Talking about educating teachers: neoliberal rhetoric and the teaching profession since 1983

Aleena Malik

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Talking about Educating Teachers: Neoliberal Rhetoric and the Teaching Profession since 1983

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Abstract

In 1983 the National Commission on Excellence in Education published a report entitled *A Nation at Risk*. This report expressed deep and urgent concern for the quality of education in the US and its effect on the country’s standing as an international economic power. This report coincided with a rise in neoliberal, market-based reforms which seeped their way into the world of education. In the wake of this report and of increased support for free market competition in education, teachers have absorbed a large amount of the blame for the perceived failure of American public schools. These trends have resulted in a pervasive mistrust of teachers as professionals. Extensive reform and policy measures have been taken to mitigate the professional autonomy and decision making power of teachers, leading to an ongoing devaluation of the teaching career and of teacher education. This paper explores the relationship between neoliberalism and the progressive deprofessionalization of the American teacher. I ask: How does the global neoliberal marketplace shape rhetoric around teacher professionalism in the United States? And how does this manifest itself within the realm of teacher education? The programs analyzed are Teach for America (TFA), an alternative teacher preparation program, and the Master’s in Teaching program at the University of San Francisco (USF MAT), a traditional university-based certification program. Language employed on the TFA website undermines the teaching profession while language employed on the USF MAT website strives to frame teachers as professionals, like doctors or lawyers. The narrative about teachers that TFA provides fits nicely with neoliberal logic but the narrative provided by USF contradicts that logic. To conclude, I consider the edTPA as a controversial move toward increasing teacher professionalism and revitalizing teacher education. And finally, I offer several thoughts about the future of teacher education in the United States.
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Chapter I: Introduction

About a year ago I was working twice a week in a second grade classroom in a Poughkeepsie City public school. On both Mondays and Wednesdays, I arrived at 10 a.m., right after the students had a computer lesson in another part of the school. I often beat the students and their teacher back to the classroom and had to wait at a child-sized table in the hallway. On these occasions, I would often hear the goings on of the other second grade class, whose teacher I had mistaken for my cooperating teacher on my first day. Unfortunately, the reason I could hear what was going on in that classroom was because that teacher spent most of her time shouting. I still remember standing by that child-sized table one day, dumfounded, as a student ran from that neighboring classroom. She pulled her coat from the hooks on the wall, and attempted to hide underneath it as she cried. Her teacher immediately burst from the classroom, pulled the coat away from her, and screamed at her to return to the classroom. The student pleaded that she wanted her mother and, after the teacher made it clear that her mother would not be coming, she exclaimed that she wanted to be in a different class. At that moment all I could think was that I seconded her wish.

When my cooperating teacher finally arrived, with a single-file line of smiling faces trailing behind her, she unlocked her classroom for snack time and we began with our usual small talk. She asked after my major. I told her that I had a major in Educational Studies but that I had not yet decided on a career path. She responded, quite matter-of-factly, that if I decided to teach that I should “go where the resources are.” I thought of the teacher in the classroom next door and of that student, there in that place where the resources certainly were not.

We often talk about teacher burnout due to strict accountability measures and micromanagement. We often hear teachers blamed for the current “failing” state of American
public schools, such as those in Poughkeepsie. We often hear the teaching career degraded, considered a back-up option or an easy intermediate step for recent college graduates. We do not, however, hear very much about how our teachers are educated or about the possibility, and necessity, of reform in teacher education programs. We do not tend to hear about the incredible, and sometimes unpredictable, complexities that exist within the teaching profession, which classroom teachers manage daily. We do not often hear our teachers acknowledged; we do not thank them enough. This lack of critical examination of how we prepare and treat our teachers reflects a larger trend in education research and the broader American culture of disrespect for teachers.

One of the most common words we use when speaking about education reform today is “neoliberalism.” I argue that we must use neoliberalism, a free-market based capitalist ideology, as a way to understand what has happened to teacher preparation and professionalism in this country. Further, I contend that this must be done with consideration of the global neoliberal economy. Little research directly explores the intersection of neoliberalism, teacher education, and the effects of neoliberal teacher education models on the teaching profession. While the literature that does exist sometimes implicitly or briefly discusses teachers as professionals, on par with doctors or lawyers, it does not deeply explore the relationship between neoliberal education reform and the language of teaching as a profession, like medicine or law.

Additionally, the true gravity of rhetoric often goes unrecognized, but as Lipman (2004, p. 11) states: “Policies are, in part, discourses – values, practices, ways of talking and acting – that shape consciousness and produce social identities.” Rhetorical analysis presents incredible opportunity to dissect unspoken opinions, norms, and ideologies. In this piece, I seek to answer the following question: How has the global neoliberal marketplace shaped rhetoric regarding
teacher professionalism in the United States and how does this manifest itself through teacher education?

In order to find this answer, I will first explore the historical progression of neoliberal teacher education reforms beginning with the 1983 national report *A Nation at Risk*. I will then move to a close examination of how the language used by TFA and the MAT program at the University of San Francisco, a traditional certification program, frame teachers and their professional identity. I will close out with a brief deliberation of a recent development in teacher professionalism, the edTPA, and some final thoughts on the future of the teaching career in the United States. Through this exploration I hope to achieve two goals. First, to illuminate how the undermining of teachers as professionals and the undervaluing of teacher preparation have interacted with each other to create and sustain the image of teaching as an unskilled career. Second, to expose the reader to the importance of teacher education and professionalism in the struggle for equitable education.

*Review of the Literature: Neoliberalism in Education*

Neoliberalism has been a popular topic of study in political science, economics, and the intersectional field of political economy for many years, in line with its rapid emergence as a central ideology in both global and national policy making circles. The doctrine of neoliberalism is understood as an economic ideology that promotes deregulation and competition as the most important factors in creating an efficient national economy. In order to assure that the market is able to function in this way, a central authority, such as the state, must protect the individual’s basic right to compete in the free market (Apple, 2001; Lahann & Reagan, 2011). Historically, many academics characterize the rise of neoliberalism as a response to the perceived failure of Keynesian welfare state, which promoted state-interventionist social welfare projects and became popular in the Western world following the destruction caused by World War II (Hursh,
Neoliberalism transforms all sectors of public life in a manner counter to the welfare state. From healthcare to education, neoliberalism seeks to replace universal, tax-funded, government-subsidized programs with various private competitors in each field. The main idea is that the ability of the individual to choose the best product or service for themselves will naturally, and positively stimulate the economy. Non-governmental transnational actors, such as the World Bank, have widely declared the adoption of neoliberal economic strategies as necessary for economic growth in developing countries, and neoliberal education reform shapes a large part of this agenda (Lipman, 2004; Robertson, 2012; Weiner, 2007).

Since the 1980’s in the United States, and several other developed nations, neoliberal education reforms have emerged as a supposed step toward bettering the country’s standing in the international knowledge economy, which is also neoliberal in nature (Robertson, 2012). Powell and Snellman (2004, p. 2004) define the knowledge economy as “production and services based on knowledge-intensive activities that contribute to an accelerated pace of technological and scientific advance as well as equally rapid obsolescence” and they explain that “The key components of a knowledge economy include a greater reliance in intellectual capabilities than on physical inputs or natural resources.” What then, does neoliberalism look like in the world of K-12 education, and how does that meet the goals of the United States to be a top competitor in the international knowledge economy? Much research has been produced in the interest of answering both of these questions and, additionally, in the interest of analyzing the effect of neoliberal education reform on schools, students, and teachers.

David Hursh (2004, p. 607) argues that the goals of neoliberalism in American education are: “to prepare students for the globalized workforce more efficiently, to introduce markets and competition to education, and, if possible, to eliminate public education altogether by privatizing
The first goal that he identifies relates to the concept of economic competition at the international level, which since roughly the 1970’s has embodied free market ideology and which progressively relies more heavily upon knowledge based work. The second goal that he explains, introducing the market to education, encompasses a multitude of education reforms including: the introduction of top-down accountability measures, altering teacher preparation requirements, increasing K-12 school choice through voucher programs, private and charter schools, and the privatization of support services, such as tutoring. The third goal he discusses is derived from the nearly impossible requirements set forth by the Bush administration, specifically the No Child Left Behind act (NCLB). Hursh asserts that such requirements must be meant to fully privatize education through a slow process of turning over failing public schools to charter networks and other private groups. He explores these goals using a city level (Chicago) analysis, a state level (New York) analysis, and a national level analysis using NCLB as the main example. His Chicago analysis draws heavily on the research of Pauline Lipman (2004) who has done extensive work in the field of education as a social science, specifically regarding the interaction between the economy, urbanity, and education.

Lipman’s (2004) book *The new political economy of urban education: Neoliberalism, race, and the right to the city* opens with a concrete example of a Chicago public school closure that resulted in its transformation to a charter school. She then outlines the relevant history of the rise of neoliberalism in the United States and provides a crucial analysis of the neoliberal ideological agenda. She, as well as Michael Apple (2001), discuss how proponents of neoliberalism have had to shape neoliberal policies as the only option, or as a new type of common sense, in order to gain clout. In short, neoliberals present their policies as politically neutral policies that universally reward individual effort and merit; and in a country that many
believe to be free of systematic forms of oppression, such as racism or classism, this seems like a fair, honorable system of personal social advancement (Apple, 2001; Lipman 2004). The assumption that policies can be apolitical is key to understanding neoliberalism in education and the language of meritocracy that often accompanies it.

Susan Robertson (2012) proposes that neoliberal policies of transnational governance actors have caused a shift in who controls what it means to be a teacher away from the local level to the global. This means that it is these governance actors, not governments, who now define what teaching should look like. Lipman (2004, p. 13) differentiates government from governance and posits that governance, not government, is indispensable to making neoliberal policies: “The shift from government by elected state bodies and a degree of democratic accountability to governance by experts and managers and decision making by judicial authority and executive order is central to neoliberal policy making.” Robertson, grounding her work in the theory of Basil Bernstein, locates governance of teachers in the current global neoliberal political economy, or the field of symbolic control as Bernstein names it, within the public pedagogies of UNESCO, the OECD, the World Bank, and the ILO. She argues that these organizations, in line with the neoliberal ideal that competition will yield the best possible results in educational outcomes, have each developed their own outlines of what a competent teacher looks like and of how to create such a teacher. She explains how they have constructed their own legitimacy through self-promoted research and publicity and have since used that legitimacy to impose their ideals on member nations, which Lipman (2004) notes often involves coercion for economically developing countries.

