teach. Some of the insights gained in this experience are outlined above. There is, however, another way to look at the relationships of certification programs with in-service teachers and that is the potential benefit these programs have for the cooperating teachers.

In the years that Johnston has worked with public school teachers, they have said over and over that both the students observing and the students who actually student teach ask them questions and these questions cause them to reflect explicitly on their practice. They value that opportunity. Two long-time cooperating teachers were interviewed on the topic of what do they want from the experience. They both said that the opportunity to work with young teachers and to learn new ideas from them was terribly important, but what really stood out from these interviews was that the teachers felt that by working with young people becoming teachers, they were giving back to the profession they loved (Johnston, 2010).

Not all teachers feel this way, but when veteran teachers are not respected for the knowledge they have developed in their own teaching journeys, something is missing. TFA holds teachers in a kind of contempt. When we really listen to what teachers say and watch what they do, this contempt should be questioned.

As stated earlier, a liberal arts education is a crucial resource for young people wanting to become a teacher. The mission of liberal arts institutions is to develop wise, critical thinkers, and perceptive leaders. These particular terms are taken from the mission statement of Colgate University, but searching other college mission statements yields the same ideas. Young people who learn to be wise, critical thinkers and perceptive leaders are learning part of what a teacher is, but those qualities alone do not make a good teacher. Wise, critical thinkers can presumably do any job, but teaching is not just any job. Teaching requires wise, critical thinking *within* the context of schooling.

### **Four Years Becoming, Two Years Doing**

Reflecting on the ideas presented above, we see that a certification program in a liberal arts institution requires a real dedication to teaching. In four years of studying to become a teacher, a student learns to perceive of herself as an adult, to question the received wisdom of textbooks and other's lessons plans, and to trust herself to alter lessons. She learns that she is going to "have tough days" and to use expert teachers' knowledge to help her deal with her work. She wants to be a thoughtful, reflective teacher and she has begun to become that.

Moving from a concrete example to a more theoretical perspective on what it means to earn teacher certification in a liberal arts institution, we return to the metaphor of becoming a teacher or doing TFA.

Deciding to pursue certification within a liberal arts institution requires that students learn that teachers are not just in a room with students. Their classrooms are nested within social, cultural, and political realities. They learn in their college classrooms and in observing and teaching in K-12 teachers' classrooms what it means to be child-centered, even in the face of a political environment that often moves away from a focus on children. Students learn that being accountable is not opposite to being responsible to and for their students. Marilyn Cochran-Smith (1991) wrote that teachers need to learn to "teach against the grain." Teaching against the grain is the idea that one needs always to ask why something is done, to inquire, and to not take conventional wisdom as the model for what is done in the classroom. The experience of praxis – of going back and forth between college classrooms and K-12 classrooms – is a critical difference in learning to become a teacher and doing Teach for America.

In "Letter to a Young Teacher" Joseph Featherstone (1995) argues, "As a teacher on the side of the people, you need to make yourself a careful student of the care and feeding of small, provisional human communities, for these are where people learn to make cultural meaning together, to practice and create the people's culture. This is why John Dewey called schools 'embryonic democracies'" (p. 19). Students in teacher certification programs learn over four years how important "the care and feeding of small provisional communities" is. They also learn how difficult it is because caring for

students is not all that is needed in teaching and being among the best and brightest in mastering material is also not enough to be a teacher. A teacher needs to learn how to connect those two elements of caring and knowing together by engaging the students in creating what Featherstone calls "cultural meaning." Learning to do this is a life-long project – good teachers are always in the process of becoming a teacher, but learning and observing and reflecting on this reality over four years teaches students to question and to be on the side of the people. We do not suppose that young students who are in the TFA corps do not think of themselves as on the side of the people; most of them believe that they are. Rather we argue that to be on the side of the people requires more than intelligence and good intentions. It requires an education that challenges students to understand the hard intellectual and emotional work good teaching requires.

This kind of learning takes time and simply can not be done in The TFA Summer Institute. Veltri (2010) writes, "Limited exposure to lesson demonstrations, observation of expert modeling, and collaboration with more seasoned education professionals than TFA alumnae with two or three years teaching experience, still remains critically lacking in TFA's training system" (p. 64). Too little practice and knowledge about pedagogy seems to teach TFA recruits to repeat orthodoxy learned in the Institute rather than to realize that there is no one way to do the work of a teacher.

When someone with little experience in learning to teach and to question the conventional ideas about teaching enters a classroom, the danger is that the "care and feeding of provisional communities" gets lost in the overwhelming experience of teaching. When anyone feels overwhelmed, routine and habit take the place of imagination. Ayers and Ayers (2011) write, "our invitation is to live a teaching life of questioning, to imagine classrooms where every established and received bit of wisdom, common sense, orthodoxy, and dogma is open for examination, interrogation and rethinking. The process of upending begins at the beginning: *why?* This simple word challenges every authoritarian impulse and every autocratic structure everywhere: *why?*" (p. 2). Do TFA recruits learn this?<sup>13</sup>

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