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Teach For America in the Media
A Multimodal Semiotic Analysis

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Abstract

Teach For America (TFA), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation, recruits college graduates, often from outside of the educational domain, from some of the United States' most prestigious universities to teach for two years in low-income, oftentimes racially diverse, schools around the country. This social semiotic approach to multimodal critical discourse analysis seeks to uncover and explore the ideologies found in the discourse surrounding TFA's media representation. The purpose of this analysis is to describe how TFA is represented by it's own organization and how it is represented by the media both positively and negatively, giving explicit attention to how social actors are either collectivized or individualized. TFA's media portrayal enables individuals who have not interacted with the organization, and also may have very little understanding of it, to form an opinion about its work and effectiveness, thus creating and reinforcing beliefs that align people for or against TFA.

Introduction

As a self-proclaimed solution to failing schools, Teach for America (TFA) consistently straddles the line between the education domain and the business sector, promulgating the myth of the necessity of neoliberalism as a means to fixing America's educational fall from the top. This 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation, however, works diligently to appear situated more in the realm of education than business. The organization markets itself as an educational organization striving, and making progress towards, lessening the achievement gap, placing more significant numbers of teachers of color with students of color, and offering high quality education where it is lacking. Its goals are especially present in its representation of themselves online, in marketing materials, and in the media.

Implicit in TFA's philosophical stance and their representation in the media is the broader ideology of neoliberalism. According to Carr and Porfilio (2011), the current administration in the United States has an educational agenda that "is linked to further eradicating public education, promoting corporate interests over the needs of children and the US at-large, and pressuring the public to accept the notion that corporate involvement will improve all elements in the social world" (p. 7). Therefore, while TFA is an educational agency, its representation is also largely contextualized in business rhetoric. In addition to describing its work in the education sector, TFA is largely described as a corporation for which to work, thereby emphasizing its role in the marketization of schools. In the current 'accountability movement' in education in the United States, TFA plays a role in providing an alternative to traditional teacher education, especially prevalent in its claim to place successful scholars as content experts, rather than pedagogical experts, in the classroom. Thus, this functions to increase competition in the educational domain, imposing a business framework and neoliberal ideology and in turn deprofessionalizing teachers and educational researchers. These alternatives to traditional education are now rarely questioned, as "neoliberalism has, in short, become hegemonic as a mode of discourse. It has pervasive effects on ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world" (Harvey, 2007, p. 3).

One place where this hegemonic, neoliberal discourse is especially prevalent is within the media. According to Veltri (2010), "Teach For America has assumed a proactive agenda in terms of its media relations and public image" (p. 171). Therefore, it is important to examine how TFA represents itself, and how it is represented, both positively and negatively, in dominant media outlets, which is most often "limited to *responsible* opinions acceptable to some segment of the elite" (McChesney, 1989). Machin and Mayr (2012) state that "ideologies can be found across whole areas of social life, in ideas, knowledge, and institutional practices. In the case of 'business', this ideology comes to dominate everything in society - even how we run schools and hospitals" (p. 25).

Therefore, this study utilizes a social semiotic approach to multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) to uncover and explore such ideologies found in the discourse surrounding TFA's mainstream media representation. Apple (2004) states that "rather than taking neo-liberal claims at face value we should want to ask about their hidden effects that are too often invisible in the rhetoric and metaphors of their proponents" (p. 19). Similarly, Lipman (2011) contends that "neoliberalism is a *process* that works its way into the discourses and practices of the city through the actions of local actors, not just elites, but also marginalized and oppressed people acting in conditions not of their own making" (p. 145). The purpose of this semiotic analysis is

thus to describe how TFA is represented by its own organization and how it is represented by the mainstream media both positively and negatively, giving explicit attention to how deixis, defined below, is used in texts to collectivize or individualize social actors in order to align readers with or against TFA. The overall message of this semiotic analysis will be explored at the end of the paper.

Theoretical Orientation

Because the "norms and values which underlie texts are often 'out of sight' rather than overtly stated," Critical Discourse Analysis aims "to help reveal some of these hidden and 'often out of sight' values, positions and perspectives" (Paltridge, 2012, p. 186). In particular, it is a research method that studies how "ideology, identity and inequality are (re)enacted through texts produced in social and political contexts" (van Dijk, 2001, p. 352, in Hart, 2010, p. 13). One vastly important method of disseminating information is through the media, as it has the potential to reach a broad audience. Hart (2010) contends that the media is critical because "knowledge of certain social and political realities is not formed from first-hand experience but rather on the basis of the texts to which we are exposed" (p. 16). Koller (2004) explains "some *primary* texts and thus the ideologies they express are disseminated in the main through other *secondary* texts commenting upon them" (p. 24, as in Hart, p. 17, emphasis in original).

