"It Had to Work for Me as Well"

Neoliberal Subjectivities and Individual Advantage in Teach First New Zealand

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Abstract

Drawing on data from a phenomenological research study of Ako Mātatupu/Teach-First New Zealand (TFNZ), an affiliate of Teach for All, this article considers how differently positioned actors within New Zealand theorize the appeal of TFNZ as opposed to university-based pathways. Findings suggest that a multiplicity of factors influence the participants, including enticing financial incentives, the selectivity of the program, an emphasis on practice as opposed to theory, and the focus on leadership and career development. Underpinning these factors are assumptions about traditional teacher education—that it is too theoretical, too expensive, and too limiting and that it does not center equity and social justice—that impact the participants' decisions to pursue other avenues into teaching. These findings have implications not only for the field of teacher education, which struggles to define itself within and against neoliberal initiatives that are now proliferating worldwide, but also for collective efforts to address educational equity writ large.

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Introduction

University-based teacher education is contending with a profound set of challenges. As neoliberal educational reform initiatives garner unprecedented global support, alternative pathways into the profession are proliferating worldwide (Zeichner, 2010; Zeichner & Conklin, 2016). As a result, nearly 30% of educators receive their teaching licenses outside of a university-based teacher education program (National Research Council, 2010). This statistic suggests an ongoing distrust of "traditional" teacher education programs to adequately prepare educators to address educational disparities and meet the complex challenges of the 21st century. In fact, a litany of differently positioned constituencies have levied critiques against university-based teacher education: Policy makers question its relevance and the competencies of its graduates (Lyon, 2002). Accreditation agencies push for quantifiable outcomes and robust assessment data (Panayotidis, Towers, Lund, & Smits, 2016). Purveyors of alternative routes to certification lament the bureaucratic obstacles and the reliance on theory at the expense of practical experience (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2001). Potential students—especially those from elite colleges—express concerns about the perceived rigor and selectivity of university-based programs (Labaree, 2010). Even social justice advocates embedded within traditional colleges of education question the role of teacher education in reproducing societal inequities (Jones & Wolgrom, 2013), making teacher education a highly contested space both within and outside of universities.

As teacher education becomes more embattled and its efficacy is increasingly called into question, the alternative pathway program, Teach for All, which currently has network partners in 50 countries, continues to expand, often with robust support from government officials, philanthropists, school administrators, and educational reformers (Crawford-Garrett & Thomas, 2018; Ellis et al., 2016; La Londe, Brewer, & Lubienski, 2015). By leveraging discourses of equity that privilege neoliberal ideologies, emphasizing accountability, highlighting selectivity, and touting leadership development, Teach for All (and its affiliates, such as Teach for America) continues to define itself in direct opposition to traditional teacher education programs, an approach that has contributed to its success worldwide.

This article draws on data from a phenomenological research study of Ako Matatupu/TeachFirst New Zealand (TFNZ), an affiliate of Teach for All, to consider how differently positioned actors within New Zealand theorize the appeal of TeachFirst as opposed to university-based pathways. The data suggest that a multiplicity of factors influence the participants, including enticing financial incentives, the selectivity of the program, an emphasis on practice as opposed to theory, and the focus on leadership and career development—elements underpinned by a neoliberal logic that emphasizes efficiency and individual advantage over collective well-being (Harvey, 2007; Lipman, 2011). Moreover, embedded within these narratives are assumptions about traditional teacher education—for example, that

it is too theoretical, too expensive, and too limiting and that it does not center equity and social justice—assumptions that, whether accurate or not, impact the participants' decisions to pursue other avenues into teaching. These findings have critical implications not only for the field of teacher education, which struggles to define itself within and against neoliberal initiatives that are now proliferating worldwide, but also for collective efforts to address educational equity writ large.

