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Bringing Teach for America into the Forefront of Teacher Education: Philanthropy Meets Spin

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Abstract

This study examines the practices utilized by TFA from its inception in 1990 to create its brand and how these practices have transformed TFA into a cultural icon within the national landscape of teacher education. Well-funded through both philanthropic foundations, corporate sponsorships, and federal monies, TFA's use of its organizational and political networks, as well as the media, has enabled it to position itself discursively as a leader in the preparation of teachers in the U.S, resulting not only in transforming state and national discussions about teacher preparation, but in establishing a network of elites with a particular ideology of schooling for impoverished students.



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After purchasing a Subaru from a nearby dealer, I received an email from Subaru of America's corporate office giving me the opportunity to participate in their "Share the Love" event by voting for my favorite charity, a program that donates \$250 to a selected charity for every Subaru sold. Much to my surprise, the fourth charity listed after the American Red Cross, Children's Miracle Network Hospitals, and Make a Wish Foundation was Teach for America. My first thought was, "How could Subaru do this to its loyal customers?" Many of us are teachers and teacher educators, who see Teach for America as an organization that undermines the professionalism of teachers, not a charity. My next thought was, "How has Teach for America been able to garner this level of visibility and influence?" (*Kathleen's story*).

In 1990, Wendy Kopp, a Princeton graduate, launched Teach for America (TFA), whose mission is "to enlist our nation's most promising future leaders in the movement to eliminate educational inequity (TFA, 2013). TFA recruits high quality college graduates from all disciplinary backgrounds who commit to teach in urban and rural low-income communities for two years. In its 22 year history, TFA has become well known among the public as well as educators, researchers, and policymakers, expanding across the United States and now serving as a model for Teach First in the United Kingdom and Teach for All, its global network. In this study we began with TFA's founding years and traced the organization through its media presence to better understand how the organization branded itself as the "most effective source of new teachers in low-income communities" in the U.S. (Teach for America, 2012d). An examination of TFA's history and growth serves as an illustrative case to show the tremendous impact non-profit educational management organizations (EMOs) have had in the past two decades on educational policy and practice in the U.S.

This critical qualitative study examines the trajectory of TFA, since its inception in 1990, and how it has utilized branding to leverage philanthropic, corporate, and public funding to position itself as a source "for increasing the number of effective teachers in high need schools and hard to staff subject areas" (Georgia Department of Education, 2011). The study contributes to the emerging literature on the impact of philanthropy on education and specifically on Teach for America (c.f. Brewer, 2011; deMarrais, 2006; Kovacs, 2011; Hill & Kumar, 2009; Saltman, 2007, 2010, Suggs & deMarrais, 2011, Veltri, 2010) focusing on the following critical qualitative research questions:

1. In what ways has Wendy Kopp utilized the historical, personal, political, economic, and sociocultural contexts of the United States to construct the Teach for America brand in such a way as to allow the organization to gain a foothold in the U.S. media and become a cultural icon for teacher preparation?
2. Who are the leading philanthropists contributing to Teach for America and how much money has been contributed to this effort over time?

We begin here with an explanation of our research methods, move to a discussion of Wendy Kopp's branding of Teach For America. We transition to an examination of how the TFA brand has appealed to and leveraged philanthropic funding since its inception, and conclude with a discussion of TFA's impact on the communities it serves as well as its impact on educational policy and practice.

Research Methods

This study examines the practices utilized by TFA from its inception in 1990 to create its brand and how these practices have transformed TFA into a cultural icon within the national landscape of teacher education. Well-funded through both philanthropic foundations, corporate sponsorships, and federal monies, TFA's use of its organizational and political networks, as well as the media, has enabled it to position itself discursively as a leader in the preparation of teachers in the U.S, resulting not only in transforming state and national discussions about teacher preparation, but in establishing a network of elites with a particular ideology of schooling for poor students. To explore TFA's use of media and networking, we searched popular (easily accessed by the general public/non-academic) publications from 1990-1993 for articles about TFA and/or its founder, Wendy Kopp. This data allowed us to examine the messages being shared with the nation concerning TFA and to analyze the role language played in creating the TFA's cultural branding (Holt, 2004). Additionally, we obtained a copy of Kopp's 1989 senior thesis entitled "An Argument and Plan for the Creation of the Teacher Corps" so we could gain insight into Kopp's philosophy toward education and her conceptualization of TFA.

Next, to examine TFA's philanthropic funding, we used Foundation Search, a database for tracking funding based on the IRS 990 tax filings for non-profits and charities. With 'Teach for America' as the search term we identified and analyzed philanthropic grants from 1998-2011 with the goal of identifying top funders, levels of funding within and across these years, the number and amount of contributions by city and state, and the purposes of these grants. A limitation of these data is that due to federal filing deadlines, which allow two years for non-profit organizations to file tax returns, the 2011 data is incomplete. However, with complete data for all other years, we can identify patterns in philanthropic funding to TFA. We turn now to the early years of TFA through an examination of the context in which TFA was enabled to be created and thrive.

The Branding of Teach For America

Branding refers to the process through which producers and consumers construct a brand for a product or service. "A brand is a promise of satisfaction. It is a sign, a metaphor operating as an unwritten contract between...an event and those who experience it" (Healy, 2008, p.6). According to Healy (2008), brands play an important role with regard to reputation, loyalty, quality, worth and affirmation of the product or service and "entry into an imaginary community of shared values" (p. 10). While brands have traditionally been associated with goods and services, as well as corporations, the concept of branding has been extended to non-profit EMOs, such as TFA. Due to the intrinsic connection brands have to the product or service, the conceptual basis of a brand often originates with the chief executive officer (Healy, 2008). This section of the paper begins with a discussion how Wendy Kopp (Kopp) conceptualized TFA and the brand development process she undertook. We then look at how TFA used the five key components of branding: positioning, storytelling, design, price and customer relations to create a brand that not only attracted consumers, its corps members, but also investors, primarily philanthropists. Over the years the symbiotic relationship between TFA and

philanthropists has enabled the development and promotion of TFA as a significant player in teacher preparation.