Thus, how Teach for America is portrayed in the media enables individuals who have not interacted with the organization, and also may have very little understanding of it, to form an opinion about its work and effectiveness. In van Dijk's (1995) model of social cognition, members of a social group share mental representations and processes, which form group ideologies acquired "through complex and usually long-term processes of socialization and other forms of social information processing", thus assumed "to control, through the minds of the members, the social reproduction of the group" (p. 18). Therefore, TFA's representation in the US media, when represented in a specific, consistent fashion, creates US' ideological beliefs about the organization and its effectiveness.

To complete a multimodal social semiotic analysis of how TFA is portrayed in the media, the researchers employed the frameworks of van Leeuwen's (2008) Representation of Social Actors in text and image, supplemented by Machin and Mayr's (2012) strategies for Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis. These frameworks, as described below, were used to determine how text and image were used to create a representation of TFA in the national media, thereby shaping the view of TFA in the public consciousness.

In his work on the representation of social actors, van Leeuwen (2008) finds that "representations of the world and what is going on in it, however abstract, should be interpreted as representations of social practices" (p. 5) and that it is essential to determine how text and image work in order to demonstrate "how the *participants* of social practices can be represented in English discourse" (p. 23). In text, he emphasizes the importance of examining authors' particular lexical choices and how they affect the portrayal of social actors. van Leeuwen also stresses the importance of including an analysis of visual representation, "with the increasing use of visual representation in a wide range of contexts, it becomes more and more pressing to be able to ask the same critical questions with regard to both verbal and visual representations, indeed, with regard to representations in all of the "media" that forms parts of contemporary 'multimedia' texts" (p. 25).

Machin and Mayr (2012) also express the importance of highlighting how visual representations and text work together to create meaning, as "meaning is generally communicated not only through language but often through other semiotic modes" (p. 6). They continue that "visual communication, as well as language, both *shapes* and *is shaped by* society" (p. 10, emphasis in original). Therefore, it is important to look not only at the visual semiotic choices in isolation, but instead to analyze them for "the way that they play a part in the communication of power relations" (p. 10).

In analyzing TFA's public image, as portrayed in the media, the researchers looked at how the language and images used enable readers to form opinions of the organization. Language gives writers of texts lexical choices that can be used to "foreground and background different aspects of identity, through which we can encourage and discourage either alignment with or against that person" in order to "place them within broader discourses that can serve to legitimise or delegitimise them" (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 12). The data in this analysis revealed two primary strategies that were used to shape the public understanding of TFA. The first was the use of collectivization and individualization, as created through the use of inclusive and exclusive pronouns and lexical choice, explained below. The second was the language of business and venture philanthropy rhetoric. This paper focuses on data that highlights the use of strategies of collectivization.

Deixis: Inclusive and Exclusive Pronouns

According to Gee (2011), "deictics are words whose reference must be determined from context" (p. 8). He categorized deictics into three groups: person (e.g., I/me, we/us), place (e.g., here/there), and time (now/then). When using the deictic linguistic form, also called 'shifters', in a referential manner, speakers "send messages about the interactional context which these forms index" (Wortham, 1996, p. 3). According to Wortham (1996), "*we* [...] can both refer to and establish an interactional group" (p. 3). Thus, pronoun choice, the aspect of deixis that is considered in this article, when combined with the context of a text, is often used to assign value to an idea (Wortham, 1996), therefore offering the reader opportunity to make judgment on the associated idea. According to Riggins (1997), inclusive and exclusive pronouns "are most revealing of the boundaries separating Self and Other" (p. 8, in Petersoo, 2007, p. 420). Petersoo (2007) stresses that one of the functions of the inclusive pronoun 'we' is that it "helps to draw clear distinction between members and non-members, between *us* and *them*" (p. 8). Fowler (1991) states that the deictic expression 'we' also suggests "an existence of so-called 'implied consensus'" (as in Petersoo, 2007, p. 421) between the newspaper and its readership. Therefore, pronouns can be a powerful tool that allow text producers to "evoke their own ideas as being [readers'] ideas and create a collective 'other' that is in opposition to these ideas" (Machin and Mayr, 2012, p. 84). Thus, in this article, pronoun use will demonstrate how articles align with and against TFA in the mainstream media.