Teach for All and Teacher Education

Founded in 2007 as part of the Clinton Global Initiative, Teach for All, an organization inspired by and predicated upon the tenets of Teach for America, counts network collaborators in 50 countries worldwide. Teach for All aims to address long-standing issues of educational inequality by recruiting talented university graduates to teach in high-poverty schools for a 2-year period, developing their leadership capacities, and then offering support as they segue into careers in other sectors, with the expectation that rectifying inequities requires a multidimensional approach (Crawford-Garrett & Thomas, 2018; Labaree, 2010; Maier, 2012; Stern & Johnston, 2013). Critics of Teach for All and its subsidiaries have cited concerns regarding how the organization depicts teachers and teaching (Crawford-Garrett, 2017; Crawford-Garrett & Thomas, 2018; Horn, 2016; Kavanagh & Dunn, 2013; Kopp, 2014; Price & McConney, 2013; Zeichner, 2010), how global discourses shape and/or obscure local contexts (Adhikary & Lingard, 2017; Ellis et al., 2016; Thomas & Lefebvre, 2018), and the ways in which marginalized students are represented by the organization (Crawford-Garrett, 2013; Darling-Hammond, 1994; Popkewitz, 1998), among others.

As it reinvents itself across a range of sociopolitical contexts worldwide, Teach for All remains particularly at odds with traditional teacher education programs, both ideologically and practically. For example, as Teach for All subsidiaries work to define the problem of educational disadvantage, the organization does so by implicating the current system (Schneider, 2014; Stern & Johnston, 2013)—a system that includes K–12 schools and teachers as well as the institutions that prepare them.

Teach for All's conceptualizations of and approaches to rectifying disparities remain distinct from those utilized in social justice–focused teacher education programs, which are predicated on preparing preservice teachers to recognize the ways in which factors like race, culture, language, social class, colonization, gender, and sexuality contribute to achievement disparities (e.g., Alismail, 2016; Cochran-Smith et al., 2016; Howard, 2006; Jones, 2006; Jones & Hughes, 2016; Kitchen & Raynor, 2013; Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008; Milner, 2017; Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2013). As such, equity-based teacher education aims to "provide opportunities for teachers to consider how social structures such as race, racism, class, and classism, shape the experience of individual students"

(McDonald, 2008, p. 154) and create conditions that allow preservice teachers to analyze the institutional structures (Gorski, 2016) that preclude families and students from participating fully in schools and classrooms.

Although issues of equity continue to be centered in the field of teacher education, important changes in conceptualizations of equity have occurred over the past several decades as neoliberal school reform initiatives gain traction in the United States and abroad. Like many nations across the globe, New Zealand has increasingly applied neoliberal logic to issues of persistent inequality by conflating educational equity with teacher quality (Ell & Grudnoff, 2013). Namely, teacher education is conceptualized as both as the cause of and potential remedy for the persistent underachievement of specific student populations (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006), a paradox that continues to place "the responsibility for improving schools and schooling on teachers and teacher educators alone, and ignores larger societal factors" (Ell & Grudnoff, 2013, p. 80). Focusing on factors like teachers and students rather than systemic inequities does little to alter social conditions and improve the lived realities—and thus the opportunities—available to historically marginalized youth.

Similar phenomena have altered the educational landscape of the United States. Yet reforms related to teacher quality, school choice, privatization, and high-stakes accountability (Ravitch, 2010, 2014)—all of which are hallmarks of a neoliberal turn—"did not develop a strong national constituency until they broadened their goals to incorporate the Teach for America–style appeal to social justice and equal opportunity" (Labaree, 2010, p. 49). In other words, until these movements adopted the discourse of equity and social justice, they were ineffective in appealing to a broad cross section of the American public. Part of the appeal of programs within the Teach for All network is the clear narrative that poor children deserve a strong education and that a good teacher alone has the capacity to remedy persistent and complex educational issues (Crawford-Garrett, 2017; Dunn, 2017). By disproportionately citing school-based (rather than societal) factors to explain disparities, neoliberal reformers rely on "thin equity" frameworks (Cochran-Smith et al., 2016). These perspectives are predicated on the notion that mastering a specific set of teaching approaches and adopting a relentless focus on student growth and achievement (Thomas & Lefebvre, 2017) will equalize outcomes for historically marginalized youth who have been subjected to a complex set of sociopolitical circumstances.