Wendy Kopp, Founder and CEO of TFA

Since an understanding of Kopp's social capital and sociopolitical networks is key to understanding Kopp's conceptualization of TFA and her journey into educational entrepreneurship, we turn now to her personal background and then move to an analysis of her 1989 senior thesis at Princeton University, which articulates her conceptualization of TFA. Kopp attended Highland Park High School in the 1980s (Kopp, n.d.), a prestigious school in an affluent neighborhood of Dallas, Texas. This predominately white school (99% in 2005), is referred to as "The Bubble" due to its affluence; further, it has a list of notable alumni, from NFL stars like Bobby Layne and Matthew Stafford to Hollywood elite like Aaron Spelling and Morgan Fairchild (Highland Park High School [University Park, Texas], n.d.). Another Highland Park alum, Bill Clements, served as governor of Texas from 1987 to 1991, during the period Kopp initiated her funding efforts for her 'Teacher Corps.' This affluent environment provided Kopp with access to a network of political and cultural elite.

After high school graduation, Kopp matriculated to Princeton University to attend the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs (WWS) (Wendy Kopp, n.d.), the lone selective undergraduate major at Princeton which admits only 50% of the sophomores who apply (Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, n.d.). With an impressive alumni network of WWS including Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito, General David Petraeus, and several governors, senators, and state representatives, Kopp was introduced to a larger network of America's political elite, ties essential for her financial and political success with TFA in subsequent years.

While studying in the WWS, Kopp was a member of *Business Today*, a "non-profit student organization that seeks to bridge the communication gap between college students and business executives" (Business Today [student magazine], n.d.). As a member of *Business Today*, an organization that "provides college students across the country with opportunities to interact directly and indirectly with executives" (Business Today, 2013), Kopp had access to key business contacts. Collectively, Kopp's high school and undergraduate experiences provided her with access to a powerful network of corporate and governmental sponsors.

In 1989, Kopp wrote her senior thesis entitled "An Argument and Plan for the Creation of the Teacher Corps," which served as the blueprint for TFA. One short year later in 1990, "500 committed recent college graduates joined Teach for America and began fueling the movement to eliminate educational inequity," as stated by TFA's website (Teacher for America, 2011b). By 1990, Kopp had raised nearly \$1.5 million in funding from corporations including Mobil, Merck, Xerox and Union Carbide (Chira, 1990). Robin Hogen, then vice president of Merck, commented that Kopp was "'disarmingly effective' at opening doors in high places" (Toch, 1990, para. 8), which could be a direct result of the elite networks she belonged to for much of her life due to her affluent background. Little of this personal history is evident on TFA's public website, which depicts Kopp as a graduating senior who had a good idea, as well as the personality and drive to sell it quickly to wealthy investors. The political/corporate

network she gained through her affluent background and elite education enabled easy access to those who could kick-start and maintain her venture through the years with hefty financial contributions and other resources as well as the political capital necessary to create TFA. However, access to financial connections does not automatically translate to the attainment of financial resources. So, why Kopp? Why was she able to make TFA succeed? How was this remarkable leap from an idea on paper to a working organization possible in just one year? We argue Kopp created a brand, TFA, which promised to address the growing concern with the educational attainment of America's children.

TFA Brand Development: Kopp's Senior Thesis

We turn now to a discussion of the following components of the process of developing a brand: (1) researching the situation, (2) imagining an ideal future, (3) combining strategy and creativity (Healy, 2008).

Research situation. Kopp's first step in the development of the TFA brand was to research the current state of education in the United States. *A Nation At Risk* (1983) signaled a national need to overhaul the education system in the United States with its ominous wording, "If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war" (Gardner et al., 1983, 3, para. 2). The report enumerated the 'indicators of risk' describing a system that caused students to perform poorly on standardized tests, schools that allowed students to graduate yet were functionally illiterate, and business leaders who felt new entrants to the workforce did not have the most basic of academic skills with which to function. While this report was released seven years prior to the creation of TFA, the sentiments of the report were still ringing in the public's ears, causing the nation to continue to seek solutions for the problems in education.

In September of 1989, President George H. W. Bush focused national attention on the improvement of the educational system when he convened an educational summit with governors and business leaders. The first of its kind since the Depression, the summit members highlighted the deficits of the educational system. This national dialogue, with its focus on the deficits of the U.S. educational system, had politicians on the lookout for potential solutions to the problems. Kopp's senior thesis echoed these and other educational concerns raised between 1983 and 1989; on the first page of her thesis, she called the educational system "dilapidated" (Kopp, 1989, p. 1). She cited several educational scholars and government officials to support her view on the educational system, thus strengthening her argument for an organization such as TFA. James Burke, then chairman of Johnson & Johnson, stated that there was a "deficit in bright, well-educated, highly motivated people. We have allowed our educational system to totally deteriorate" (as cited in Kopp, 1989, p. 4). *Fortune* magazine critiqued American education, saying, "American schools are producing an army of illiterates" (Perry, 1988, p. 42). Finally, as further evidence of the failure of American public schooling, Kopp cited National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 1983; Applebee et. al 1986) findings including the facts that 50 percent of 17-year-olds revealed that they don't have command of decimals, fractions, percentages, basic geometry and algebra, and fewer than 24 percent of 17-year-olds were able to write an "adequate" analytic or persuasive essay. (Applebee, Langer & Mullis, 1989 as cited in Kopp, 1989, p. 5-6). Kopp then extended

her argument as to how schools were failing students, particularly minority students, by listing a 35% dropout rate for Black students and 45% for Hispanic students (Kopp, 1989).

Kopp's focus on teachers as responsible for the poor quality of schooling is seen in her description of individuals who go into the field: "[T]eachers have traditionally come from among the least academically able of Americans" (Kopp, 1989, p. 14). She supported this claim with statistics from relevant studies: In 1988, education majors who took the SAT scored 21 points below the national average on the verbal portion and 34 points below the national average on the math portion (College Entrance Examination Board, 1988). Almost half of the students enrolling in teacher education in 1986 came from non-academic high school programs that were not intended to prepare students for college studies (Task Force on Teaching as a Profession, 1986). Finally, many teachers in the 1980s were either teaching subjects for which they were not trained, or were unable to qualify for certification in their subject (Feistritzer, 1986; Darling-Hammond, 1984). Kopp led readers to believe that, based on these statistics, there was an obvious need for more academically able teachers to properly reform education.