Lexical Choice: Collectivization and Individualization

Machin and Mayr (2012) stress the importance of considering how social actors are described either as individuals or as part of a collectivity (p. 80). According to van Leeuwen (2008), in North America, there is a great value placed on individuality, and therefore, the vast majority of readers understand social actors who appear as individuals as important, particularly in terms of having elite status (p. 37-38). When social actors are collectivized, they are homogenized, as group representation "diminish[es] individual differences" (p. 144). Text

producers can simultaneously individualize and collectivize social actors, and Machin (2007) stressed the importance of examining the ways in which this is done. In this paper, lexical choice will be examined in tandem with pronoun choice, particularly in the discussion of the data analysis.

Methodology

Selection of media for analysis began with a Google search for articles relating to Teach for America (TFA). The researchers looked at recent media, originally published within two years of the analysis, dating within the range of 2012-2013. Articles were to have been published in national news sources, in order to allow for media that reached a broad audience and therefore represented the more normative national discourse related to the organization.

Results from the search were carefully read and analyzed in order to select two articles that portrayed TFA in a positive manner and two containing more negative aspects. Researchers looked at both article titles and content, emphasizing text more than image in the initial analysis because images "provide interpretations, ideologically colored angles, and they do so not explicitly, but by suggestion, by connotation, by appealing to barely conscious, half-forgotten knowledge" (Berger, 1972, in van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 136). Therefore, since the intent of an article is often made more explicit in text, images were reserved for the more thorough data analysis. The manner in which the images support or negate the articles' message is presented in greater detail below.

In the selection process, referential discourse strategies, particularly the usage of the pronoun 'we', were used to determine those articles which supported and opposed TFA. According to Machin and Mayr (2012), "pronouns like 'us', 'we', and 'them' are used to align us alongside or against particularly ideas" (p. 84). Therefore, articles that used 'we' to align with TFA were considered as those that support the organization and those using 'them' in reference to the organization were considered in opposition. In addition, Hart (2010) posits that "[referential discourse strategies] aid in the construction of social boundaries because they mark group membership" and that "in-group referential strategies help to fulfill the human desire for solidarity, rapport, safety or psychological comforting that comes from sharing things with people" (in Velásquez, 2013, p. 60). Articles that prioritized the use of 'we' in reference to TFA were thus giving it a greater voice, and support of the organization could be determined.

Another element used in the selection process was an analysis of lexical choice, particularly the use of formal and informal lexical items. Machin and Mayr (2012) stated that "authors will often seem to influence us through claims to hav[e] power over us" which may be through "legal or hierarchical means or through claiming specialist knowledge" (p. 42). Thus, articles citing research studies or presenting statistical data that supported the work of TFA were considered positive and those emphasizing negative research findings were categorized as opposing TFA.

Each of the four articles was selected from different media sources, including *USA Today, Businessweek, Slate,* and *The Washington Post.* The researchers also used the TFA website as a *neutral* text in order to demonstrate how the organization depicted itself, while keeping in mind that it was likely to align positively with the promotion of the organization. The 'Our Organization' and 'Core Values' pages were chosen because they emphasized the mission of the organization. Images from these components of the website were also included in the analysis.

Findings & Analysis

An in-depth multimodal semiotic analysis revealed that the primary method of depicting TFA in the media was through the use of collectivization and individualization. For textual features, this was done through the use of inclusive and exclusive pronouns, i.e. 'we', 'they', and their various forms. The researchers' analysis of the visual data revealed that these were also common themes in the images that corresponded to the articles' text. The data derived from the analysis are presented below, initially presenting textual and visual data as distinct components. How these interact is discussed in the Discussion section that follows.

Pronoun Analysis

The use of inclusive and exclusive pronouns functioned to create an 'us' versus 'them' divide within the media discourse surrounding TFA. Table 1 below summarizes the use of the collective pronouns, 'we,' 'us,' 'our,' 'they,' 'them,' and 'their' in this study's corpus. The number of tokens and percentages of both inclusive and exclusive pronouns is given for each particular media item.

Table 1
Pronoun Usage in the TFA Corpus

	Article Slant	**We/Us/Our**	**They/Them/Their**	**Total**
TFA Website	Neutral	44 (73.3%)	16 (26.7%)	60
Article 1 (*USA Today*)	Positive	4 (28.6%)	10 (71.4%)	14
Article 2 (*Businessweek*)	Positive	35 (74.5%)	12 (25.5%)	47
Article 3 (*Slate*)	Negative	21 (33.9%)	41 (66.1%)	62
Article 4 (*Washington Post*)	Negative	6 (19.4%)	25 (80.6%)	31

The vast majority (73.3%) of collective pronouns used on the TFA website sections that we examined were inclusive. This may be expected due to the purpose of the website in conveying TFA's goals as an organization. Looking at the two 'positive' articles (*USA Today* and *Businessweek*), the researchers observed two things. First, the *USA Today* article used relatively few collective pronouns. Second, the *Businessweek* article's use of collective pronouns was similar to that of the TFA website, with 74.5% of the collective pronouns being inclusive. In contrast, the two 'negative' articles (*Slate* and *The Washington Post*) primarily used exclusive collective pronouns (66.1% and 80.6%, respectively). This information, however, only gives us an overview of how collective pronouns were used in the examined media pieces. Therefore, it is also necessary to consider how these pronouns were used as a referential discourse strategy. The following sections summarize to whom each collective pronoun was used to refer (see appendix for detailed tables).