This article attempts to illuminate these tensions by highlighting the ways in which participants in TFNZ articulate their decision to join the organization in light of the perceived limitations of university-based programs. Specifically, the participants—who ostensibly are recruited to rectify inequities—instead articulate the ways in which participation in the program works to their own advantage, a notion that aligns closely with neoliberal logic. As university-based programs face low enrollment, public distrust, and a lack of investment from the public and private sectors (Zeichner & Conklin, 2016), teacher educators must analyze factors

that have made TFNZ, and programs like it, successful in recruiting participants, recognize the ways in which assumptions about university-based teacher education programs are implied in participants' decisions, and critique the neoliberal logic that has defined these efforts.

Shifting Subjectivities: Redefining the Self in a Neoliberal Age

Critical scholars across the disciplinary spectrum have documented the ways in which the global adoption of neoliberal ideology has shifted the focus from collective responsibility for human well-being to a focus on individual efficacy (Bell, 2011; Navarro, 2007; Simon, 2008). Davies and Bansel (2007), for example, argued that neoliberalism "gives power to global corporations and installs apparatuses and knowledges through which people are reconfigured as productive economic entrepreneurs of their own lives" (p. 248). This altered set of interactions implies that social behavior is reconfigured "along economic lines" (p. 249), with individual economic efficacy taking precedence over a sense of societal good. The new neoliberal subject, then, is focused on advancing his or her own personal growth and achievement at the expense of collective well-being and eliding systemic explanations for disparities in favor or meritocratic lenses (Au, 2016). Specifically, the neoliberal state is not viewed as an entity that bears responsibility for administering public goods like health care and education. Instead, "individuals, firms, organizations, schools, hospitals, parents and each individual must all take on (and desire to take on) responsibility for their own well-being" (Davies & Bansel, 2007, p. 251). Although neoliberalism increasingly operates as a state apparatus affecting macro-level policy, it also operates within us individually as we move and act within a broader system that privileges market mechanisms and reinforces individualism. As Ball and Olmedo (2012) argued, "neoliberalism is therefore both 'out there' and 'in here' (Peck & Tickell, 2002), it is realised and constituted within mundane and immediate practices of everyday life (Ong, 2007)" (p. 88). The mundane, everyday practices of neoliberalism are felt most profoundly in school and classroom contexts where the individual is celebrated for success and achievement and blamed for failure without attention to the vast array of social conditions that shape the contours of daily experience.

Thus this shift in neoliberal subjectivity manifests as attributing success and failure disproportionately to individual schools and teachers rather than conceptualizing achievement gains and disparities as endemic to systems that continue to unfairly advantage and disadvantage particular populations (Au, 2016; Gorski, 2016; Hursh & Martina, 2003). The Teach for All enterprise, in particular, has played a central role in promoting neoliberal discourses that emphasize the capacity of the teacher to rectify long-standing disparities by privileging high-stakes tests, implementing scripted programs, and focusing disproportionately on student

achievement (Crawford-Garrett, 2013; Crawford-Garrett & Thomas, 2018). Neoliberalism requires a '"new type of individual,' that is, a 'new type of teacher and head teacher' formed within the logic of competition" (Ball & Olmedo, 2012, p. 88). Specifically, teachers are recast as technicians (Zeichner, 2010) whose focus is fulfilling policy mandates rather than engaging student curiosity or fostering intellectual inquiry.