In addition, an anticipated teacher shortage was often mentioned in articles about TFA. According to a 1988 statistic, 1.5 million new teachers would be needed by 1997 due to the combined increased pupil population and large population of teachers retiring (Stern, 1988). In a *U.S. News & World Report* article on TFA, Shapiro (1993) summarized the context in which Kopp's idea was developed:

Kopps' initiative is nothing if not timely. A severe shortage of talented teachers is threatening to undercut current attempts to improve the performance of the public schools. Reformers continue to bemoan the low caliber of many education-school graduates. And between now and 1997, rising enrollments combined with a wave of teacher retirements are expected to produce a need for 1.5 million new teachers--many more than the education schools are turning out. (National Association of State Directors of Special Education, 1990, p. 52)

Clearly, there was a need for more and smarter teachers – and quick. However, Kopp did not depend solely on fear and outrage for her message to get across; Kopp was able to add in a sense of duty and altruism in those who would be willing to volunteer and spin this negative short-term solution into positive long-term salvation for the American education system.

Slightly counter to the message that teaching could be a selective profession, Kopp emphasized that *anyone* could teach without a degree in education, thanks to the 'new' alternative certification routes several states had implemented. In the early 1990s, support was growing exponentially across the states for alternative certification programs. In their 1990 *Newsweek* article, Mabry and Gordon hailed alternative certification programs in New Jersey and Texas, pointing out that alternatively certified teachers in these states had higher test scores and a larger minority constituency. They stated, "The enthusiasm [alternatively certified teachers] generate may be the best medicine for our ailing schools" (para. 9). Kopp argued that many bright college graduates were simply

not taking advantage of this opportunity because schools of education had cornered the market on teacher preparation. In a *New York Times* article about TFA, Chira described coursework in colleges of education as “irrelevant” and “watered-down” and these programs “fail to prepare teachers for classroom reality” (Chira, 1992, para. 23). As a result, education classes were simply not attractive to America’s most intelligent students (Shapiro, 1993; Kopp, 1992a). These descriptions provided the impetus for TFA’s brand of alternative certification, which consisted of one six-week training session. To Kopp, it was not the training teachers received prior to the classroom, but the training teachers received *in* the classroom that really counted (Lawton, 1991). TFA corps members interviewed in 1992 confirmed this sentiment for a *New York Times* reporter, as they believed first-year teachers with education degrees were no better than TFA teachers (Chira, 1992).

Imagine an ideal future. Imagining the ideal future is the second step of brand development and the crux of Kopp’s TFA solution was that by recruiting highly intelligent graduates from the nation’s most elite colleges school districts could gain teachers who knew their content and could teach in high-needs schools for two years. Kopp’s research had already identified the need for more academically qualified teachers for schools, which were failing minority students. These new teachers would address the teacher shortage and alleviate out of field teaching practices. Kopp’s early communications to the public about TFA can be summarized in the 1990 Information Bulletin #34 describing alternative certification programs, including TFA, and published by the National Association of the State Directors of Special Education. Here, Kopp articulates her imagined and ideal future including not only her vision, objectives, and goals for TFA, but describes the context, rationale and blueprint for the organization. The following excerpts from this bulletin illustrate how the language used shapes the public’s perception of both education and TFA.

We have a vision of an America where millions of the nation’s best minds compete to enter the profession of teaching and the field of education. [Our goals are] to revolutionize the way Americans view teaching, so that they see it as a challenging profession demanding the nation’s best minds....To create a corps of individuals who, whether they remain in education or move on to business or government or law, will spend their lives working to improve the educational system (p. 1).

Teach for America’s premise is the future of education in the U.S. depends in large part on two factors: 1) the creativity, intellect, and drive of those who staff the schools; and 2) the extent to which the nation’s leaders have experience in and commitment to the schools (p. 4).

The language used in this bulletin, and duplicated throughout the media, helped to shape how the public viewed education, understood the concept of TFA, and reached the conclusion that TFA could solve the educational ills of the day. Over time, TFA has been savvy in how it has allowed its messages to evolve, but the crux of its message has changed very little.

Combine strategy and creativity. The problem for Kopp then became two-fold: how to actually recruit highly intelligent college graduates to become teachers and how to get the public and potential funders to accept this band-aid solution. Therefore, her next step in developing the TFA brand was to combine strategy with creativity. Strategy alone does not guarantee the successful creation of a brand, “it must be accompanied by a creative identity that engages the senses appropriately, and enough publicity and advertising to arouse demand for the brand” (Healy, 2008, p. 16). We turn now to a discussion of how Kopp combined strategy and creativity to create the TFA brand.

Several times throughout early media coverage surrounding TFA, teaching is described as ‘downwardly-mobile’ (e.g. Kopp, 1991; Kopp, 1992b). To ‘combat’ this image, Kopp first made sure the public did indeed view teaching as ‘downwardly mobile’ and then that they knew TFA would turn that perception around, making teaching the thing to do. First and foremost, TFA made clear to the public that the organization was very selective about who they allowed to be teachers (in clear contrast to the people colleges of education allowed to be teachers). By implementing a rigorous screening process, TFA implied that only specially-gifted graduates could become teachers, thus lifting TFA’s brand of teaching in the public eye. Further, Kopp embraced the fact that media buzz caused by TFA could possibly demoralize teachers who had made a long-term commitment to teaching because she insisted that overall, the (positive) attention to the teaching profession would outweigh any hurt feelings (Kopp, 1989). As she argued:

Perhaps our most important long-term impact will be the level to which we elevate the image of teaching. We are showing the public that outstanding individuals -- people with lots of other career opportunities who were leaders on their campuses and have strong academic backgrounds -- compete to enter the field of teaching and that they find it incredibly challenging once in the classroom. (Kopp, 1991, p. 29)

Quite simply, as Kopp shared with *Newsweek*, “We want to make teaching the thing to do on college campuses” (Mabry & Gordon, 1990, p. 62). Consequently, TFA was successfully able to entice potential recruits to join something selective and convince the public and potential funders that the organization was going to be beneficial to the status of the teaching profession.