TFA Website

Seventy percent of the collective pronouns used on the TFA website referred to the organization itself through the use of 'we' and 'our.' 'Our' was also used to refer to America, although not significantly (3.3%; see Table 1 below). As previously mentioned, the use of such inclusive collective pronouns may function to create a sense of implied consensus (Fowler, 1991, in Petersoo, 2007). An example of this can be found in the explanation of one of the 'core values' of the organization, transformational change. "***We*** seek to expand educational opportunity in ways that are life-changing for children and transforming for ***our*** country" (TFA, 2012, emphasis added). Although the 'we' in this sentence is referring to TFA as an organization, reading this statement may elicit a personal reaction within the reader. Individuals who have considered joining this organization be captivated to become members of an organization that has the power to change children's lives. Furthermore, the use of 'our' refers to Americans. Therefore, it is assumed that any American reading this shares this 'core value'; hence, implied consensus is achieved.

Among the uses of exclusive collective pronouns were references to students/kids (10%) and corps members/alumni (8.3%), as indicated in Table 2. Considering the central importance of students and corps members to the organization, this relatively low frequency is interesting. However, within these same sections of the organization's website (a total of 650 tokens), there were 12 tokens referring to students directly ('kids,' 'children,' or 'students') and 13 instances of direct reference to corps members ('corps members,' 'leaders [in our classrooms],' 'recent college graduates and professionals,' 'alumni,' 'educational leaders and advocates'). Whereas, there were only two instances of direct reference to Teach For America, an additional two instances of direct reference to staff members, and three tokens of reference to country/nation. Therefore, although in examining the collective pronoun usage, it may seem as though students and corps members are deemphasized, they are simply referenced more directly, although still at relatively low frequencies.

Table 2
TFA Website

We (18)	**Us (0)**	**Our (26)**	**They (3)**	**Them (4)**	**Their (9)**
TFA (18)		TFA (24)	"All kids" (1)	Core values (2)	Kids (4): "All kids" (2), Low-income kids (1), TFA students (1)
		America (2)	Corps members (1)	Students (1)	Corps members (3)
			Alumni (1)	Visions (1)	Staff members (2)

Article 1 (USA Today)

Although the *USA Today* article used relatively few collective pronouns, there are still some important trends to note. The majority of collective pronouns (71.4%) were exclusive. However, this may be explained by the context of the article, conveying the results of a study conducted by an outside entity. As a result of this context, Mathematica Policy Research, the

policy research organization which conducted the study, is referenced a total of three times by a collective pronoun (twice with an inclusive collective pronoun, once with an exclusive collective pronoun), as can be seen in Table 3 below. Mathematica is also directly referenced three times throughout the article.

Table 3
USA Today Article

We (3)	**Us (0)**	**Our (1)**	**They (8)**	**Them (1)**	**Their (1)**
Education, in general (2)		Mathematica (1)	TFA teachers (3)	Teaching Fellows (1)	TFA (1)
Mathematica (1)			TFA (2)		
			Principals/ School Districts (2)		
			Mathematica (1)		

While this article was established as having an overall positive slant with regards to how it portrays TFA, it does present some dissenting views. One such instance can be found in the one use of an exclusive pronoun in referring to Mathematica. This instance was found in a quote by Julian Heilig, an associate professor of educational policy and planning at the University of Texas, "'We need to hire white teachers who know nothing about math, did not major in math, don't necessarily come from a highly selective school and shouldn't stay a long time?' Heilig asked. 'Is that the story ***they're*** trying to tell with this study? We cannot continue to send students a revolving door of rookie teachers'" (Newlon, 2013, emphasis added). Considering that this article is reporting on a study conducted by Mathematica, it is not surprising that two out of four uses of inclusive collective pronouns refer to the policy organization. Also not surprising given the fact that the study was about TFA, the exclusive collective pronouns most often refer to TFA as an organization or TFA teachers (both approximately 21.4% of all collective pronouns, for a total of 42.9% of all collective pronouns).