These shifting subjectivities, like all subjectivities, are created discursively (Fairclough, 2003), as reshaping of the neoliberal self is fundamentally a "language project" (Davies & Bansel, 2007, p. 253). The Teach for All discourse contributes to these shifts as it not only depicts individual educators as capable of addressing historical inequities (Crawford-Garrett, 2017; La Londe et al., 2015) but also offers participants a set of distinct advantages that compel individuals to internalize these responsibilities and imagine themselves as a heroic elite (Elliott, 2018) capable of both securing an advantageous future for themselves and fostering equity for historically marginalized populations. Thus, even as participants in the Teach for All enterprise are recruited for their presumed ability to address inequality, they simultaneously receive a robust set of advantages that further concretizes their privilege—a paradox that remains unresolved within the organization.

Research Context

TFNZ was founded in 2011 with the goal of eradicating educational inequality in New Zealand by placing elite university graduates in low-decile schools for a period of 2 years and then subsequently leveraging their leadership potential to address inequality from a variety of societal sectors. TFNZ's efforts have primarily focused on Maori and Pasifika populations, who experience a disproportionate amount of poverty and consistently achieve at levels below those of their Pakeha (New Zealand European) peers. Despite the concentrated focus on improving the achievement levels of Maori and Pasifika youths in high-poverty school contexts, the majority of recruits identify as Pakeha. The typical cohort size over the past 7 years has ranged from 15 to 20 participants. Consistent with practices of other Teach For programs, participants complete an abbreviated 7-week summer training institute,[1] which, at the time of the study, occurred in partnership with the University of Auckland.

When run in conjunction with the University of Auckland, Summer Institute focused on introducing pedagogical strategies, supporting participants in curriculum development, and promoting cultural competence as participants actively wrestled with New Zealand's colonial legacies and considered the long-standing impact on Maori and Pasifika populations—specifically related to education. Although TFNZ partnered with the University of Auckland for 6 years, the partnership proved controversial, and the faculty were essentially divided on whether it was appropriate to partner with TFNZ given the cost of implementing the program and some key

ideological differences in the approach to teacher preparation. Central to these concerns was the fact that TFNZ participants would receive their postgraduate degrees for free, while other teacher candidates would incur the regular costs. Moreover, requirements imposed by the New Zealand Education Council before they would approve the program made it untenable for the University of Auckland to continue to deliver the program, especially as TFNZ sought to expand.[2] Advocates within the University of Auckland noted that a partnership would offer TFNZ participants exposure to critical perspectives and championed the idea of placing more teachers in low-decile schools. The partnership with the university has since been phased out, and TFNZ is currently collaborating with another tertiary institution. Through its partnership with this new tertiary provider, TFNZ participants continue to receive a free postgraduate degree paid for by the organization while simultaneously earning a salary for their work in schools.

Methodology

The findings discussed in this article stem from a larger, phenomenological research study focused on the experiences of TeachFirst participants and organizational stakeholders within New Zealand. Phenomenological research centers the life histories of participants while examining specific phenomena (Schwandt, 2003; Seidman, 2005), in this case, the participants' decision to become teachers through TFNZ. To understand and document the experiences of stakeholders and participants, I used in-depth and semistructured interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Seidman, 2005; Wengraf, 2001) that offered opportunities for these constituencies to build upon and extend my initial questions. Specifically, I posed the following research questions:

> How do participants in TeachFirst New Zealand describe the organization's mission and articulate their reasons for joining TeachFirst?
>
> How do they talk about this mission in light of the broader educational context of New Zealand?
>
> How do they understand, interpret, and explain their classroom practices and approaches in light of the educational context and broader mission?