This thesis became her business plan as Kopp took her idea for a ‘Teacher Corps’ public and sought financial backing. In 1990, backing of approximately \$1.5 million for TFA was secured from politician and Texas millionaire H. Ross Perot, as well as from various high-profile corporations (Chira, 1990). While seeking funding and building public support for TFA, Kopp’s on-the-record comments were kept positive and focused on what she hoped TFA could do – the negative points about education and teachers brought up in her thesis/business plan were conspicuously absent from her comments. Fortunately for Kopp, authors of articles written about TFA during this time period were more than happy to include negative comments about education/teachers made by well-known public figures (e.g. Albert Shanker, then president of the American Federation of Teachers) or alarming statistics about the dire state of education in the U.S. (e.g. Mabry and Gordon, 1990; Toch, 1990) to enhance Kopp’s story. Further, this public discourse supported Kopp’s ideas and gave politicians a solution - a promising program to respond

to these perceived problems in education. As evidenced by the sheer volume of positive press concerning TFA from 1989-1992, TFA had hit exactly the right note and the American public could not get enough of it. We turn now to an analysis of how Kopp developed and presented TFA to the public through a successful media campaign and created an elite network of corps members and alumni who could spread the TFA message.

Selling the Brand: Recruiting the Corps

Having obtained initial funding and positive press about the success of TFA, Kopp focused on selling the brand to potential TFA corps members. She accomplished this through the following strategies: positioning, storytelling, design, price and customer relationships. We discuss each of these branding components in the following sections. Kopp decided early on that advertising TFA as a glamorous life choice that was *good for the volunteers* was imperative. In a 1992 article published in the *Yale Law & Policy Review*, Kopp listed five reasons why her recruitment strategy for TFA had been so successful:

1. College students have heard all their lives that teaching is not something to do if other career options are accessible;
2. College students often do not realize that they can teach in public schools without a degree in education;
3. Graduating seniors see before them a wealth of opportunities and therefore find it difficult to choose among career options;
4. College students are hesitant to commit themselves to a single path for more than a few years – which explains the popularity of law school and other professional schools, as well as the success of aggressive corporate campaigns to recruit seniors into two-year training programs; and
5. College students often have spent their college years actively involved in community service and tutoring activities and are looking for an opportunity to assume a meaningful responsibility. (Kopp, 1992a, p. 62)

Positioning: TFA As Community Service And Teaching As The Thing To Do

In a 1993 *U.S. News & World Report* article, the generation coming of age was referred to as the “sacrificial generation,” the “repair generation,” as well as a “generation of janitors” (Shapiro, 1993, p. 50). These nicknames were given because those born between 1961 and 1981 would be left to clean up after the “selfish” Baby Boomers and would need to give back in order to restore balance to the world:

Members of this ‘sacrificial generation’ ...will be the ones hurt most by fallout from the debt crisis, disintegrating families, a growing racial disharmony and a poisoned environment. They are ennobled by a sense that they are a Repair

Generation who will make the world better, but embittered by a belief that they are fixing problems not for themselves but for the future benefit of their younger brothers and sisters or of their own children. (Shapiro, 1993, para. 2)

In particular, students who could both succeed in and afford to attend Ivy League colleges were expected to give more than the average person. For example, a 1987 Gallup Poll found that overall, 35% of college students participated in charitable services. Higher levels of community service were cited by Kopp in two of the country's elite institutions, as 60% of Harvard's 1987 graduating class and 43% of Yale undergraduates in 1988 participated in community service (Kopp, 1989). Cook (1992) stated, "Teach for America represents the ultimate form of noblesse oblige" (p. 29), which is perhaps the most accurate statement concerning the portrayal of the corps members and Kopp's message to the public.

Following this sense of duty and noblesse oblige, voluntarism became the "cool" thing to do in the late 1980s. Kopp (1989) clearly planned her recruitment campaign around this sentiment, stating, "the Teacher Corps ads will sell the experience as something almost glamorous – spirit and mystique" (p. 47). Kopp portrayed teaching as a community service well suited for young, enthusiastic go-getters – college students have been involved in voluntarism during their elite college careers, so why not continue their work? Moreover, these were not just academically-select graduates, but also graduates who were spirited. Adjectives such as 'young,' 'imaginative,' 'enthusiastic,' 'energetic,' and 'idealistic' were used to describe the volunteers for TFA (e.g. Chira, 1990; Teach for America, 1990; Marriott, 1992; Kane, 1990). The underlying message: If college graduates are smart and excited about teaching, they will succeed. The public through an enthusiastic media bought this message.

The astounding level of response to Kopp's new program in 1990 was described in detail by the *U.S. News & World Report* as follows:

Well-tailored recruiters representing investment banks and professional schools are commonplace on the nation's elite college campuses. Students recruiting their classmates to teach in the nation's beleaguered public schools are not. Yet that is what has been happening at 100 leading colleges and universities since early December under an ambitious new project called Teach for America. Astonishingly, this country's best and brightest, who traditionally have shunned teaching as a low-pay, low-status occupation are responding. Indeed within a week of slipping an informational flier under the dorm rooms last month, Teach for America's Yale representative received 1870 phone inquiries, reflecting a level of interest in teaching unimaginable on top campuses a decade ago. (Toch, 1990, p. 16)

Storytelling: TFA's Message to Recruits

Over time, TFA's savvy approach was to allow its messages to evolve, but keep its core message unchanged. We turn now to an examination of the recruitment of TFA members and the messages intended specifically for them. TFA could not exist without its recruits, or *corps members* who are attracted to an organization promising to fight for

a better education for American children. At the same time, TFA maintains an ability through its language to convince young college graduates that joining TFA is the right thing to do. Through a recruitment plan targeted at the nation's Ivy League and elite institutions with an appeal founded on selectivity in its search for the "best and brightest" as well as short commitment of two years during which the recruits could gain a sense of giving back to the community, the program has flourished.

TFA capitalizes on those positive feelings with their vibrant, young website that includes the *Voices* section. In this portion of the website, past and present corps members post their pictures and share things about themselves which makes the website reminiscent of *Match.com*. Alongside a quote about how hard it is to be a teacher or a favorite teaching moment, corps members say things such as, "On a Saturday night, you can find me...at home, playing games, watching a movie, or cuddling with my Labradoodle," or "If you talked to my friends and family, they'd describe me as...a hard worker, but a silly and creative one" (Teacher for America, 2011c). Certainly college students not only appreciate seeing pictures of people like themselves, but aspire to be like these people – they are sexy because they are teaching for America and giving of themselves while still looking great and keeping their sense of humor.