Neoliberal education policies do not exist untouched by other political ideologies, according to Apple (2001, p. 182) who proposes that modern changes in who controls education
and how they control it fall under the larger umbrella of “conservative modernization.”

Conservative modernization, he argues, consists of “neoliberal market-based reforms, neoconservative reforms involving strong central authority, and new middle-class emphases on technical and managerial solutions to moral and political problems” (p. 182). Regarding the third point about managerial approaches to morality, he explains the difference between “thick” and “thin” morality. “Thick morality” is that which is based upon consideration for the common good, while “thin morality” is based upon concern for the individual and necessitates hierarchy (Apple, 2001, p. 190). The concepts of thick and thin morality directly reinforce Lipman’s consideration that the neoliberal project intends to change the soul, or social consciousness, of societies: “The neoliberal project is not only to change how we think, but who we are” (Lipman, 2004, p. 11). Apple (2001) discusses that proponents of neoliberal and neoconservative reforms point to an imagined past of cultural hegemony and free market glory in order to justify socially conservative policies and reforms. While much, if not all, of the ideology of said imagined past seems contradictory to rhetoric of equity and equality, those are the exact principles that neoliberal education reforms explicitly aim to foster in schools. Albeit, the underlying reasoning here is not necessarily that all people deserve quality education because all people are of equal value to society, but rather that in order to compete in the global economy, the United States must have the most bountiful and most well-prepared workforce. Apple (2001), along with a large number of other scholars, explains that despite these outward claims of reform for equitable education, the reality is that neoliberal education reforms, at any level, actually exacerbate preexisting societal inequalities and shift public funds away from public goods, as is shown collectively by the literature reviewed above.
Review of the Literature: Teacher Education in the United States

Teacher education is one of the many spheres of education that neoliberal policies and organizations have deregulated in the interest of improvement through free market competition. Every aspect of teacher education, from its design to the eventual effectiveness of in-service teachers from various programs, has been heavily investigated. The pertinent examination of teacher education for the question at hand concerns various styles of teacher certification programs and their rhetorical and practical relationship to teacher professionalism.

The prevalence of alternative teacher certification programs, those which are not based in a university setting, has been on the rise in the United States since the 1980’s (Shen, 1997). Jianping Shen (1997) conducted a policy-based study in the 1990’s to determine whether or not alternative certification programs had been delivering on their promises in their first decade of broad popularity. These promises included that alternative programs would alleviate the shortage of qualified teacher in urban districts, especially in science and math, that they would create opportunity for those with other professional experience and subject matter knowledge to enter teaching, and that they would increase opportunity for people of color and older individuals to become teachers. Shen (1997) concluded that while more alternatively certified teachers did seem to teach in urban schools, in math and science fields, and come from marginalized backgrounds, they did not tend to come from other professional fields and they generally had fewer academic qualifications than traditionally certified teachers. The study also identified a number of concerns with alternative certification tracks that to this day remain contentious points of debate. For example, the study found that these programs lead teachers not to consider teaching a life-long career and that they place teachers with low academic and pedagogical qualifications with students who most need qualified and experienced teachers (Darling-
Hammond, 2000; Labaree, 2010; Shen, 1997). The equity issues related to alternative certification and fast-track programs will be explored briefly in the next section.

Grossman, Hammerness, and McDonald (2009) propose a restructuring of teacher education that would adequately reflect the complexity of teaching as a practice. They argue that the several historical divisions in traditional teaching preparation programs have hindered teacher education from reaching its full potential. These divisions lie between theory-based foundation courses and practice-based methods courses, as well as between classes held on university campuses and fieldwork in K-12 schools. The overlap of these divisions with a public preoccupation with subject matter knowledge and common belittling of pedagogical theory have diminished the importance of clinical practice during training for pre-service teachers. (Grossman, Hammerness, & McDonald, 2009). The success of alternative certification programs as they exist today depends on this societal desire to produce teachers with strong subject matter knowledge without spending much time or money on pedagogical training. Authors like Grossman, et. al., Darling-Hammond (2000), and Labaree (2000, 2010) do not undermine the importance of subject matter knowledge, but they do emphasize the importance of spending time learning the art of teaching.

In *Teaching for America’s future: National commissions and vested interests in an almost profession*, Linda Darling-Hammond (2000) explores the ways that positive changes have come from the policies that the National Commission of Teaching and America’s Future (NCTAF) have encouraged with regard to regulating and professionalizing teacher education. She points to NCTAF’s unique approach to disseminating information, engaging with various stake-holders, and cultivating unconventional policy relationships as the reasons for their success with many state partners. She advocates that we set standards for the accreditation of certification programs:
“Standard settings is at the heart of every profession. When people seek help from doctors, lawyers, accountants, engineers, or architects, they rely on the unseen work of a three-legged stool supporting professional competence: accreditation, licensing, and certification” (Darling-Hammond, 2000, p. 173). She claims that such regulation would actually improve decentralization and localization of control over teachers, as opposed to the global governance of teachers that Robertson (2012) has observed. According to Darling-Hammond (2000), this would allow society to trust teachers once again as competent professionals. The idea of whether or not to create such professional standards has become particularly salient following the introduction of the edTPA, or Teacher Performance Assessment. The edTPA, a test akin in function to the legal bar examination, has been both celebrated and opposed by teacher educators since its introduction (Au, 2013). The edTPA, as well as its relationship to and deviation from neoliberalism, will be discussed in Chapter V. The body of literature that deals with the neoliberal economic and political issues of deregulation and competition within teacher education through alternative, privatized, and fast-track certification programs will be discussed in the next section.

Review of the Literature: Neoliberalism in American Teacher Education

Neoliberal policy making and business-minded social entrepreneurs have changed the American perception of who can be a teacher and what it takes to teach well. Apple (2001) believes that the neoliberal reforms which have taken hold in K-12 schools, such as rigid standardized testing as the ultimate measure of student achievement and teacher performance, are the very same reforms that affect teacher education. He contends that one must examine teacher preparation in order to fully understand how market-based accountability reforms affect students in school. He further claims that to study the United States context alone is inadequate...
because neoliberalism has influenced various reform movements in other Western nations as well. He presents examples of market-based reforms in England and New Zealand, which have also been unsuccessful in their claims to support equality for students: “Paradoxically, they have a negative, not a positive, effect on the performance of schools with large working-class and minority populations” (Apple, 2001, p. 189). Weiner’s (2007) analysis of neoliberalism in teacher education, which she locates as a “unique threat” to teacher education, also looks at global trends in order to understand policy changes in the United States. She explains that the World Bank discourages most teacher preparation in developing countries because the labor in the major industries of developing countries typically requires little education “teachers who are themselves well educated or skilled, those who have a significant amount of education and professional training, are an un-needed and costly encumbrance” (Weiner, 2007, p. 278).

The United States shares the perception of teacher education as an “un-needed and costly encumbrance,” but for a different reason under a unique set of circumstances. The American dismissal of teacher preparation stems from an entrenched belief that teachers need only have subject matter knowledge in order to produce high-achieving students, and therefore “pedagogy and education in pedagogy are irrelevant – even deleterious – because otherwise capable people are kept out of teaching because they lack training in education and teachers waste time and money on spurious degrees” (Weiner, 2007, p. 278). This logic overwhelmingly dominates the discourse of proponents of alternative teaching certification.

The assumption upon which alternative certification is based and that which it perpetuates through marketing practices and public pedagogy, is two-fold: first, that subject matter knowledge is necessary to teach and, second, that common sense and natural ability satisfy as pedagogical training. Both Weiner (2007) and Apple (2001) contend that free-market
motivated competition in teacher education, as embodied by alternative certification programs, has harmed teacher professionalism in the classroom by depicting teacher training not only as unnecessary, but also as an impediment to encouraging the nation’s best and brightest to lead in classrooms.

Teach for America (TFA) is by far the most well-known, and most widely-lauded, alternative teacher preparation program. The amount of scholarly research and the number of popular media articles both in support and in opposition to TFA’s mission and its outcomes is astounding. Many academic and journalistic studies about the organization focus specifically on the relationship between TFA and neoliberal education reform. Randall Lahann and Emilie Reagan (2011), themselves both former TFA corps members, argue that rather than falling strictly into line with neoliberal politics, TFA belongs to a “progressive neoliberalism.” They explain that TFA is founded upon five basic assumptions. Three of these are traditionally market-based and managerially-minded neoliberal assumptions, while the other two are socially progressive in nature. In short, they argue that TFA through progressive neoliberalism “demands an active commitment to the politically and economically equitable outcomes of education,” but in the end they do concede that TFA focuses much more attention on the first three of their guiding assumptions, which have more to do with business than with education (Lahann & Reagan, 2011, p. 15). Other scholars fervently disagree with the idea of a progressive neoliberalism. They argue that market-based reforms are agents for social reproduction, and thereby are inherently repressors of social justice, meaning that market competition in education and educational equity, are in fact, mutually exclusive (Apple, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 2004; Weiner, 2007). Darling-Hammond often calls attention to the fact that the students who most
need qualified teachers are those who are subjected to the teachers with the least training due, in large part, to alternative certification programs.

Labaree (2010) has explored how in the current landscape of competition for potential teachers, an outcome of market-based reforms, TFA enjoys a huge advantage over traditional certification programs. He explains that “TFA is a marvel at marketing, offering elite college students a win-win option: By becoming corps members, they can do good and do well at the same time” (Labaree, 2010, p. 48). The “do good” half of TFA is that which involves serving the nation’s most under-served and under-resourced students. The “do well” half, then, comes from the elite status of TFA corps members who end their two years of service with a very high level of prestige and a vast network of equally prestigious alumni with whom to connect as they move into their desired career (Labaree, 2010). This picture of a highly ambitious college student with aspirations beyond teaching as the ideal teacher reflects the deprofessionalization of classroom teachers that Weiner (2007), Apple (2001), and Lipman (2004) and many others have explored.

Outline of Chapters

Chapter I has introduced the research question for this paper and provided a review of relevant literature, identifying a lack of research surrounding the rhetoric of teacher professionalism in the light of neoliberal teacher education reform. Chapter II will provide a socio-historical background for neoliberalism and related reforms while offering definitions of various types of teacher preparation programs. Chapter III provides an in-depth look at the promotional materials on the TFA and USF MAT websites. Chapter IV analyzes the rhetoric from these materials in light of the ideologies explored in Chapter I and Chapter II. Chapter V offers an explanation of the edTPA as a result of both neoliberalism and professionalization efforts which will lead to final conclusions, implications, and thoughts for the future.
Chapter II: A Brief History of Neoliberal Trends in Teacher Education

In the last chapter, I explored relevant literature concerning neoliberalism, teacher education, and the fate of teacher professionalism as it hangs in the balance between the two. This chapter lays out a brief history of neoliberalism in teacher education and explains the teacher education market. This market is the background for the following two chapters, which will analyze the presence or absence of neoliberal logics in the promotional materials of Teach for America and the Master’s in Teaching program at the University of San Francisco.