Article 2 (Businessweek)

The *Businessweek* article, a question and answer session with Wendy Kopp, predominantly used inclusive collective pronouns (74.5%). TFA as an organization was referenced by 48.9% of the collective pronouns used in the article (65.7% of the inclusive collective pronouns). This article is a prime example of how collective pronouns have the power to align us alongside or against particular ideas (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Wendy's use of 'we,' 'us,' and 'our' in her answers act to align readers alongside TFA's mission. For instance, "***We*** are working to build a movement on ***our*** college campuses" (Damast, 2012, emphasis added). The juxtaposition of the 'we,' which refers to TFA as an organization, and the 'our,' which refers to America, serves to metaphorically join the forces of the two entities, making TFA's aims America's aims as well. As the average reader is consuming this media, they generally will not

take the time to decipher who the collective pronouns are referring to; therefore, 'we' generally includes self, making Wendy Kopp's extensive use of 'we' (55.3% of collective pronouns) a potentially effective tool in aligning readers with her organization's causes.

On the other hand, TFA participants were referenced by 19.1% of the collective pronouns (75% of the exclusive collective pronouns). However, all of the uses of exclusive collective pronouns are, in fact, people who may be seen as aligning *with* TFA (i.e. TFA participants, recruitment teams, graduating seniors, and people who want to do good; see Table 4). Therefore, even in the case of exclusive pronouns in this article, readers are encouraged to align alongside TFA. For instance, "***We*** are working essentially to build a leadership force of folks who will, during ***their*** first two years of teaching, actually put ***their*** kids on a different trajectory—not just survive as a new teacher, but actually help close the achievement gap for ***their*** kids" (Damast, 2012, emphasis added). There is a sense that the 'we,' TFA as an organization, and the 'their,' TFA teachers, are collaborative; hence, if we align with one, we align with the other as well.

Table 4
Businessweek Article

We (26)	**Us (2)**	**Our (7)**	**They (4)**	**Them (2)**	**Their (6)**
TFA (20)	TFA (2)	Americans (4)	TFA participants (3)	Graduating seniors (1)	TFA participants (6)
Society (6)		TFA (3)	Recruitment teams (1)	People who want to do good (1)	

Article 3 (Slate)

The *Slate* article, about a university instructor/professor who will no longer write recommendations for Teach For America, primarily used exclusive collective pronouns (66.1%). The largest group of reference was TFA teachers, referenced by 46.8% of the total collective pronouns, 51.7% of which were inclusive due to the author's status as a former Teach For America corps member, as demonstrated in Table 5 below. Therefore, the author operates on both sides of the 'us' versus 'them' dichotomy throughout the article. Although she was formerly a part of TFA ('us'), she no longer aligns with the organization and now sees the organization as 'them,' with the only collective pronominal references to TFA as an organization being exclusive (6.5% of all collective pronouns).

Table 5
Slate Article

We (12)	**Us (0)**	**Our (9)**	**They (19)**	**Them (7)**	**Their (15)**
TFA teachers (10)		TFA teachers (5)	TFA teachers (6)	"My" students (3)	TFA teachers (5)
College faculty (2)		America (2)	Unionized teachers (6)	TFA teachers (3)	Minority community (2)
		College faculty (1)	"My" students (4)	TFA (1)	Unionized teachers (2)
		School the author worked at (1)	TFA (2)		Billionaires (1)
			Public school movement (1)		Schools / school districts (1)
					Charter school teachers (1)
					Public school movement (1)
					TFA (1)
					"My" students (1)

This article also had the greatest diversity in what was referenced by these collective pronouns. For example, 'their' (15 tokens) was used to represent nine different entities (i.e. TFA teachers, minority community, unionized teachers, billionaires, schools/school districts, charter school teachers, the public school movement, TFA, and the author's university students). References to the author's university students and to unionized teachers each accounted for 19.5% of the exclusive collective pronouns. However, these references were not negative. For example, "The unionized teachers at my school were the opposite of everything TFA told me ***they*** would be—***they*** were profoundly skilled, committed to ***their*** students…" (Michna, 2013, emphasis added). Similarly, "My students generally have little to no experience or training as teachers, but ***they*** are lured by TFA's promises that ***they*** can help close the education gap for children in low-income communities" (Michna, 2013, emphasis added).

In both of these instances, TFA is negatively represented. In the first instance about the unionized teachers, TFA is portrayed as deceitful; whereas, in the second instance TFA is depicted as a temptation that should be avoided. These uses of exclusive pronouns, again, function to align readers with particular ideas; however, in contrast to the *Businessweek* article, this article uses them to align readers *against* TFA.