Coupled with the growing trendiness of voluntarism, TFA's high selectivity is another factor that has caused the number of applicants to soar. TFA appeals to high-achieving college graduates and consistently turns away scores of applicants each year. In 2011 TFA received more than 48,000 applications yet only accepted 5,200, or 10.8% of its applicants, to be corps members (Teach for America, n.d.). With 48,000 recent college graduates applying for TFA, their messaging is effective. This selectivity has always been a goal of Kopp's since the beginning of TFA, as it inspires a sense of confidence in the organization – in other words, not everyone can be a teacher, but if you are special enough, *you* can. Kopp noted in her thesis that some alternative certification candidates "revealed that the selectivity of the program was a major attraction; in effect, the degree of selectivity raised the status of the job" (Kopp, 1989, p. 47). In 1996, Kopp told *The New York Times*: "I'd like people to someday talk about TFA the way they talk about the Rhodes Scholarship" (Shteir, 1996, p. 32).

And indeed working for TFA has become an elite status symbol. A 2010 Harvard graduate found that it was easier to be accepted into the nation's top law and graduates schools than be accepted for a job with TFA. A different Harvard graduate who did not get accepted into TFA had to 'settle' for University of Virginia Law School while a Villanova graduate and rejected TFA applicant accepted a Fulbright (Winerip, 2010). The TFA application process is intense, including an online application, a letter of intent, transcripts, a resume, a phone interview, an 'online activity', a face-to-face interview and a monitored group discussion with other applicants. Once again, the message sent to potential TFA corps members is that if they pass this rigorous application process, they are something special because there are so many hoops to jump through. If you succeed, you are the cream of the crop. TFA has "harnessed the culture of status-seeking to a greater purpose and turned national service into a resume-builder" (Zenilman, 2006, para. 3).

Price: Time To Choose Career Options And Build Your Resume

Once Kopp had made the case that teaching is something that *anyone* can do, and should do, Kopp then had to find graduating seniors to fill the positions. A two-year break for graduates from the world of finding a job in order to help poor children was advertised. Currently, this sentiment can be found in TFA brochures amongst statistics concerning America's educational problems:

What makes the gap in educational outcomes so unconscionable is the clear evidence that it does not need to exist....As a member of Teach For America, you will commit two years to teach in one of our country's high-need public schools and will gain the skills, perspective, and experience that will help you make an impact over the long term and pursue your personal and professional goals, regardless of your career path. (Teach for America, 2008)

It is a win-win situation: the graduates only have to commit for two years, which provides them with time to figure out what they want to do with their lives, and the schools get 'teachers' in the classrooms. As Kopp stated in a *New York Times* article, "So many of my peers were undecided about what to do after college...They seemed ready to be recruited by something like what I had in mind" (Hechinger, 1989, para. 4). But, this two-year commitment, however graduate-friendly, was met with a great deal of criticism from the education world. Arthur Wise, then president of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) stated that requiring mere two-year commitments from corps members, "conveys the idea that teaching is something you do for a few years before you move on to 'important work'" (Lawton, 1991, p. 26). To quickly counter this argument, TFA once again played both sides of the field, by insisting that even if corps members choose to leave the classroom after two years, they will become lifetime advocates for education (Chira, 1991; Lawton, 1991; Kopp, 1992a). Further, TFA supporters argued that most teachers are 'temporary,' regardless of preparation route, finding support from researchers reporting high turnover rates in the teaching profession. For example, Pearl Kane, a then assistant professor at Columbia Teachers College, argued in a 1990 *Phi Delta Kappan*, that "viewed in historical context, even a temporary commitment to teaching should be heralded by us all as a welcome opportunity" and "national studies show that as many as 40% of beginning teachers leave teaching within five years" (1990, p. 805). In short, the TFA corps members provide a valuable contribution to education, no matter how short their stints in the classroom may be.

To recruit these high-achieving corps members, Kopp played into college graduates' sense of uncertainty concerning the future as well as their unwillingness to make major commitments. Teaching can be a 'hiatus' (Kopp, 1989, p. 118) for the indecisive – TFA can do these graduates a favor. This concept was consistent with a study in which Harvard undergraduates were surveyed concerning their feelings towards teacher education. They viewed teaching as a welcome 'break' from the rat race of procuring a job (Kopp, 1989, p. 46). More importantly, during the two-year break, corps members are adding to their resume. While TFA advertises on its website that they recruit "leaders...who work to expand educational opportunity," they emphasize that this

leadership career is merely “starting by teaching for two years in a low-income community” (Teach for America, 2011a). Teaching with TFA is a simple ‘stepping stone’ on the way to graduate school or a more lucrative career in law or medicine and now that the economy provides fewer and fewer jobs to college graduates, TFA looks like an incredible opportunity (Herships, 2009). As Singer (2010) summarizes:

Teach for America (TFA) is really a relatively well-paid temporary missionary program that sends the children of the wealthy into the inner cities for resume building and career enhancement. It pays much better than the Peace Corps or church work, you get to stay in this country, and you don't have to move back into your parents' house after college. One recent Yale University graduate, getting paid \$45,000 a year for a two-year stint in San Antonio schools, explained it well: "I feel very fortunate. I know a lot of people at Yale who didn't have a job or plan when they graduated." (para. 3)

With that explanation, how could new graduates not find appeal in TFA's message?

As if each of the aforementioned reasons were not persuasive enough, TFA has begun to partner with businesses and schools to give TFA alumni a boost when they leave their teaching jobs. The TFA website states:

As a Teach for America corps member, you'll develop strengths that are critical to being a successful teacher in a low-income community. These skills are also essential to leadership across many other professions and sectors. We see our corps members' talent and resolve play out in the classroom and beyond, and so do the exceptional graduate schools and employers that actively recruit second-year corps members and alumni.

In addition, many graduate schools and employers offer special benefits to our corps members and alumni. (Teach for America, 2011d)

The list on the website includes sector tabs for TFAers to explore, including business and finance, education, law, medicine and dentistry, policy, science, and social services. Companies such as Ernst & Young, Goldman Sachs, and Google offer two-year deferments for those who are offered a job with both TFA and the company. The Harvard Business School has a 2+2 MBA program in which college graduates work in an ‘approved’ business experience for two years before going on to complete the MBA – TFA is on their ‘approved’ list. MIT gives two \$10,000 merit based “Teach for America Emerging Leaders Scholarships” (Teach for America, 2011d). Brown University's Masters Program in Urban Education Policy waives application fees and provides a 25% discount on tuition to TFA alumni. The Cornell Institute in Public Affairs provides a minimum \$18,000 tuition fellowship (which is 50% tuition) for admitted TFA alumni. The list of perks for TFA alumni includes over 200 graduate schools and employers. Beyond being an altruistic endeavor, TFA has become a sound financial and career decision for recent graduates. With so many graduate schools and employers providing ‘extras’ for TFA alumni, the opportunity to list TFA on your resume and a guaranteed job for two years that can pay around \$45,000, TFA has become not only the ‘cool’ thing to do, but also the ‘smart’ thing to do.