1983: A Nation at Risk

*A Nation at Risk*, a report from the National Commission on Excellence in Education, investigated the effect of the public education system on the decline in American international influence. The report explains the “risk” and then addresses the shortcomings of four areas of education which have put our nation in this unfavorable global position and also proposes a list of recommendations specific to each of the four areas addressed. The four areas are: content, expectations, time, and teaching.

The urgent tone of the report expresses deep concern for the future of the United States as an educational, technological, and economic world power. It states that “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” (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 13). The alarmist nature of the report and its self-proclaimed status as “an open letter to the American people” created panic amongst many citizens. This panic has been the driving force, at times explicitly and at times implicitly, behind institutionalized attacks on U.S. public schools and the public teaching force for over thirty years now (Slater & Griggs, 2015). But what aspects of the report lead to these economic and political attacks on public
schools and their teachers? What do these attacks look like; how do they embody neoliberal ideology? What effect have these broader educational reforms had on the way that the U.S. prepares its teachers as professionals? And how have changes in teacher preparation, teacher professionalism, and the American perception of public school teachers affected our nation’s students? These questions will be addressed throughout this chapter in order to lay a groundwork for the textual analyses of Teach for America (TFA) and the University of San Francisco teacher preparation programs, which will come in following chapters.

Neoliberal Logics and A Nation at Risk

A Nation at Risk justifies itself using several underlying logical assumptions and one very important rhetorical technique. First it must be noted that the report bases itself in the idea of a growing “knowledge economy” or “information age” as the driving factor behind technological advancement and the global economy (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983; Powell & Snellman, 2004). It follows, then, that education is a key component of American success in such an international economy. Using this rationale, every American with a poor education or no education at all is a lost economic asset and therefore, all Americans must receive high quality education. From this conclusion comes one of the strongest and most long-standing pieces of rhetoric in education reform, and particularly in neoliberal education reform: all students must receive a quality education, regardless of identity. This logic and its accompanying rhetoric of equal education is encompassed in the following passage:

Knowledge, learning, information, and skilled intelligence are the new raw materials of international commerce and are today spreading throughout the world as vigorously as miracle drugs, synthetic fertilizers, and blue jeans did earlier. If only to keep and improve on the slim competitive edge we still retain in world markets, we must dedicate ourselves
to the reform of our educational system for the benefit of all – old and young alike, affluent and poor, majority and minority (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 15).

A second logical assumption embodied in *A Nation at Risk*, which complements the narrative of equal education for all in theory if not in practice, is that education must be isolated from culture, politics, and social issues. In other words, education should be a neutral endeavor and our schools have been failing precisely *because* we have asked them to address “personal, social, and political problems that the home and other institutions either will not or cannot resolve” (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 14). This assumption is as integral to general neoliberal ideology as it is to the recommendations provided in *A Nation at Risk*. In the words of scholar Pauline Lipman (2013, p. 10), “Neoliberalism is an ideological project to reconstruct values, social relations, and social identities – to produce a new social imaginary.” The neoliberal social imaginary describes a world in which every human being in the United States begins their race at the same starting line and therefore has equal chance of success. The imaginary ignores systematic identity based oppression that people of color, women, differently-abled folks, and economically-disadvantaged students faced, among many others. According to this highly exclusionary world view, a free market is the only fair way to ensure that those who deserve success achieve it and those who do not deserve it are not wrongfully rewarded. It is crucial to understand this perception of equality and neutrality to understand the trends in education reform and teacher education reform that followed the publishing of *A Nation at Risk*. It is also crucial to understand the inaccuracy of this perception in order to understand why these reforms have hurt, not helped, our teachers and our students.
A Nation at Risk explained its findings about our public schools’ shortcomings and made recommendations for their improvement based upon the aforementioned neoliberal logics and social imaginary. Notably, the report’s recommendations were directed not only at public schools but also at private schools, parochial schools, and institutions of higher education, though public education is the focus of this piece. This uncritical amalgamation of these very different school categories reflects the larger theme of “commonality” that the report stresses prior to outlining its recommendations, “Nevertheless, there remains a common expectation: We must demand the best effort and performance from all students, whether they are gifted or less able, affluent or disadvantaged, whether destined for college, the farm, or industry” (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 32). Such rhetoric envelopes the neoliberal dedication to the conception of meritocracy, which in turn complements an unwavering belief in the power of the free market to produce the best possible outcomes through unregulated competition.

The Evolution of Teacher Preparation since A Nation at Risk

Prior to the 1980’s in the United States teachers sought certification nearly exclusively in university programs due, in part, to the fact that the vast majority of states did not accept other forms of certification. In 1986, only 18 states, just over a third of the country, allowed alternatively trained teachers to work in their school districts. By 1992 that number had jumped to 40 states, or 80% of the country (Shen, p. 276). This transformation correlates strongly with the publication of A Nation at Risk and with the tide of reforms that followed in its wake. Along with the shift in certification regulations, the United States also experienced several shifts in who oversees pre-service teacher recruitment, training, and credentialing as well as in-service teacher accountability, support, and professional development.
Bales (2006) evokes the image of two teams playing tug-of-war in order to explain historical shifts between state-lead control of teacher education and control lead by the United States federal government. Robertson (2012) might argue that a third team, consisting of international and transnational non-state actors, has added a vertical axis to this teacher-control-tug-of-war scenario. The final section of this chapter will explore the addition of this third axis.

Bales argues that state governments and the federal government compete for control over teacher education because they consider that high quality teachers are vital for increasing educational achievement: “At the core of this particular policy problem is the assumption that teacher quality contributes to student achievement and some authority out to be accountable for assuring that level of quality” (Bales, 2006, p. 397). It follows that what state governments and the federal government are indirectly fighting for is the right to define what makes a good teacher and what constitutes high student achievement. The national government published a number of reports and relevant research during the 1980’s, including *A Nation at Risk*, but most of the control over recruitment, training of pre-service teachers, and career development of in-service teachers remained with individual states (Bales, 2006, p. 399). While many states wished to enact stricter regulations for incoming teachers, those experiencing teacher shortages began to accept alternatively certified teachers.

Shen’s 1997 study about goal attainment of alternative certification programs, discussed in Chapter I, concluded that while alternative certification policies had helped to decrease teacher shortages and increase the number of racially diverse teachers, they did not hold up to their promises of attracting teachers from other professions or of increasing the academic qualifications of teachers. Furthermore, he found that “a lower percentage of AC teachers treated teaching as a lifelong career than did TC teachers” (Shen, 1997, p. 281). When alternative
certification programs began to gain ground in the 1980’s there existed no overarching policy with regard to their existence or their requirements, but edging into the 1990’s, around the time of Shen’s study, the national government had begun to try to homogenize the nation’s requirements for public school teachers. As these initiatives evolved throughout the 1990’s, via bodies such as the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), the national government pushed to organize education reform at all levels. The government centered these initiatives around student achievement outcomes, which it measures using standards, testing, and accountability measures, and which it uses to assess teacher quality (Bales, 2006, p. 402).

The trend of gauging the quality of the American education system through student performance has persisted since the 1990’s. International tests such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) have brought this trend to the international stage. Member nations use their students’ scores on these assessments as benchmarking tools to compare themselves to their peers. In theory, this information then translates to effective educational reforms. Indeed, as Robertson argues that international testing and benchmarking prove that control over education today truly lies at an international level. Even so, no one seems to agree on what teacher quality looks like or on how it can be measured. This will be addressed in the final section of this chapter as well as throughout the paper.

*Teacher Preparation Programs Defined*

Throughout this paper I will use several terms, defined below, to describe three of the various ways in which teachers today can earn certification. First, “university-based teacher education” refers to teacher certification programs that occurs in a university setting with a
mixture of theoretical training and clinical practice. These programs are associated with a local public school district for the fulfillment of student teaching practicums. Students who graduate from these programs sometimes simultaneously fulfill the requirements for a master’s degree.

Secondly, “fast-track certification” or “boot-camp certification” are broad terms which can explain two different types of certification programs with a few common characteristics: “fast-track certification requires less formal preparation prior to paid teaching, and emphasizes on-the-job training rather than theoretical knowledge of the university classroom” (Nygreen et al., p. 101). The first type of fast-track program is university-based fast-track teacher preparation. Fast-track university programs differentiate themselves from traditional university programs by minimizing program length and time dedicated to developing theoretical knowledge. This system maximizes student turnover, which increases tuition payments to universities and builds the teacher workforce more quickly. Many of these programs last for only one year. Part of the pressure to keep preparation programs short stems from cuts in government funding for higher education, part from outcry about a shortage in the public teaching force, and part from the need to compete for students. The second category of fast-track certification is “alternative certification.” A variety of non-profit organizations, from online universities to non-profit companies such as Teach for America (TFA), fall in this category. They offer shortcuts to begin teaching with little to no pedagogical training or expansion of theoretical knowledge.

Market Competition in Teacher Education

The market for teacher education consists mainly of the three types of programs defined in the previous section. Traditional university-based programs, fast-track university programs, and alternative certification programs like TFA all compete for the same prospective teachers. For the remainder of the paper I will focus on the MAT (Master of Arts in Teaching) program at
the University of San Francisco (USF) as the main example of traditional university teacher education and Teach for America (TFA) as the main example of an alternate certification program.

Labaree (2010) posits that universities struggle to convince pre-service teachers that it is worthwhile to invest more time and money in a longer, more holistic, program when alternative career paths can result in quicker employment. TFA, he argues, largely due to its prestige, perfectly exemplifies how alternative certification programs easily out-compete traditional university programs for pre-service teacher candidates. The following passage summarizes his argument:

TE [teacher education] programs are in a hopeless position in trying to compete with TFA for prospective students. They cannot provide students with the opportunity to do well, because they can offer none of the exclusiveness and cachet that comes from being accepted as a TFA corps member. Instead, TE programs are cursed with a deeply rooted reputation for being the safety option (I can always teach) for college students who are less talented and less ambitious. And to make things worse, these programs require a substantial investment of student time and money just to become certified, whereas TFA corps members only need to attend an all-expenses paid summer boot camp before vaulting into the classroom. Sure, teaching has always offered students the chance to do good, to devote themselves to public service and social improvement, but this opportunity is less entrancing to prospects when presented as a lifelong career instead of a 2-year tour in the teacher corps. (Labaree, 2010, p. 49).