Article 4 (The Washington Post)

The article from *The Washington Post* had the highest percentage of exclusive collective pronouns (80.6%). Of these exclusive pronouns, 40% referenced corps members, while 24% referenced TFA as an organization (see Table 6). The heavy use of exclusive pronouns in this article acts to emphasize that TFA ('they') are the opposition, something to be fought and defeated. Of the few inclusive pronouns (6 tokens) used in this article, 83.3% were ambiguous. Rather than marking group membership (Hart, 2010, in Velásquez, 2013), these inclusive pronouns were used to blur the lines, making it hard for readers to understand exactly who 'we' signifies. For instance:

> ***We*** are not talking about a longer TFA summer institute. Nor are ***we*** talking about college- and university-based programs that rigorously use data or more tightly link coursework with practice teaching. Instead, ***we*** have a war of words—and in this case, a war in which the ***words are almost entirely divorced from*** the realities of practice (Strauss, 2013, emphasis added).

The collective entity being represented by 'we' is hard to identify; furthermore, the phrase "words are almost entirely divorced from" acts to delete the agent by using the passive. It could be argued that the author is implicitly referring to teacher preparation, or even education reformers; however, the lack of clarity here acts to hide exactly who the social actor is in this "war of words." Fairclough (2000) stated, "[T]he concept of 'we' is slippery. This fact can be used by text producers and politicians to make vague statements and conceal power relations" (in Machin & Mayr, 2012). The previous quote from the *Washington Post* article is a testament to the slipperiness of 'we.'

Table 6
Washington Post Article

We (6)	**Us (0)**	**Our (0)**	**They (12)**	**Them (5)**	**Their (8)**
Ambiguous(5)			TFA (5)	Corps members (2)	Corps members (6)
TFA (1)			Corps members (2)	Curriculum Materials (1)	Education reformers (1)
			Words (2)	TFA (1)	Curriculum Materials (1)
			Arguments (1)	Society (1)	
			Education reformers (1)		
			Teacher preparation (1)		

Image Analysis

The four articles and the TFA website contained 7 images total. The first of these images, Images 1 and 2, derive from the TFA website. Image 1 is a banner on the website's 'Our Organization' page, and it shows two smiling African American students and an overlay with a brief description of the organization's vision. The children in this image connote students, based on the context of the image and the dress of the children in what appears to be collared school uniforms. Any teacher or other features of school have been excluded.

In the text, TFA, implied using the inclusive pronoun 'our,' states that its vision is that "one day, all children in this nation will have the opportunity to attain an excellent education," thus implying that TFA is working to serve this purpose. The size of the text used is larger to describe "Our Vision," which places TFA as more important, in terms of size, than the children they serve. According to Machin (2007), overlapping, as occurs with the text box of the vision that covers a portion of the face of one of the children, can be a form of foregrounding (p. 154), which again suggests that TFA should be prioritized over its students.

Image 2, also located on the TFA website, is a chart entitled "Corps Size and Students Taught." According to Machin (2007), scientific drawings and images, even with a high degree of abstraction, seem to have high truth values, as they show "the essence of how things work" (p. 58). In this chart, viewers first find a disproportionate scale, where the units used for teachers and students are not comparable, and while the two charts appear to overlap, the graph of students appears larger because the distance from 0-10,000 is the same distance as 10,000 to 100,000. The initial marker of 0-1,000 is the same as the intervals of 2,000 up to the 10,000 mark. In addition, while the data can be determined as up-to-date as of September 2013, the source from which this data was gathered is excluded. Because the researcher or research organization is excluded, one cannot determine the credibility of the source, nor can one follow up on what is presented in the chart by seeking out more information from the original survey or research.

In the article by *USA Today*, in which TFA teachers are described as having the potential to be the best teachers, there is one image used, Image 3. In this image, viewers see a female teacher of color working with a female student of color. The two are interacting with each other, and their gazes do not meet that of the viewer, thereby making this an "offer" photo, where "the viewer is able to look at the represented person as an observer. They are not called upon for a response" (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 124, in Machin, 2007, p. 112). Thus the viewer is "offered the images as information available for scrutiny" (Machin, 2007, p. 112). This image denotes school with mathematics posters on the wall, the presence of both student and teacher, and the student seated at a single person school desk. However, the teacher is casually dressed, which is not always common for depictions of educators. Viewers also see the teacher in a position of power and authority, both hovering over and looking down upon the student. This image, however, does not match the content of the article, as the article emphasizes TFA's success with students of secondary mathematics, per a Mathematica research study, and the student appears much younger than one of a secondary school. The image is not a stock photo, used in general to describe the article's content; rather, it is an original photograph, taken for an article on TFA or education. However, it was chosen to represent a context which it cannot accurately or authentically depict.