Customer Relationship: TFAers as a Brand Community

Making customers feel special is another essential component of successful branding. Branding “grant(s) the buyer a sense of affirmation and entry into an imaginary community of shared values” (Healy, 2008, p. 10). The highly selective recruitment of corps members has fostered the sense of being unique and special among these individuals. They are touted not only as the cream of the crop, but also as highly intelligent people ready to make a difference in the lives of children who have been left behind. The TFA website describes the program’s impact:

During Teach for America's first year in 1990, 500 men and women began teaching in six low-income communities across the country. Since then, Teach for America's network has grown to over 28,000 individuals. We have become one of the nation’s largest providers of teachers for low-income communities, and we have been recognized for building a pipeline of leaders committed to educational equity and excellence. (Teach for America, 2011b)

Currently, the website reports more than 10,000 TFA corps members who teach in 46 urban and rural areas with more than 28,000 alumni “work[ing] across sectors to ensure that all children have access to an excellent education” (Teach for America, 2012c). TFA’s website currently promises, “In 2015, we hope to have 15,000 teachers in 60 urban and rural regions across the country. This would mean that our teachers would reach nearly one million students in some of our country’s highest-need communities” (Teach for America, 2012b).

TFA describes the impact of its alumni movement as “a growing movement of leaders, now more than 28,000 strong, who work at every level of education, policy and other professions, to ensure that all children can receive an excellent education” (Teach for America, 2012a). In another portion of its website, TFA claims even broader impact:

Since then [1990], nearly 33,000 participants have reached more than 3 million children nationwide during their two-year teaching commitments. They have sustained their commitment as alumni, working within education and across all sectors to help ensure that children growing up in low-income communities get an excellent education. Given the magnitude of the achievement gap, we have aggressively worked to grow and deepen our impact. Our corps members and alumni have helped accelerate the pace of change as teachers, principals, elected officials, social entrepreneurs, and leaders in all fields. Alongside many others, they have proven that classrooms, schools and now whole communities can transform the life trajectories of all students, regardless of background. (Teach for America, 2011b)

Messages, such as these, affirm the specialness of being a TFA corps member, which fosters a good customer relationships and a sense of loyalty.

Given this comprehensive effort, we suggest TFA corps members and alumni have become brand communities. Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) define brand communities as “a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of

social relationships among admirers of a brand...Like other communities, it is marked by shared consciousness, rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility” (p. 412).

Brand communities differ from normal customer relationships because of the heightened sense of belonging and loyalty to the brand. TFAers develop a consciousness of kind, a “shared consciousness, a way of thinking about things that is more than shared attitudes or perceived similarity” (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001, p. 413). The extensive selection process, summer institute and alumni conferences have created a shared set of rituals and traditions, which “perpetuate the community’s shared history, culture, and consciousness” (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001, p. 413). TFA’s mission of having a positive impact children living in low-income communities by addressing the educational achievement gap conveys a sense of moral responsibility. In brand communities, moral responsibility extends to a “sense of duty or obligation to community as a whole, and to its individual members” (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001, p. 413). As a result of the development of a sense of moral obligation to TFA, the message to the public with regard to the experiences of the corps members has been positive and one of success. We have only recently seen former corps members critique the efficacy of TFA (Brewer, 2013).

Teach for America’s Philanthropic Funding

We turn now to the financial arm of TFA to examine how Kopp has been able to use TFA’s brand to leverage extensive philanthropic funding for the organization. It is beyond the scope of this study to systematically analyze corporate sponsors, but due to the tax filing requirements of non-profit organizations, philanthropic foundations contributions to TFA are more readily accessed publicly. Using FoundationSearch data between 2000 and 2011, the total funding given to TFA by philanthropic organizations totaled \$267,165,222 given in 4,155 grants with the purpose of the grant described as general support or general operating support. Of those, 53 grants were over \$1 million each. Table 1 summarizes the 25 highest funders for the period with total contributions of over \$93 million.

TFA’s financial growth can be seen in Table 2, a summary of its 990 tax filings from 2001 to 2010. Funding from all sources – gifts, grants, contributions, public support and government contributions increased from \$38,541,704 in 2001 to \$372,603,252 in 2010. Compensation to its officers and CEO Kopp reflect this trajectory. For 2010, the total compensation to officers and directors was nearly 30% of TFA’s total end of year assets. In addition to healthy compensation to its officers, TFA’s has reported considerable expenses for lobbying expenditures to influence legislative bodies. The explanatory text on TFA’s 2010 990 is worth quoting at length in regard to the organization’s lobby efforts:

Table 1
2000 – 2011 TFA Top Funders

SIGNIFICANT FUNDER	GRANTEE LOCATION	TOTAL FUNDING
ROBERTSON FOUNDATION	New Orleans, LA	\$20,140,000.00
FIDELITY INVESTMENTS CHARITABLE GIFT FUND	New Orleans, LA	\$10,000,000.00
THE MICHAEL AND SUSAN DELL FOUNDATION	New York	\$9,580,000.00
BROAD FOUNDATION	New York	\$8,050,000.00
C. D. SPANGLER FOUNDATION INC	New Orleans, LA	\$5,500,000.00
JOHN S. AND JAMES L. KNIGHT FOUNDATION	New York	\$4,800,000.00
STARR FOUNDATION	New York	\$4,700,000.00
WALTON FAMILY FOUNDATION INC	New York, Arkansas	\$3,546,382.00
AMGEN FOUNDATION INC		\$3,000,000.00
CARNEGIE CORPORATION OF NEW YORK	New York	\$3,000,000.00
LEHMAN BROTHERS FOUNDATION	New York	\$3,000,000.00
THE GOIZUETA FOUNDATION	New York	\$2,850,827.00
ROBERT K. STEEL FAMILY FOUNDATION	New York	\$2,000,000.00
LENFEST FOUNDATION INC	New York	\$1,700,000.00
HELIOS EDUCATION FOUNDATION	Phoenix, AZ	\$1,500,000.00
LINCY FOUNDATION	Las Vegas	\$1,075,500.00
JOEL E. SMILOW CHARITABLE TRUST	New York	\$1,015,674.00
THE SKOLL FUND	New York	\$1,015,000.00
SCHWAB CHARITABLE FUND	New York	\$1,010,250.00
BILL AND MELINDA GATES FOUNDATION	New York	\$1,000,000.00
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION OF MIDDLE TENNESSEE INC	New York	\$1,000,000.00
D AND DF FOUNDATION	New York	\$1,000,000.00
MEDTRONIC FOUNDATION	New York	\$1,000,000.00
SAN FRANCISCO FOUNDATION	New York	\$1,000,000.00
THE CARROLL AND MILTON PETRIE FOUNDATION INC	New York	\$1,000,000.00
TOTAL		\$93,483,633.00