TFA promises that “corps members,” or those who teach with TFA, can both “do good” work and “do well” for themselves by being part of their elite program. The market in which
TFA competes with universities sits at the intersection of the neoliberal global marketplace and American preoccupation with dominating that marketplace. To proponents of neoliberalism, sitting at this intersection not only makes sense but also seems like the only reasonable way to simultaneously uphold American international standing and improve American education. Critics, however, maintain that this intersection supports an “assault” on teacher education and only further undermines the potential success of low-income students, students of color, immigrants and children of immigrants, and English Language Learners (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Lipman, 2004; Sleeter, 2008; Weiner, 2007).

These critics contend that minimizing necessary qualifications for pre-service teachers, shortening training programs, and inadequate time spent student teaching have led to a devaluation not only of teachers as professionals but also of the necessity of learning how to teach. Sleeter (2008) notes that teacher education can and should be criticized from within the field in order to build stronger programs but that criticisms which have come from outside of professional educational circles, from economists or the government or for-profit testing organizations, “have their origins in global, economic and political restructuring” and “aim not only to deprofessionalize teaching by devaluing professional preparation of teachers, but also to undermine equity and democracy by restructuring education around corporate needs” (Sleeter, 2008, p. 1947). There is a large body of education researchers and reformers who share this perspective that neoliberal reform in education is nothing short of an attack on equity, democratic education, and the overall belief that education is a public good (Hursh, 2004; Lipman, 2004; Sleeter, 2008; Weiner, 2007; Zeichner, 2010).

Both neoliberal reformers and critics espouse rhetoric of educational equity in their respective arguments, but the two schools of thought hold different beliefs about what equity
means. For neoliberal reformers, equity and equality are interchangeable concepts that rely upon each student having uniform materials, uniformly certified teachers, and uniform tests to take in order to hold teachers and schools accountable for student achievement. These reformers see teaching as natural rather than as a skill that requires development. Therefore, neoliberal reformers push for high-achieving “elite” college graduates to enter the teaching workforce with minimal training because such students, considering their own academic achievements, should sensibly be the best teachers and the best resources for students. And if these teachers are the best resources for students, and students are the nation’s best form of capital in the global market, then these teachers are also an indispensable resource for the American economy.

Critics of neoliberal education reform see equity as something that must be actively sought through learning how to differentiate a basic education based on what students need the most. For example, students with different abilities, different socio-economic statues, and different linguistic, racial, and cultural backgrounds will all learn differently, hold different values, and require acknowledgement of the validity of their learning styles and value systems. To best serve students then, these reformers believe that teachers must learn and practice the art of teaching. This includes subject-based pedagogy as well as proper techniques around differentiation, cultural relevancy, and multicultural pedagogical techniques. Fast-track and alternative models of teacher education, which severely reduce or else eliminate instruction and practice surrounding pedagogy in order to minimize training time prior to their students assuming full-time paid teaching positions, contradict this vision of educational equity.

**Summary**

This chapter has explored the issues of neoliberal education reform and the resultant teacher preparation market in the United States. The history outlined here has illuminated the
converging trajectories of global economic competition, neoliberalism, and a surge in alternative certification programs. My analysis unearths several ways in which the neoliberal philosophies have shaped the different types of teacher preparation programs which have grown out of them.

The next chapter will describe in detail promotional materials from a traditional university based teacher preparation program at the University of San Francisco as well as those from Teach for America’s most recent recruitment campaign. Following that, in Chapter IV, there will be a detailed analysis of the discourse that each of these programs use in their promotional materials within the context of neoliberalism.
Chapter III: Exploring Promotional Materials

In this descriptive chapter I will walk you through the online promotional presence of TFA and the USF MAT program. This chapter will include screenshot images as well as a detailed narrative description of my journey through each program’s website. Throughout the online research process, I collected screenshots and handwritten notes as data in order to discern patterns in word choice, phrasing, and tone that might reveal the ideological underpinnings of TFA and USF. Chapter IV analyzes each program’s promotional discourse, as described here, with an eye to how the language employed by each program either fits within or contradicts neoliberal perceptions of the teaching profession.

I began with a Google search of each program. From there, I surveyed the entirety of the first page of search results and followed the link for the page or pages that appeared to be the most relevant and informative. I acknowledge that there are countless ways in which one can approach internet searches, but I attempted to conduct the search as if through the eyes of a prospective candidate. It is also important to note that all online materials, from Google search results to social media profiles, are subject to rapid change. All materials captured below, images and text, were accessed in February and March of 2017.

Google Search: TFA

A Google search for “teach for america” yields well over 9 million results in under one second (accessed February 2017). On the right hand side of the browser sits a badge (Figure 1), powered by Wikipedia, with the TFA logo-slogan “One Day, All Children” written in a blue and white box in the right upper corner. In the left upper corner of this badge “Teach For America” appears written in black with the words “Nonprofit organization” beneath in grey text. The Wikipedia badge offers several hyperlinks which lead to: the TFA website, pages about the
headquarters and founding of the organization, and four social media profiles. These social media profiles include: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Google+.

![TFA Wikipedia Badge in Google](image)

*Figure 1. TFA Wikipedia Badge in Google*

I conducted this search a few days prior to the final deadline for the 2016-2017 application cycle. Accordingly, the first result, a sponsored page demarcated by a small green “Ad” box next to the web address, reads “Teach for America - Students Need Leaders Like You.” It displays two smaller links with information about how to apply to the program and where corps members, or TFA teachers, can work.

Including the sponsored page, TFA self-published four of the top five results Google search results. The first hit besides the sponsored page, the second hit overall, is TFA’s official website with the simple title “Teach for America” underneath which sits a search bar that can be
used to search within that website. When application deadlines are not looming, this hyperlink holds the first result spot. There are also six direct hyperlinks offered underneath that search bar which are titled “About Us,” “How to Apply,” “Is TFA for You?” “Teach for America – New York,” “Apply to Teach,” and “Where We Work.” The third result, TFA’s Twitter account, shows a scrolling bar with the latest six tweets from the organization. The fourth result is the Wikipedia page for TFA and the fifth result is the organization’s Facebook page.

Results six through ten come from a variety of sources, from Slate to The Atlantic. Their tone differs drastically from the results promoted by TFA (Figure 2). The blue hyperlinked text of these results as well as the grey preview text below each link relay negative sentiments toward TFA. For example, the sixth result claims that TFA censors the ability of former employees to criticize the organization and the tenth claims that TFA is built around lies.

Figure 2. TFA Google results 6-10
At the very bottom of the first page of results are eight suggestions for searches related to “teach for america.” The format of each suggested search is the same, beginning with “teach for america” and ending with one new search term to help yield more specific results. The suggestions include: “teach for america salary,” “teach for america deadlines,” “teach for america requirements,” “teach for america reviews,” “teach for america acceptance rate,” “teach for america locations,” “teach for america loan forgiveness,” and “teach for america criticism.”

**Google Search: USF MAT**

A Google search for “university of san francisco MAT” yields between 9 million and 12 million results in under two seconds (accessed March 2017; Figure 3). Seven links appear on the first page of results, all of which are affiliated with the university although only three of them directly relate to the correct combined Master’s degree and Credential programs for which I intended to search. No social media profiles appear on this page and no badge exists on the right side of the browser, instead there is only open white space. The first available hyperlink reads “Teaching MAT with Credential – University of San Francisco.” While there is no special search bar for this link, there are six direct links presented underneath some descriptive grey text: “Credentials,” “Urban Education & Social Justice,” “Admission,” “Scholarships & Aid,” “Faculty,” and “Program Details” (Figure 3).

The second search result links to the broader USF School of Education website and the third hit takes you to a list of all the possible “Master’s / Credential Programs” at USF. The fourth result has to do with the university’s campus in Sacramento, the fifth is titled “Dual Degree in Teacher Preparation – University of San Francisco,” and the sixth concerns itself with information about application requirements. The seventh, and final, result on the first page provides general tuition information for graduate programs at USF.
The eight suggested searches at the bottom of the results page vary in their relevance to the MAT program at USF (Figure 4). Two of the suggested results are quite close to the spirit of the original search: “usf teaching credential program” and “school of education usfca.” Both of these searches relate both to USF and to its graduate school of education, which is the school that offers the Master’s and Credential programs. One suggested search relates to the correct university but not necessarily to teaching or education: “university of san francisco doctoral programs.” Two of the suggested searches relate to education and teaching credentials but not to the university in question: “sf state school of education” and “ucsf teaching credential.” The final two of the suggested searches are quite broad but, even so, they relate to the pursuit of master’s degrees in education or teaching: “best masters in education programs in california” and “combined masters and teaching credential programs.”
Following the Links: TFA

Curious about the ad page at the top of the TFA results, I chose to click on that link before going to the organization’s official homepage. It takes me straight to a recruitment page where I am immediately struck by the image of a twenty-something woman with long, dark hair standing in front of a chalkboard upon which a single mathematical equation is written. Across her waist, in giant bold white font, are the words “Join Teach for America” below which hangs a blue banner that reads, in smaller white font, “Begin your legacy.” On the right side of that banner is a yellow tab: “Apply Now.” As I scroll further down the page I am called upon, in entirely capital letters, to “BE A FORCE FOR CHANGE” and am ensured that “Students deserve your passion” (February 2017; https://www.teachforamerica.org/join-tfa). At this point on the page there have been several calls to action and catchy, inspiring phrases but I still have not learned very much about TFA as a program or about what my role would be as a corps member. Differently colored backgrounds and well-coordinated headings in bold text divide the page into segments. This vibrant, colorful style prompts me to continue scrolling without paying much mind to the lack of information provided so far.
Following yet another call to action and promise of personal benefit, I arrive at the first informative section of the webpage. It section reads “LEAD A CLASSROOM” and states: “In the classroom, you'll be challenged to think creatively and lead boldly--growing every day as a problem-solver while living your most deeply held values.” I am offered three hyperlinks to other pages with further information: “Discover what it’s like to lead a classroom,” “Learn about your training and support,” and “financial benefits and aid” (February 2017, https://www.teachforamerica.org/join-tfa).