Another image of a TFA teacher in the classroom comes from the *Businessweek* article of an interview with Wendy Kopp, the organization's founder and CEO. The article does not

emphasize classroom teaching as a component of TFA, but Image 4 appears as the article's primary image, as it is situated above the text in a larger size than the other visual representation. The image also denotes a TFA teacher, this time a male teacher of color, interacting with a group of students of color. The students are seated in a grouping of single person desks, and the teacher stands above them, offering a high-five to one of the students, again in a position of power. This teacher is dressed in a collared shirt and tie, connoting professionalism and high status. The students appear in a group, and the teacher is the individual, which also demonstrates his higher status (Machin, 2007, p. 118).

Image 5, which also appears in the *Businessweek* article, is an image of Wendy Kopp. While her interview is the focus of the article, her image appears more as a component of text, and is smaller is size and lower in the article layout than the image of the male TFA teacher (Image 4). From a Google Image search, it was determined that this was not a stock photo, but instead a photo taken and used for the purposes of this article or taken and reserved for an article such as this. The image denotes Wendy, who appears well-dressed in a blazer and jewelry. The image's close shot signifies a close social relationship between Wendy and viewers of the image (Machin, 2007, p. 116). She looks slightly upward and reaches her hand out, and according to Machin and Mayr (2012), individuals, such as politicians, "might be represented looking upwards to lofty ideas and to high status and downwards when they are worried" (p. 72). Her forward reaching hand also signifies strength and forward movement.

Another image of Wendy Kopp appears in one of the articles that positions itself against TFA in *The Washington Post*. Thus Image 6, which is also a close shot of Wendy Kopp, is used to represent the article's message of TFA's changing teacher preparation program, which now more closely aligns with traditional university-based teacher preparation programs. The image appears to be candid rather than posed because Wendy appears to be in the midst of speaking, with slightly pursed lips and raised eyebrows, which conveys a lack of control. While the image is a *Washington Post* original, as can be determined from their logo that appears in part as a background to Wendy Kopp, it can not be inferred as original to the purpose of this article. A Google Image search revealed that the image had been used for multiple articles in *The Washington Post* related to TFA.

The final image of this analysis, Image 7, is a stock photo from Fotosearch categorized under the search terms "happy teacher in school classroom." It depicts a female teacher seated in the front of a classroom. Her students are all female and are seated in rows facing her, as is typical in a traditional classroom. Both her position at the front of the classroom and the position of other actors away from the viewer give her power as the head of the classroom. This image is used to represent an article in opposition to TFA, where a professor shares her experiences that inhibit her from producing letters of support to TFA applicants that have not formally studied education. However, this image is of particular importance because it does not represent neither the university classroom, as the students are too young, nor the TFA classroom, where students of color are the primary population.

Discussion

Perdue, Dovidio, Gurtman, and Tyler (1990) stated, "Collective pronouns such as 'we' or 'they' that are used to define people's ingroup or outgroup status are frequently paired with stimuli having strong affective connotations. As a consequence, these pronouns may acquire

powerful evaluative properties of their own" (in Gaertner & Dovidio, 2007, p. 114). In this multimodal semiotic analysis, the researchers found that the pronominal collectivization of TFA was supported by the visual stimuli found in the articles analyzed. According to Veltri (2010), "Teach For America teachers are presented as a collective entity in their new communities. In this capacity, a corps member's view of 'self' seems secondary to their organizational affiliation" (p. 69). This was realized in the texts analyzed as no current Teach For America teacher was ever mentioned directly by name, including Mississippi's Teacher of the Year, a second year corps member (Damast, 2012). Only one former TFA teacher, speaking out against the organization, was nominalized (Michna, 2013).

Across the texts, however, other social actors are mentioned by name, including outside educational scholars and researchers. Furthermore, in the images, teachers were always shown with students. Only Wendy Kopp, the organization's founder and CEO appears as an individual, demonstrating that she is more important than both students and teachers. This dichotomy of individualization and collectivization reinforces the power hierarchy present within TFA as an organization.

Seemingly inconsequential images of teachers working with students, when paired with mention of the achievement gap (Damast, 2012), a notoriously racialized subject, become strongly affective for viewers. In the two images of teachers with students from the articles that depict the organization positively (Image 3 and Image 4), both teachers and students are people of color. According to the TFA Annual Report (2011), 34% of TFA corps members in 2011 identified as people of color (i.e. Latino, African American, Asian, multi-ethnic). In the 2011 TFA Annual Letter, the organization states, "In particular, we value the perspective and credibility that individuals who share the racial and economic backgrounds of the students with whom we work can bring to our organization, classrooms, and the long-term effort for change" (p. 5). However, according to TFA (2012), more than 90% of the students TFA serves are African American and/or Latino.