On a state level, local advisory board members, paid staff or management had direct contact with state legislators, their staffs and members of state executive branch agencies in support of state appropriations for Teach for America's in-state operations through regular state budget processes. In addition, regional staff also worked for the passage of various pieces of legislation which would impact Teach for America's ability to operate in a given community, including the passage of alternative certification legislation, legislation permitting Teach for America to be recognized by the states as an alternative pathway to teacher licensure and expansion of charter schools. At the federal level Teach for America staff interfaced with Members of Congress, as well as personal and Committee staff, in support of adequate federal funding for Teach for America and the Corporation for National and Community Service [includes Americorps]. In addition, Teach for America lobbied for specific legislative provisions beneficial to it both within and outside the context of the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). (Economic Research Institute, 2013)

These lobbying expenditures were first reported in 2006 with a total of over \$83 million, and continued but in much lesser amounts in subsequent years. Evidence that TFA's lobbying efforts have been increasingly successful is seen in the organization's ability to leverage federal and state funding to support itself. For example, in Georgia, a significant amount of Race to the Top grant funds were used to increase the number of TFA corps members in the state's schools and in the process contribute to the organizations coffers. Downey (2011), an education writer for the *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, reported:

Teach for America is a national network that enlists mostly new college grads and some career-changers to work in low-income schools. The state is spending \$15.6 million in federal Race to the Top grant funds during the next four years to help fund 30 percent of Teach for America's budget. State money could grow Teach for America's ranks in Georgia from 380 to nearly 850 teachers, according to the state. (para. 2)

Downey also provided a critique of the program:

Georgia Association of Educators president Calvin Rollins still takes issue with local districts hiring teachers who have taken an alternative path instead of hiring traditionally trained, veteran teachers. National Education Association officials also have voiced concerns about the corps' high turnover and inexperience. "Teachers have been laid off all across the state," Rollins said. "Our teachers are better qualified than any person who has gone through just a five-week training." (para. 5)

Downey ended this article with a statement about the corps members' retention rates:

About two in five Teach for America corps members bail after their two-year commitment is up, according to a 2010 study. The national retention rate for

the program is 89.4 percent for one year and it drops to 61 percent beyond two. The annual retention rate for Georgia teachers is 90.8 percent. (2011, para. 6)

Georgia is not alone in using its federal grant monies to fund TFA corps members. Duval County, Florida, will begin a three-year, 3.3 million federally funded program to bring 300 TFA teachers to the county, despite reports of low retention rates for the program.¹ *The Florida Times-Union* described the context in which this incoming group of TFA teachers arrived in the county:

In August, about 100 Teach for America recruits will arrive to work as teachers in Duval County Public Schools. If past trends hold, as few as 11 of them will still be teaching here in traditional public schools five years from now. Duval County is among many school districts nationwide that have partnered with TFA despite concerns about high turnover. The program recruits young college graduates who do not have an education degree. It puts them through a five-week boot camp in education in exchange for a two-year commitment to teach in schools that serve low-income students. The program's limited teaching commitment has turned off some major urban school districts, including Hillsborough County Public Schools and the Cobb County School District, which serves Atlanta. Officials from those districts say the financial investment in recruitment and training, plus the replacement cost when those teachers leave, makes the program impractical given the limited funding for education. (Stepzinski, 2012, para. 1-3)

At the national level, TFA was awarded a \$50 million U.S. Department of Education Investing in Innovation grant to expand its program.² As a requirement to qualify for the awards, winners of this competition were required to obtain 20% matching pledges from private sector donations, which TFA was able to do (Dillon, 2008). In short, TFA's philanthropic, corporate, and governmental funding is at an all-time high.

¹ Until recently, there were little retention data for TFA teachers. Through surveys of 200, 2001, and 2002 TFA corps members, Donaldson and Johnson (2011) found 60.5% continue as public school teachers beyond the two-year commitment; after five years, only 27.8% were still in teaching as compared to an estimated 50% retention rate for new teachers across all types of schools reported by Smith and Ingersoll (2003).

² KIPP Foundation also won a \$50 million award. Interestingly, as noted above, KIPP's CEO, Richard Barth, formerly vice president of Edison Schools, is Wendy Kopp's husband. Gootman (2011) writer for the *New York Times* referred to Kopp and Barth as an "education power couple." And indeed that seems to be the case garnering \$100 million in federal awards.

Table 2
TFA 990 Summaries, 2001-2010

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Gifts, Grants, Contributions Received	66,614,126	82,611,883	110,595,141	125,048,817	153,675,874
Direct Public Support	15,460,949	25,828,270	22,746,317	47,251,526	92,323,862
Indirect Public Support	298,256	121,708	126,442	63,266	237,198
Governmental Contributions (grants)	8,222,449	12,804,013	14,345,345	6,407,333	8,610,124
Total Assets End of Year	38,541,704	46,739,299	53,364,842	65,361,195	112,292,071
Lobbying Expenditures to Influence Legislative Body	None reported	None reported	None reported	None reported	None reported
Compensation to officers/ directors (Total)	564,813	662,071	716,976	714,906	1,219,467
Kopp's TFA Salary	152,000	192,565	216,682	206,000	Included in total
Kopp's Teach for All Salary	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
President/CEO Salary (Hauser, 2001-2004); Kramer (2006-2010)	127,867	147,356	167,793	126,160	Kopp listed as president; salary included in total
Corps Member Financial Aid/grants/Support	22,658,904	26,380,407	40,326,684	34,094,489	36,706,675