The next two sections on the webpage seem to be about life after TFA; one boasts that of the latest Forbes 30 under 30 are TFA alums, and the other claims that “Your future is bold.” The latter of these two sections displays photos and current career titles of TFA alumni; I notice that while some of the people featured in this section have remained in education, through educational programming or charter school leadership, none of them are still classroom teachers or even working in traditional public schools (February 2017, https://www.teachforamerica.org/join-tfa).

Before the page ends, two final sections appear. Both of these sections consist entirely of links to other parts of the TFA website. The penultimate section, “Start your future,” focuses on providing information about the application process. The final section, “Learn more,” speaks for itself and includes a special button for those who wish to “Get involved on campus.” Getting involved on campus refers to various opportunities that undergraduates have to recruit for, promote, and volunteer with the organization before they become even eligible to apply as corps members. These buttons mark the end of the recruitment campaign webpage. I return to the Google search results to click on the link for the official TFA homepage.
The homepage, almost more striking than the recruitment page, has a light blue banner across the top of the browser with a bold white drawing of a clock set to 9 o’clock and white text that reads “4 Days Left to Submit Your Application for the Final 2017 Deadline.” In all bold on the right side of the browser, in the same banner, it reads: “6th Deadline: Mar. 3, 11:59 pm EST” (February 2017, https://www.teachforamerica.org/join-tfa). As I scroll further down the homepage the banner follows me, always sitting at the topmost part of whatever section I have begun to read. I realize that I can close the banner and quickly do so as I find it distracting.

The standard navigation bar for the TFA website and one high-resolution image of a TFA alum now dominate my screen. To the left of her face, in the bold white text which I have come to expect from this website, it reads “Where Justice Begins” (February 2017, https://www.teachforamerica.org/; Figure 6). There are two white arrows on either side of the image which prompt me to scroll through three additional photographs, all alike in spirit. Each features a TFA alum, a few inspirational words, and a call to action – a call to join the corps (Figures 6 – 9).

Figure 6. TFA Homepage Photograph No. 1
Greatness Awaits
Be among the most diverse, remarkable leaders of your generation empowering our children to lead our country forward.

Figure 7. TFA Homepage Photograph No. 2

Realize Your Boldest Ambitions
Students need leaders like you. What will be your legacy?

Figure 8. TFA Homepage Photograph No. 3

Be on the Front Lines of Change
Step into a classroom. Put your talents to work to disrupt inequality and understand the systemic problems that need solving.

Figure 9. TFA Homepage Photograph No. 4
The following segment on the homepage features a picture of a yellow pencil, sharpened to a dramatic point, with several curly pencil shavings adorning the white background which all frame the question “So Why You?” (Figure 10). Three statements answer this question. The last one stands out in its bolded font: “You are ready to be part of something big.” I notice that none of three statements mention a desire to teach.

![SO WHY YOU?](image)

**Figure 10. TFA Homepage Segment: So Why you?**

As I scroll past this section, a thick blue banner appears at the bottom of the browser suggesting that I should join the TFA email list. In a similar fashion to the application banner that I encountered at the top of the page earlier, it follows me until I elect to close it with the small white “x” in the upper right hand corner. Once I reach the bottom of the page I realize that I still do have the option to join the mailing list thanks to a permanent blue box in the bottom left hand corner of the browser.

However, there are still four more panels to scroll through before I reach this box. The first panel, claims that greatness awaits me should I choose to work for TFA. The next one, about double the size of the majority of segments on the homepage, emphasizes alumni achievements once again. I recognize some of the faces from the “Your Future is Bold” section on the recruitment page. The design of this segment reminds me of the opening sequence of *The Brady Bunch*, with each alum in their own square, except the center square which simply reads: “You’ll
join an extraordinary, diverse network 53,000 strong tackling inequity from every sector” (March 2017, https://www.teachforamerica.org/).

The next panel, “The Power of Place,” is once again standard size. It features images of several communities out of the 53 in which TFA operates. Underneath this places feature is the final segment of the homepage. This segment, similar in size to the last alumni feature, is labeled “Our Work in Action” and it features a number of TFA-published and TFA-affiliated press articles. Above the photos with links to the articles that, each of which boasts a category label of some sort, sit the words “26 years. 53,000 leaders, 53 regions, Millions of kids. Together, we are working alongside families and communities to open the doors of opportunity and empower the next generation.” Below this section a dark grey banner, adorned with the AmeriCorps logo and links to the website’s privacy policy, indicates that I have reached the end of the homepage (March 2017, https://www.teachforamerica.org).

Following the Links: USF MAT

When I access the first Google search result for “university of san francisco MAT” it directs me to the section of the USF School of Education page for the “Teaching Master’s Program with Credential” (March 2017, https://www.usfca.edu/education/programs/masters-credential-programs/teaching). The header at the top of the browser, thinner and less crowded than that of TFA, is branded with the University of San Francisco logo (Figure 11).
Since the specific program that I am researching is only one of many programs within the School of Education, and because the School of Education is only one of many branches attached to the University of San Francisco, I must carefully navigate the website in order to ensure that the information I gather relates to the program of interest. This concern did not surface while browsing the TFA website.

The title of the section is written in bold white text across an image of a teacher who looks directly at you, seated in front of a colorful, overcrowded chalkboard. Below this text, in smaller white font, it reads: “Learn to be politically informed and democratically engaged curriculum decision makers and designers who think critically about educational purposes, perspectives, and practices” (Figure 12).

The remainder of the page below the title and eye-catching photograph takes much less time to scroll through than does the TFA page.

Below the photograph the page offers a brief description of the program, touting a focus on curriculum design, critical thinking, and maintaining one’s educational values, “The Master’s of Arts in Teaching (MAT) program focuses on curriculum. We engage in critical study of historical and current controversies that shape what is taught in classrooms today. Teachers learn
to design curriculum that embodies their educational values and provides all students access to powerful learning opportunities” (March, 2017, https://www.usfca.edu/education/programs/masters-credential-programs/teaching).

Underneath this are four color-coded hyperlinked rectangles: an orange box which allows you to request more information, a magenta box which will assist you if you wish to attend an open house, a green box from which you can apply to the program, and a teal box with tuition information. Below these boxes are the final two sections on this webpage which encourage you to learn more about program faculty and newly hired math and science education scholars.

To the right side of the page are eleven tabs, contact information for the School of Education and a black box labeled “Find Us Online” with icons for Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Instagram, and Flickr. The eleven tabs connect to pages about “Program Details,” “Credentials,” “Bilingual Authorization Certification,” “Learning Outcomes,” “Admission,” “SFUSD Discount Rate,” “Scholarships & Aid,” “Careers,” “Internships,” “Students,” and “Faculty” (March 2017, https://www.usfca.edu/education/programs/masters-credential-programs/teaching).

I followed the “Program Details” tab first and then the “Learning Outcomes” tab to achieve a better understanding of the expectations and requirements of this teacher preparation program. I realized that, due to TFA’s prestige and large media presence, I had not needed to pursue much information about the structure of the program. I knew that the obligation of the corps member began in the summer prior to teaching for two years at a placement school, most likely in an urban setting. When it came to USF, however, I had no idea how long the program would be, what kind of classes and training would be required, or how long it would be before I actually entered a classroom as the teacher of record.
I discovered that it takes three semesters and anywhere from 34 to 40 credit hours in order to earn a Master’s and either a Preliminary Single Subject Credential or Preliminary Multiple Subject Credential. The university also offers the chance to earn Bilingual Authorization in Spanish in conjunction with the Master’s / Credential track. Evening classes are offered Monday through Thursday and day classes are offered on Saturday. Student teaching begins in the second semester with two days a week at the partner school; the third semester requires a five-day week in the placement school (March, 2017, https://www.usfca.edu/education/programs/masters-credential-programs/teaching/program-details).

Prospective teachers have three “strands” to choose from within the MAT and Credential program at USF: Teaching for Diversity & Social Justice, Learning & Teaching/Development, or Curriculum & Instruction. These strands differ slightly in focus but the core requirements, structure, and spirit of all three programs exist within the goal of the School of Education: to prepare teachers with strong professional identities who engage critically with their craft and their students in order to best serve all children. Even though only one strand uses the words “diversity” and “social justice” in the title, the program considers these aspects to be inextricable from teacher education and these concepts therefore permeate all three strands (March, 2017, https://www.usfca.edu/education/programs/masters-credential-programs/teaching/learning-outcomes). The top of the “Program Details” page offers four bullet points in an effort to describe the overall spirit of the teacher education experience at USF (Figure 13).
The USF website lacks the distinct thematic segmentation and memorable marketing phrases that TFA utilizes, but these four bullet points seem to be the most comparable branding strategy to that found on the TFA website. The final bullet of these four promises reads: “Vision that emphasizes humanizing relationships, democratic participation, and critical inquiry” (March 2017, https://www.usfca.edu/education/programs/masters-credential-programs/teaching/learning-outcomes). This powerful phrase resembles the tone of TFA’s many calls to action.

I visited the “Career” tab on the sidebar because, while the TFA website emphasized TFA alumni so greatly, I had yet to learn anything about graduates of these programs at USF. At the top of this page, below the word “Careers,” it states that “Graduates of the Teaching MA are educators who work in a variety of settings. Most are public and private school teachers” (March 2017, https://www.usfca.edu/education/programs/masters-credential-programs/teaching/careers). Next appears a list of school districts and the names of several private schools, all within California, that currently employ program alumni. The final feature of this page, a large orange box containing an embedded video and some white text, reads: “Alumni Teacher Inquiry Group.”
The box contains a description of the group attributing its inception and implementation to alumni of the program, and it explains that “Through collaborative inquiry the group’s main focus is improving teaching practices by fostering best practices communication among group members” (March 2017, https://www.usfca.edu/education/programs/masters-credential-programs/teaching/careers).

Cost Benefit Analysis: TFA vs. USF MAT

Finally, I searched for information about financial incentives or drawbacks associated with TFA and the MAT programs at USF. In order to learn about pay, benefits, and cost related to TFA I clicked on the “Parents, Family, & Friends” option next to the “Is TFA for You?” tab under “Join TFA” in the header. In this section, I found some Frequently Asked Questions, or FAQs (March 2017, https://www.teachforamerica.org/join-tfa/is-tfa-for-you/parents-family-friends). The FAQs reveal that TFA-affiliated school districts consider corps members as standard full-time employees. Therefore, they receive the same salary and same benefits as any new teacher who
joins the same district. In addition to receiving a stable salary with benefits for two years, and the promise of a highly influential professional alumni network, TFA corps members are AmeriCorps members. In addition to eligibility for loan forbearance during their term of service, AmeriCorps members earn a $5,645 education award at the completion of each year served (March 2017, https://www.teachforamerica.org/join-tfa/is-tfa-for-you/parents-family-friends).