Walker Johnson (2012) posits that neoliberal policies shift the purposes of schooling from democratic purposes to those that are more economic, further emphasizing differences in racial and socioeconomic statuses of students and teachers. This plays out in several ways, including the formation of charter schools, an increased emphasis on test preparation, and a reliance on merit pay to hold teachers accountable. Lipman (2011) adds:

> Urban schools are wound up in privatization, public-private partnerships, demands for union 'flexibility,' teacher merit pay schemes, and mayoral takeovers, along with high stakes testing and restricted democracy… There are also new forms of racial containment and regulation of students of color (public military schools, strict discipline schools, zero tolerance discipline policies) (p. 47).

Teachers and students, alike, are disenfranchised by these policies, their free will taken away by a narrow focus on student achievement scores, scripted curricula, militaristic school policies, and an emphasis on competition. However, all too often, these policies lead to a cycle of blaming the victim. Harvey (2007) expresses that "individual success or failure are interpreted in terms of entrepreneurial virtues or personal failings… rather than being attributed to any systemic property" (p. 65-66). This feature of neoliberalism is consistent with the recently popularized "no excuses" mentality often associated with charter schools and TFA. Students' shortcomings,

although sometimes reflected back on the teacher, are ultimately viewed in terms of personal, and more broadly, cultural, deficits.

In sum, while TFA may be making a concerted effort to match teacher demographics to those of the students served, the images analyzed over-represent and romanticize how well this aim is being achieved. Furthermore, the intentional choice of inclusive, collective pronouns in TFA's discourse masquerades as democratic, attempting to mask their pro-market, economic orientation. This charade promulgates neoliberal ideology. Lipman (2011) suggests, "Reframing the neoliberal education discourse is a critical aspect of fracturing the hegemonic alliance that supports it" (p. 163). Critically examining how the media is used to substantiate neoliberal ideals is the first step towards this reframing.

Conclusion

Overall, this multimodal semiotic analysis has found that pronominal collectivization, especially through the use of the inclusive pronoun 'we' to represent TFA and its affiliates, is used to align readers alongside particular ideas (Machin & Mayr, 2012), creating a positive representation of TFA in the national media. According to Perdue et al. (1990), "these words (we, they) can potentially increase the availability of positive or negative associations and thereby influence beliefs about, evaluations of and behaviors toward other people, often automatically and unconsciously" (in Gaertner & Dovidio, 2007, p. 114). The consequences of these ideological underpinnings go largely undetected by media consumers; therefore, this analysis demonstrates the importance of analyzing texts to determine how text producers use lexical choices and visual representations to manipulate text consumers.

While this study analyzed a small corpus, the limited texts allowed for a thorough, initial analysis of the media representation of TFA. Future research should make use of a larger corpus in order to more fully examine how TFA's media representation shapes public perception of the organization. Furthermore, the authors of this study are currently examining the same corpus for market and venture philanthropy rhetoric in order to further explicate neoliberal ideology. Additionally, alternative media outlets should be examined to determine if and how TFA is depicted.

The results of this study hold powerful implications for critical media literacy and teacher education. As teacher educators themselves, the researchers believe that university students, both those formally studying education and those with an interest in education, must be given the necessary skills to become critical consumers of all media, and more specifically media surrounding TFA. In settings where access to first hand knowledge of TFA is limited, students often gain their understanding of the organization through media consumption, and the bias of the source may be undetected and subconsciously align students for or against the organization. As teacher educators, this is particularly important in working with pre-service teachers, who may see the organization as a solution for 'failing' schools and challenging student populations. They are often drawn to TFA because it promises to provide quality education to underserved populations while also offering incentives to members of its teacher corps, such as student loan deferment. However, what they fail to realize is that TFA is not seeking individuals who have studied education but rather scholars from other disciplines.

This analysis of TFA and its representation in the media demonstrates the importance of analyzing texts to determine how text producers use lexical choices and visual representations to

manipulate text consumers. Through seemingly innocent use of pronouns, the media effectively collectivizes and individualizes social actors. This acts to align readers either for or against TFA as an organization and solution to challenges in the current system of education in the United States. The purposeful pairing of visuals with text reinforce the underlying message of the articles. Examining the media through a critical lens uncovers what is left unsaid.

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