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Gifts, Grants, Contributions Received	190,265,488	227,416,135	251,515,886	193,027,434	243,647,246
Direct Public Support	59,681,859	117,468,297	*	*	*
Indirect Public Support	195,146	None reported	*	*	*
Governmental Contributions (grants)	17,062,078	24,877,015	*	*	*
Total Assets End of Year	122,347,145	180,315,255	305,981,521	337,962,466	372,603,252
Lobbying Expenditures to Influence Legislative Body	83,392,298	523,475	452,675	760,285	548,437
Compensation to officers/ directors (Total)	1,459,763	1,539,565	62,804,570	109,181,485	109,903,294
Kopp's TFA Salary	275,500	268,585	279,525	350,630	364,062
Kopp's Teach for All Salary	N/A	64,940	54,000	Not reported	Not reported
President/CEO Salary (Hauser, 2001-2004); Kramer (2006-2010)	222,735	274,050	274,050	292,230	298,496
Corps Member Financial Aid/grants/Support	51,356,015	27,860,204	80,271,802	126,554,537	47,711,468

* Reported total gifts, grants contributions not discrete categories as in previous years.

Discussion

In this paper we examined how Wendy Kopp used both her elite networks in the corporate and philanthropic worlds as well as a brilliant media campaign to build and develop the TFA brand into the national and international (Teach for All) enterprise it is today. Using TFA's status as a non-profit organization, coupled with clear, concise media messages, Kopp has successfully sold the TFA brand to recruits, philanthropists, politicians and the public. The more positive press she generated for TFA juxtaposed with critiques of traditional teacher certification programs, the more corporations and philanthropists filled TFA's coffers, joined later by large federal and state grant programs. With assets of over \$372 million in 2011, the organization promises continued expansion. This high level of philanthropic, corporate, and public monies in support of TFA are not unique. TFA is but one educational non-profit within a network of non-profits, along with charter management organizations and other educational management organizations that provide curriculum, testing, other support services, and even real estate, in an effort to privatize the educational sector (deMarrais, 2012).

Since the 1990s, venture philanthropists and "educational entrepreneurs" like Kopp have been successful in using the media to create a national reform movement that focuses the public's attention on low performing schools with blame placed on poorly prepared or ineffective teachers, teachers unions, and large, slow moving bureaucracies. TFA's solution is to put "bright," enthusiastic college graduates from the nation's elite universities into poor communities, where they promise to improve achievement for children one student at a time. Its stated mission "is growing the movement of leaders who work to ensure that kids growing up in poverty get an excellent education" (Teach For America, 2012e).

We are not critiquing the young, idealistic corps members who enter the program with good intentions and a belief they can be part of Kopp's "building a movement" to impact the education of poor children. However, a system built on two years of service, sending underprepared recruits to urban schools does not create a permanent workforce of teachers committed to these communities. TFA has increasingly moved its corps members to well-funded charter schools (i.e. KIPP schools). As argued by Simon:

The organization that was launched to serve public schools so poor or dysfunctional they couldn't attract qualified teachers now sends fully a third of its recruits to privately run charter schools, many with stellar academic reputations, flush budgets and wealthy donors. TFA also sends its rookies, who typically have just 15 to 20 hours of teaching experience, to districts that have recently laid off scores of more seasoned teachers. (Simon, 2012, para. 3)

Ironically, TFA has been successful at poignantly demonstrating how its version of a teaching force requires large infusions of money with significant philanthropic and corporate donations as well as hefty federal grant monies to support its program. If we were to take TFA's end of year assets of \$372,603,252 and divide it by the number of 2011 corps members (5,200), we see a cost of \$71,654,472 per corps member. It is also

ironic that venture philanthropists fueling these non-profits, normally focused on measureable outcomes, do not require the same level of accountability from TFA. The result is an expensive revolving door of two-year teachers in the nation's most needy schools and an increasingly wealthy "non-profit" organization that can afford to pay its leaders significant salaries. As shown above in the examples of Georgia and Florida using its Race to the Top grants to hire TFA recruits (in addition to the cost of district funded salaries), the cost of losing those two-year teachers is an additional cost. Darling Hammond and Ducommun (n.d.) reported on average, it costs \$15,000 per teacher who leaves the system, at an annual cost of \$2 billion. Can states afford TFA's type of temporary teaching force?

Within a context in which state funding is increasingly cut to the educational arena both in P-12 and higher education levels, perhaps venture philanthropists like Gates, Broad, Dell, and Walton might look to earlier philanthropic foundations like Carnegie, Rockefeller, and Ford with funding programs committed to working within existing educational institutions. Today's leading colleges of education across the nation have successfully trained and supported teachers for working in schools in diverse communities. Through extensive state and federal accountability and accreditation requirements, they have demonstrated high quality content knowledge, pedagogical skills, and excellent performance rates for teachers. For example, Georgia's Board of Regents (2008) reported a one-year retention rate of 95% and a two-year retention rate of 90% for its institutions. In 2010, according to the Georgia Governor's Office of Student Achievement, nearly 75% of Georgia's new teachers remain in public education after five years (Downey, 2010). Rather than divert funding from the very institutions that specialize in preparing high quality teachers, perhaps philanthropists might use their wealth and political power to support these institutions in building programs aimed at the preparation of a permanent teaching force for urban and rural under-resourced communities.

In conclusion, despite the rhetoric and extreme levels of funding, TFA provides children in poor communities underqualified, inexperienced teachers with high attrition rates, and little evidence of impact on student achievement. TFA's approach to the problem of poor schooling situates the problem within educational institutions – schools, school districts, and those institutions preparing teachers, thus minimizing the larger context of an economic system that creates a persistent underclass in America's urban and rural communities while enabling a thriving elite. The real success of TFA is its ability to create a vast network of elite alumni who have moved into positions of power not only in educational organizations in the creation of non-profit educational management organizations, but in political and corporate arenas. As part of that elite, Kopp and her TFA network have consistently and successfully refocused the national conversation away from the vast inequities between rich and poor communities, rich and poor schools and corporate tax structures that enables these conditions. In effect TFA has served philanthropists, corporations, and politicians well by blaming the achievement gap on teachers and schools rather than a nation that lacks the political will to invest in its poorest communities.

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