In order to learn about pay, benefits, and costs related to the MAT program at USF I clicked on the teal “Tuition” box on the homepage. The value of tuition per credit varies depending on whether a candidate pursues a Master’s, a Doctorate, or a credential alone. For the Master’s program, tuition currently costs $1,130 which comes out to $38,420 total for a 34 credit course of study and $45,200 for a 40 credit course of study. To earn a credential without a Master’s the tuition per credit is $955 (March 2017, https://www.usfca.edu/education/admission-aid/tuition). The school does offer a variety of scholarships, a discount for long-term substitute teachers and emergency-credentialed teachers in the San Francisco United School District (SFUSD), and a discount for students who are part of the San Francisco Teacher Residency (a long-form alternative certification program). However, only so many candidates meet eligibility requirements for any one of these forms of aid or have the knowledge, resources, or ability to access this aid.

Summary

This chapter has provided rich, narrative descriptions of TFA and USF MAT’s websites. I have placed emphasis on their materials targeted toward prospective candidates for each program. Materials presented include: text, screenshots, and videos produced by the programs or on behalf of the programs. The following chapter will synthesize the logics of neoliberal reform in teacher education, discussed in Chapter II, and the rhetoric of the self-promotional materials of TFA and the MAT program at USF, presented in this chapter.
Chapter IV – Analyzing Promotional Materials

This chapter looks to situate the language and underlying logics of TFA and USF MAT within the framework of American teacher education as it has become subject to neoliberal market-based reforms. In other words, this chapter aims to answer our research question: How has the global neoliberal marketplace shaped rhetoric around teacher professionalism in the United States? How do this rhetoric and its accompanying ideas about teacher professionalism manifest themselves through teacher education?

Neoliberal Perceptions of the Teacher

As established in Chapter II, it is in the interest of the American economy to produce as many citizens capable of performing labor in the knowledge economy as possible. On the global market, jobs reliant on unskilled labor simply do not have the same economic influence as they did two or three decades ago. It follows that for the United States to maintain its competitive position in the global knowledge economy, all children must receive the excellent education necessary for them to become efficient workers in that economy. This thought process has driven education reform for over thirty years now, including reforms in teacher education and preparation.

The logic behind market-based reforms in teacher education have shaped both the nation’s perception of teachers and the nation’s priorities with regard to teacher preparation. This logic, detailed at length in Chapter II, envisions teachers as a necessary evil. We need teachers in classrooms to manage children but we cannot trust them to design curriculum, deliver creative instruction, or accurately assess student achievement because their failure in executing these tasks is exactly why A Nation at Risk became necessary. As the practice of teacher blaming continues to permeate educational reform, teachers become little more than proctors of rigid
scripts and high-stakes standardized tests accountable to groups far removed from the classroom (Apple, 2001; Au 2013; Robertson, 2012). If this is the case, if teachers are expected to be little more than adults with common sense and memory of their own K-12 experience, then the focus of teacher preparation should be to create as many teachers as possible as quickly as possible. In theory, this would address teacher shortages and high levels of turnover, thereby allowing schools to effectively produce large quantities of economically efficient citizens. Lowering expectations for teachers, minimizing pre-service preparation time, and promoting alternative means of certification all fall in line with this logic.

Critics of this particular perception of teachers point to the large body of literature that shows how thoughtful teacher training really does matter for student achievement. However, the neoliberal logic described above seems quite sound based on shared experiences of the population. Labaree (2000) explains that most people, including prospective teachers themselves, tend to question the necessity of teacher preparation programs. The every-present neoliberal perception of teachers as non-professionals creates the impression that anyone can begin teaching at any time, with or without practice and training. He contends that the professional mystery that surrounds medicine, law, and other prestigious career paths is absent from teaching for three reasons; and that this absence reinforces the idea that teacher education is superfluous.

First, due to the compulsory nature of school, all adults have spent years observing teachers and therefore believe that they understand teaching: “Their apprenticeship of observation shows them a lot about what teachers do but almost nothing about why they do it” (Labaree, 2000, p. 232). Secondly teachers’ knowledge appears to be easily accessible to any adult, they are not considered to be experts: “schoolteachers are seen as masters of what most adults already know” (p. 232). And third: “They don’t rent their expertise, they give it away. A
good teacher is in the business of making himself or herself unnecessary, of empowering learners
to learn without the teachers’ help” (p. 233). The conflation of these commonly held beliefs
combined with the pervasiveness of neoliberal logic leads to a depreciation of the teaching
profession. Thus teaching “appears to be simple action, guided either by custom (this is the way
teaching is done) or by nature (this is the kind of person I am). In neither case would teacher
preparation be necessary or even useful” (p. 232).

The remainder of this chapter delves into the language that TFA and USF use to describe
teachers and career teaching by answering the following questions: To what extent do TFA and
USF embody neoliberal attitudes about teachers, teacher preparation, and teacher
professionalism?

*TFA: Teaching as an Act of Service*

Across the United States, parents and teacher alike encourage high school students to
volunteer. This emphasis on volunteerism, community service, or service learning serves two
major purposes for the student. First, while community service hours may or may not exist as a
graduation requirement, going above and beyond this expectation is believed to look great on a
college application. Second, volunteering makes students feel good about themselves as people.
In this way, they can contribute to alleviating or solving a problem that has been publically
recognized as important.

This system reflects the “do good” for others and “do well” for yourself package that
TFA advertises to prospective corps members. For the majority of teenagers at these high
schools, participating in community service endeavors for a set number of hours allows them the
opportunity to increase their cachet at elite colleges and universities. They do good for a cause of
their choosing and they do well for themselves by gaining social advantage through their service.
The do good and do well marketing strategy of TFA, as explained by Labaree, parallels this dynamic exactly.

TFA corps members receive all the financial and insurance benefits of a school district employee in addition to national recognition as AmeriCorps service members, which comes with additional financial benefits. These financial incentives compound with the selective nature of the program and its well-intentioned social mission to create an incredibly attractive, resume-bolstering package. As Labaree (2010) and Veltri (2008) have contended based on the two-year model, I argue that TFA shapes teaching as a service rather than as a profession. I add that TFA rhetorically achieves this through use of the language of leadership, the language of impact, and the language of future to sell the idea that teaching is an act of service rather than a profession.

TFA: Language of Leadership

With the exception of the organization’s title, TFA culture regularly avoids the use of words like “teach” and “teacher.” And even then, the acronym TFA appears commonly within their self-published materials. TFA exchanges the language of teaching for the language of leadership. In fact, TFA suffers from such an allergy to the language of teaching that participants have the title “corps member” as opposed to “teacher” and everywhere that the word “teach” might logically appear has been replaced with the word “lead.” On the homepage alone, the terms “lead” and “leader” occur five times while the term “teach” appears twice (both times in reference to the organization’s title) and the term “teacher” does not occur even once (March 2017, https://www.teachforamerica.org/).

The first tab in the navigation bar, “Join TFA” provides the option to explore “Leading a Classroom” (March 2017, https://www.teachforamerica.org/join-tfa/leading-classroom). The first section of this page, with the goal of enticing prospective corps members to apply, heavily
engages with the language of leadership. The title of this page reads “Leading a Classroom Means Leading with Passion” and the subheading reads “As a classroom leader, you have the opportunity to put your unique background, strengths, and passions to work in a way that is unlike any other job” (March 2017, https://www.teachforamerica.org/join-tfa/leading-classroom). The choice to employ the phrase “classroom leader” instead of “teacher” speaks volumes about TFA’s philosophy on teacher professionalism. This philosophy, in line with neoliberal logic, deems subject matter knowledge and personal academic achievement adequate prerequisites for a teaching job.

It is only after one’s potential for leadership development has been established that TFA breaches the language of teaching. Even so, these terms only appear if one chooses to expand the information in the third section of the recruitment page or scroll all the way down to the final three sections of the page. Without expanding that menu, it is not until the fourth segment that the language of teaching begins. The language of leadership appears seven times before the word “teach” appears. Of these seven instances, four of them are instances of the phrase “classroom leader.”

TFA: Language of Impact

As Labaree (2010) indicates, and as is present in the minds of many high school volunteers, the potential for social impact is at the heart of all service projects, in inception if not in effect. TFA operates with a motto as well as a mission. Their motto, which has become intertwined with TFA branding through their self-published magazine and social media icons, is: “One day, all children in this nation will have the opportunity to attain an excellent education” (March 2017, https://www.teachforamerica.org/about-us). TFA seeks to remedy educational inequality in order to ensure this future for all children through their mission: “Our mission is to
enlist, develop, and mobilize as many as possible of our nation’s most promising future leaders to grow and strengthen the movement for educational equity and excellence” (March, 2017, https://www.teachforamerica.org/about-us/our-mission). Here, we return to the language of leadership but this time it is contextualized within the American struggle for educational equity. The broad conceptualization of the impact of corps members exists within the language of leadership and serves as the foundation for TFA’s language of future.

TFA frames the life of a teacher in a high-need classroom as a challenge to be overcome in two years. The experience, they claim, will not only change you as a person but will effect concrete change in the lives of your students: “Every day you are making small gains that produce big impacts. When a student gets his first passing score on a math quiz or reads her first chapter book cover-to-cover, these all add up to new opportunities that your students never had before. [. . . ] As a classroom leader, you have a rare opportunity to see direct impact of your hard work” (March 2017, https://www.teachforamerica.org/join-tfa/leading-classroom).

TFA capitalizes on the language of impact to prove to prospective corps members that the organization will be worth their valuable time, that their service will indeed make a difference in the battle for educational equality. TFA often comes under fire from critics who see the two-year model as a bandage solution, at best, or as an actively damaging model, at worst. In 2014, a shift in TFA rhetoric regarding their two-year model resulted in two major changes to the operation of the program as well as its marketing (Gottfried & Straubhaar, 2015). These changes simultaneously address and circumvent the issues raised by those who critique the minimal training, two-year model, and resultant high attrition of TFA teachers.

The first change came in the form of a pilot program meant to incentivize corps members to remain in the classroom beyond their second year by supporting those who take this path. The
second change is that TFA now promotes itself as “a producer of lifelong education advocates” (Gottfried & Straubhaar, 2015, p. 482). The former change addresses the concerns of critics while the latter artfully works around it. This has allowed TFA the opportunity to reinforce its language of impact by promising the impact of its corps members will reach far beyond the classroom. For two years (or more), corps members can make small, concrete changes in their students’ lives and then move on into any career field – nonprofit sector, medical sector, policy sector – where they will serve as “education advocates” in their respective fields. The message, which inherently undervalues the impact teachers can make in the classroom, becomes that TFA offers a multifaceted and sustainable approach to improving education.

Under the “Alumni” tab on the website header, there is an option for “Continuing your Impact” which takes you to a new website (https://sites.google.com/a/teachforamerica.org/continuing-your-impact/). This site lacks the color, polish, and organization of the main TFA website. The banner at the head of this website offers three ways to engage with impact: “Reflect,” “Explore ways to continue your impact,” and “Act on what you’ve discovered with our concrete tools” (https://sites.google.com/a/teachforamerica.org/continuing-your-impact/).

Figure 15 shows the “educational ecosystem” in which TFA discursively places its alumni through its language of impact and its positioning of all alumni as advocates for equal education. The language of impact on TFA’s main website would lead one to believe that two years in the classroom transform all TFA alumni, from doctors to bankers, into consistent, active agents in the quest for educational equality. As one former corps member expressed in a qualitative study tackling the question of whether or not TFA alters corps members’ initially desired career paths, “the [two year] commitment is fine, because it makes corps members into teachers, gives them enough time exposed to the problem, and then pushes them to do things that
really can close the achievement gap” (Brooks in Gottfried & Straubhaar, 2015, p. 489). At least in the case of this corps member, the TFA mission is understood through its reliance upon the language of impact, specifically impact after the corps.

The explanation of this former corps member, however, rests upon a number of problematic neoliberal logics. It treats students, who are largely students of color living in poverty, as little more than guinea pigs for corps members to use while they get a taste of the problem that is educational inequality. Additionally, this comment discredits the work of teachers by insinuating that teaching is not one of the “things that really can close the achievement gap.” Interestingly, but perhaps appropriately, the concept of “making corps members into teachers” speaks to TFA’s allergy to the language of teaching; it reinforces a harsh barrier between the superior TFA corps member and the inferior schoolteacher.

Overall, TFA frames teachers as “classroom leaders” and paints the act of teaching in high-need schools as a “challenge” to be overcome; which, in turn, creates lasting impact in the face of social inequality and prepares corps members to succeed in any future career while

Figure 15. TFA’s “Educational Ecosystem”
continuing to advocate for educational reform. The language of future builds on the implied messages of the language of leadership and the language of impact; it promises access to exclusive TFA networks that will lead to rich professional futures.

*TFA: Language of Future*

The expansive, varied, and elite alumni network of TFA, which the organization heavily advertises, only represents one of its promises for the future of its corps members. Additionally, TFA alumni enjoy benefits offered by over 100 partner graduate schools – ranging from Harvard University Business School to the University of New Mexico School of Law – as well as employer partnerships and access to TFA-alum-specific scholarships and aid (March 2017, https://www.teachforamerica.org/join-tfa/after-the-corps/grad-school-and-jobs). Similar to the cachet inherent in a degree from an elite college or university, TFA provides corps members with unparalleled access to professional networks in every career sector and they emphasize this aspect of their program relentlessly.

The segment of the TFA homepage dedicated to sharing stories of successful alumni is nearly twice the size of any other segment on that page. Under “Join TFA” there is a tab dedicated to “After the Corps” where prospective corps members can learn about specific graduate school and career partnerships, alumni network programs, and can browse a database of alumni by college, career, or location because: “Your corps experience will accelerate your success. Meet some Teach for America alumni and learn about how their experiences have shaped their impactful careers” (March 2017, https://www.teachforamerica.org/join-tfa/after-the-corps). This page exists in addition to the “Alumni” tab on the header which itself has six subsections: “Career & Leadership,” “Awards, Fellowships, & Programs,” “Community,” “Take Action,” and “One Day Magazine.”
In 2014, Heineke et. al. published a mixed methods study to tackle the issue of teacher attrition among TFA corps members. Their study surveyed 73 corps members. In 2015, Gottfried and Straubhaar published a qualitative study of 30 TFA participants in the Los Angeles region in order to assess the effect of corps service on corps members’ career goals. Heinieke et. al. found three categories of TFA corps members, labeling them based on how long they remained in the classroom: leavers (those who leave after the two years), lingerers (those who stay on for a year or two for job security or because they are unsure of their next steps), and lasters (those who remain in schools as teachers or in leadership positions). Gottfried and Straubhaar (2015, p. 493) concluded that “the general career trajectories they had envisioned for themselves before beginning TFA had remained intact during and after TFA, though specifics may have been altered.” Collectively, these studies acknowledge the wide variety of career aspirations held by TFA corps members as well as the varied experiences that these corps members have. The conclusions of these studies and the interview answers they share from respondents support the assertion that the language of future is an indispensable element of TFA’s success and that the organization tirelessly capitalizes on this in the interest of self-promotion.

TFA emphasizes soft skills that corps members can learn, practice, and master during their two years of service which, in addition to their newly attained elite status as TFA alumni, allow them to attain their original career goals. Leadership, perseverance, organization, and interpersonal skills are all highly transferable competencies that alumni can use to market themselves to whatever graduate education or career aspiration they choose to pursue after the corps and these are the skills that TFA looks to enlist and develop (March 2017, https://www.teachforamerica.org/join-tfa/is-tfa-for-you). Skills like lesson planning, classroom management, and differentiated instruction cannot transfer so easily to a medical school or law school.
application so TFA does not advertise these skills or such specific language of pedagogical training – especially because this would seem inconsistent given their assertion that a summer-long teaching boot camp is all that corps members need before school districts can hire them as full time teachers.

All in all, TFA constructs teaching as a service opportunity through use of the language of leadership, the language of impact, and the language of future. All of these languages, wrapped within ever-present neoliberal logics concerning education reform, work together to dismiss the need for highly trained teachers in favor of elite, educated, well-intentioned, college graduates with career goals that may or may not relate to education.

**USF MAT: Teaching as a Profession**

Prospective students of the MAT with Credential program do not typically, if ever, use the Master’s as a means to gain social status or as a springboard toward further education or careers other than teaching. Such candidates would likely be dissuaded by the length and cost of the program, which were detailed in Chapter III, as well as by the fact that teachers do not enjoy a culture of professional respect in this country. TFA holds a significant advantage when one considers cost, length of program, and professional prestige but USF holds the advantage when it comes to candidates who believe in the importance of teacher education. Unfortunately for USF, such candidates have steadily become rarer following decades of public teacher blaming, strict accountability reforms, and the perpetuation of a teach-to-the-test approach. The university, therefore, must not only work to make its program attractive to pre-service teachers but must also convince them of the very fundamentality of the program.

In the face of these challenges, the USF MAT website utilizes the language of agency and the language of relevance to achieve to distinct but symbiotic goals. Through the language of
agency, the university aims to frame teaching as a life-long, skilled profession which requires guidance, theoretical study, and clinical practice to execute correctly. Then, using the language of relevance, the university strives to convince the potential teacher candidate that its program is capable of providing the training necessary for that candidate to become an effective, impactful educator.

*USF MAT: Language of Agency*

Unlike TFA’s emphasis on soft skills, such as leadership and organization, USF does not shy away from the language of hard skills specific to the field of classroom teaching. Such skills include pedagogical decision making, questioning the origins and historical contexts of curriculum creation, and unit design (March 2017, https://www.usfca.edu/education/programs/masters-credential-programs/teaching/program-details). The website structures its program descriptions in a way that shows the classroom teacher as a professional with the agency and authority required to make decisions of consequence:

Classroom teachers constantly make crucial decisions about curriculum, instruction, and assessment. To be thoughtful decision makers, they need to gain a historical perspective on the conflicting movements – and the politics between them – that have shaped curriculum in K-12 schools. They need to think about how their own curricular units and lessons represent different views of what students should know and be able to do. (March 2017, https://www.usfca.edu/education/programs/masters-credential-programs/teaching/program-details).

Here, the classroom teacher receives credit for daily professional actions in the way that a doctor might receive credit for making decisions on the operating table or in the way that a lawyer might receive credit for preparing and delivering a seething cross examination. As opposed to
TFA, which actively avoids the language of teaching – and often even avoids the word “teacher” – USF treats the teacher as a respectable professional who undergoes training and refines their practice over time. Through this language of agency, USF seeks to convince the reader of two ideas about learning to teach.

The university employs the language of agency to frame teaching as a complicated practice, one which demands training if it is to be executed well. The first idea then, is that to be a teacher you must be trained. The second idea, enveloped in the language of relevance, is that the university can provide this necessary training to the candidate; and it subtly promises to do so.

*USF MAT: Language of Relevance*

In reference to the coursework, the website reads: “The courses help prepare teachers to understand and balance conflicting demands of classroom teaching. They extend teachers’ sense of themselves as intellectuals, adaptive experts, and reflective practitioners” (March 2017, https://www.usfca.edu/education/programs/masters-credential-programs/teaching/program-details). Through describing the work of a teacher as multifaceted, complex, and important USF makes its Master’s and Credential offering relevant.

Many critics of market-based reforms in teacher education (Labaree, 2010; Weiner, 2009; Zeichner, 2004, 2006) cite the neoliberal framing of teaching as nothing more than good subject knowledge and common sense as one of the most dangerous blows to education; thereby making teacher education programs irrelevant and granting a significant market advantage to alternative paths to teaching, such as TFA. USF substantiates the language of teaching with rich descriptions of teaching as a profession; describing teachers as reliable, trustworthy professionals precisely because they require the training provided by the longer, well-scaffolded university-based
preparation program.

Summary

This chapter has illuminated the relationship between neoliberal ideologies and teacher professionalism as exhibited by promotional rhetoric utilized by two different types of teacher education program. Multiple scholars have identified that the two-year model of TFA, an alternative path to teaching, shows how the organization treats teaching as a service rather than as a lifelong career. I expanded upon this notion by highlighting the languages of leadership, impact, and future that TFA uses to paint teaching as an act of service. USF, on the other hand, uses the languages of agency and relevancy to depict teachers as professionals who require the careful that its university-based teacher education programs offer.

Using these findings and the theory outlined throughout this paper, Chapter V will explore how the edTPA relates to the neoliberal narrative regarding teachers as non-professionals. Finally, with the goal of a truly equitable American education system in mind, I will offer my concluding thoughts as well as several implications for the future of teacher education and professionalism.
Chapter V: On the edTPA and the Future of Teacher Education

This thesis stemmed from a realization that teacher blaming and devaluation have become serious and enduring problems for the education system in the United States. If we want to improve our educational outcomes and compete with countries as close as Canada or as far as Japan, then we need to treat our teachers better by paying them more, providing supportive infrastructure and above all, creating a culture of respect for our teaching force. In Surpassing Shanghai (Tucker, 2011), which largely inspired my interest in teacher education, the author describes the context, history, and current educational systems of five global educational leaders: Canada, Finland, Singapore, Japan and Shanghai. Tucker outlines what the US can learn from each of these systems particularly with respect to competitive salaries, extensive training, and societal respect for teachers. As I have illuminated in this paper, the US is steadily shifting away from these three integral components of public school teaching.

At the start of this process I asked one framing question: How has the global neoliberal marketplace shaped rhetoric around teacher professionalism in the United States; and how does this manifest itself through teacher education? The previous four chapters have highlighted how, since the 1980’s, copious neoliberal, market-based reforms in teacher education have trivialized teacher professionalism by questioning the need for teacher education. In Chapter I, I explained that these reforms have steered educational priorities away from education as a public good toward education as a manufacturer of human capital. In Chapter II, I traced the history of minimizing teacher education requirements and analyzed its relationship to neoliberal reforms inspired by American economic interests on the global market. Furthermore, in that chapter I outlined several possible pathways to teaching certification: traditional university-based teacher education, university-based boot camp teacher education, and alternative certification programs.
Chapter III provides in-depth descriptions of marketing rhetoric employed by two specific teacher education programs: Teach for America and the Master’s in Teaching program at the University of San Francisco. Chapter IV analyzes these materials through the lens of neoliberal teacher education reform. This chapter will offer some information about teacher education currently, contribute some concluding thoughts, and outline some implications for the future of teacher education.

*The edTPA and the “Teacher Professionalization Agenda”*

In Zeichner’s (2006) reflections on three decades of experience in the practice of educating teachers, he identified three distinct, but not mutually exclusive, agendas held by teacher educators: the deregulation agenda, the social justice agenda, and the professionalization agenda. With regard to the professionalization agenda, there exist at least two schools of thought. The first espouses the idea that uniform standards and one nationally recognized and accepted training process, such as those present in the medical and legal fields, will elevate teaching to the status of a respected and desirable profession. The second suggests that such standards, tests, and uniform processes will cause more harm than good. Caught in the crosshairs of this debate, as I briefly discussed in Chapter I, is the Teacher Performance Assessment, or the edTPA.

A group of distinguished researchers at Stanford developed the edTPA, a performance based assessment for which student teachers create and submit a multi-media professional portfolio. Pearson Education Inc. administers the assessment though the Stanford researchers remain involved in overseeing certain aspects of it. Pearson is a well-known and highly influential player in the game of corporate education reform (Au, 2013). The edTPA’s $300 price tag and inflexible guidelines have brought the test under fire by critics of corporate and neoliberal education reform; they see the test as little more than an additional revenue stream for
Pearson. These critics further maintain that the edTPA undermines university-based teacher education by forcing teacher educators to spend undue amounts of time preparing their students to meet the specific requirements of the assessment. On the other hand, many, including Darling-Hammond who helped design the assessment, argue that the edTPA is the teaching career’s best hope for revitalization. Advocates of the assessment believe that it will help teachers to gain recognition as trustworthy professionals while simultaneously ensuring that teachers have indeed been well trained before they enter the classroom. *A Nation at Risk* and its underlying neoliberal logics continue to be the background for the larger debate about the value of teacher preparation, within which the debate surrounding the edTPA is deeply enmeshed.

**Concluding Thoughts**

Fast-track alternative certification programs and traditional university based teacher education are not only fundamentally at odds with regard to program content and structure, but they thoroughly disagree about what it means, and what one needs, to be an effective teacher. The opposing discourses presented by TFA and USF on their websites highlight these discrepancies.

Building on the argument that TFA discursively frames teaching as an act of service rather than as a profession (Labaree, 2010; Veltri, 2008), I divided the bulk of TFA’s promotional rhetoric into three categories: the language of leadership, the language of impact, and the language of future. By underscoring the USF MAT program’s language of agency and language of relevance, I revealed how the university uses rhetoric to compete with alternative programs that can offer steady work and pay much faster than traditional programs. They employ the language of agency to frame teaching as a skilled professional practice while simultaneously
utilizing the language of relevance to offer training for that skilled professional practice at their institution.

Based on the styles of rhetoric that TFA and USF engage with in their promotional materials, it becomes clear that TFA holds the dominant position in the market. Because the organization enjoys nationwide prestige, and even some international prestige through Teach For All, it does not have to work very hard to convince potential candidates to join. TFA capitalizes on its high desirability by only speaking about soft skills that corps members will hone during their time with the program. USF on the other hand, which does not enjoy such prestige, must not only detail the concrete skills and experiences that potential candidates will gain from its program, but also must work to convince candidates that it is fundamentally necessary for them to gain these skills and experiences.

The reason that TFA easily appeals to potential corps members and the reason that USF must work so hard to appear attractive is that TFA makes sense within neoliberal perceptions of the teacher while USF does not. Under neoliberal, market-based, human-capital-centered logic, student knowledge can be measured by a series of highly standardized tests, the average scores of which can then be used to measure the success of national education systems against each other. The role of the teacher, then, becomes to prepare students for these tests. From this perspective, TFA corps members are the most efficient solution to the problem posed by *A Nation at Risk* because they absorb little time, money, and resources prior to working with students. This system, in theory, maximizes production of human capital while maintaining a steady flow of teachers to remedy the high turnover rampant in the public school system.

If one follows this logic, the almost two years and thousands of dollars that go into training teacher candidates through university programs, such as the one at USF, appear utterly
superfluous. However, university programs and their supporters challenge the effectiveness of the neoliberal system as well as the very foundations of market-based reforms. University based programs allot time for pre-service teachers to learn about cultural competency, classroom management, differentiated instruction, and the art of lesson planning while also providing space for peer review, critique, and support. The underlying message about teachers present in these programs distinguishes itself from that of TFA; these programs conceptualize teachers as competent professional agents with the ability to make adroit choices in their classrooms, about their students, based on their professional judgment.

**Implications for the Future of Teacher Education**

It is important to note that the issue of teacher education remains incredibly complex and brimming with nuance. This paper addresses only two very specific programs that present two unique points of view about teacher preparation, but hundreds of teacher education programs exist in dozens of forms. It would be unwise to summarily declare that alternative certification programs are bad and traditional teacher education programs are good. Each program has particular strengths and weaknesses with regard to: providing access and support to racially and socio-economically diverse pre-service teachers, attracting people to the teaching profession, managing societal misconceptions about teaching, and producing deft educators. It would be equally naive to attempt to isolate trends in teacher education and perceptions of teachers from trends in K-12 education reform, the reputation of public education, and the proliferation of different styles of school (Waldorf, charter, magnet, parochial, alternative, etc.).

General education reform and teacher education reform must work in tandem or both will separately fall to pieces. If one reform movement seeks to work toward inclusion, creativity, and collaboration in education then the other reform movement must also take concrete steps to reach
these goals. It is not enough to name educational equality and equity as goals, as neoliberalism does, without implementing policy that effectively dismantles the systems of oppression that institutionally uphold inequality and inequity. For several decades now educational reform movements have been approaching extreme standardization, stringent discipline, competition, and privatization even in the face of opposing research and social resistance. As I have conveyed in this paper, building on the knowledge and research of many others (Hursh, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Labaree, 2000; Slater, 2008; Zeichner, 2006), training teachers to be culturally competent professionals, decision makers, and problem solvers is inextricably linked to the journey toward educational equity.

As I described in Chapter II, neoliberal language around meritocracy assumes that all students will benefit to the same degree from a stringent, standardized national curriculum which highlights only one narrative – a white, Western narrative – in schools. Reform processes have been operating under this logic since the 1980’s and our schools, students, and teachers have suffered for it; education is about expanding horizons not narrowing knowledge to one easily palatable narrative. It is time to take another look at what trends A Nation at Risk condemned, such as allowing the role of the teacher to extend beyond delivering curriculum and allowing teachers to alter their instruction with consideration for their students’ lived realities – we must again prepare teachers to take exactly these actions.

The knowledge economy still dominates the global marketplace, but it has not stagnated. If the United States wishes to continue competing in this evolving marketplace, then we must reassess what it means to create productive citizens. If we want our students to graduate as capable, flexible, and innovative young adults then we must support them in their journey to develop critical thinking skills, leadership abilities, and problem solving strategies. Teaching to
the test, rigid curricula, and burnt out teachers will not get us there. High quality teacher
education, financial support for our public schools, and respect for the profession will get us
there. After thirty years of educating teachers Zeichner concludes that:

There is a range of quality within both university-based programs and alternatives to
these programs and the research on this issue clearly shows that neither traditional nor
alternative programs have particular kinds of effects on teacher and student learning
because of their sponsorship [... ] it is the characteristics of the programs rather than
who sponsors them that matter in terms of influencing a variety of teacher and pupil
outcomes (Zeichner, 2006, p. 331).

Providing alternative teacher education programs was not in itself a poor reform, the problem
lies within the hidden logics, content, and time restraints that govern many such programs.
Furthermore, universities have not escaped neoliberal economic pressures, which combined with
a loss of prestige in teacher education departments (Nygren et. al., 2015; Zeichner, 2006), have
forced them to compromise similarly on content, time, and structure. Zeichner asserts that the
following characteristics, while not all inclusive, indicate successful teacher education programs:
“clear and consistent visions of teaching and learning that guide the program, strong integration
between instruction about teaching and clinical practice, and clear articulation of the
performance standards by which candidates’ teaching is judged” (2006, p. 331).

The next question becomes that of how we can help institutions of teacher education to
construct effective programs. Funding, research, and reform are all part of the formula which
will lead us to stronger teacher preparation and a new understanding of teaching as a complex
practice and a worthwhile career. However, this funding and research are scarce and must fly in
the face of reform which continues to build upon incorrect assumptions and harmful logics
perpetuated since the 1980’s. We must address these issues intentionally and simultaneously if we are to improve the lives and careers of teachers, thereby improving the lives and educations of our nation’s students.
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