Researcher Positionality

As an American university professor and educational researcher, I traveled to New Zealand on a 6-month fellowship with the primary goal of studying TFNZ, with a particular interest in the ways in which the Teach for America model was translated to a contrastive educational context abroad. Specifically, New Zealand's legacy of colonialism and an empowered indigenous population mirrors the context in which I teach and work, and thus I was curious to explore how a Teach for All model was taken up and applied in this setting. As I established contacts and col-

lected data in New Zealand, I was struck by the range of insider/outsider positions I inhabited in the course of my fieldwork. For example, Teach for America (TFA) was the subject of my dissertation research; thus I had a high level of familiarity with the general operating principles of Teach for All programs, because most of them are predicated on the TFA model. Moreover, I possessed certain insights into the experience of being a first-year participant in these programs, and many of the teachers within TFNZ were curious to hear about my research with TFA corps members as a way to compare and contrast their experiences. Additionally, like most of the participants I interviewed, I am White and middle class, but I spent many years teaching students of color in high-poverty schools. In this sense, I understood the challenges the participants faced as they attempted to teach in culturally responsive ways in underresourced schools in urban and indigenous communities. Despite these shared experiences and my background knowledge on TFA, I worked hard to suspend any assumptions I had about TFNZ and the ways in which it was similar (or not) to TFA. Instead, I sought to understand New Zealand education from the perspectives of the study participants. This practice often involved asking detailed questions about phenomena I thought I understood—for example, Summer Institute—to ensure that I was correctly capturing the perspectives of TFNZ participants and the other stakeholders whom I interviewed.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data for the study, collected over a 6-month period from January to June 2016 in Auckland and Northland, New Zealand, consisted of formal and semistructured interviews (Seidman, 2005; Wengraf, 2001) with TeachFirst thought leaders and key personnel ($n = 3$), current TFNZ participants ($n = 16$), alumni of the program ($n = 5$), school principals ($n = 2$), university professors and leading experts in teacher preparation practices ($n = 6$), and a representative from a national teacher's union who played a key role in advocating for specific changes to the TeachFirst certification process ($n = 1$). The vast majority of study participants identified as New Zealand European. For example, of the 21 TFNZ participants and program alumni I interviewed, only three identified as ethnic minorities, and of these, only one as partially indigenous. These demographics are reflective of the broader program makeup at the time of the study. Furthermore, 9 of the 21 participants interviewed were women, and the remaining 12 were men. Interviews were typically 1 hour in length, and a variation of the same protocol was used for both participants and stakeholders with slight modifications (the appendix includes the interview protocol). All of the interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and checked for accuracy. I also used document analysis (Yin, 2003) as a supplement to the interview data, as I analyzed recruitment materials, Web sites, and other written artifacts that were produced and disseminated during my tenure in New Zealand by both TFNZ and the University of Auckland.

I used Dedoose, a qualitative software program, to inductively code the data and identify themes and categories (Janesick, 2000). Drawing on qualitative approaches to analysis, I aimed to identify "emic terms" (Street & Heath, 2008) within the data set and to center the voices of the participants and their experiences in or with TFNZ. In a further effort to assess the validity of emerging themes and categories, I convened a focus group after the first round of data analysis, inviting the 16 current TFNZ participants to attend, among whom 7 self-selected to participate. I constructed focus group questions using my initial codes and viewed this as an opportunity to conduct member checks with key participants and as a means of validating or invalidating my initial interpretations (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). After the focus group, I conducted a secondary round of coding in an effort to finalize a set of interpretive categories. The themes presented in this article—including the financial incentives of participating in TFNZ, its selectivity and prestige, the practice-based dimensions of the program, the emphasis on equity, and the focus on leadership development—were all pervasive throughout the interviews and focus groups and coded enough times to substantiate a category within the data set.

To conduct a final set of member checking, I shared these categories and selected data samples with a range of differently positioned individuals, including faculty members at the University of Auckland, TFNZ participants, and TFNZ personnel, to gain additional insights into the data and to substantiate and/or challenge my interpretations.

Findings

Findings from this study suggest that various stakeholders within TFNZ, including participants, university faculty members, and TFNZ personnel, held divergent perspectives on what motivated participants to join TeachFirst. While participants expressed being drawn primarily to the program's financial incentives, abbreviated training period, and selectivity, organizational thought leaders sought to foreground the participants' commitment to the organization's equity mission. Specifically, the competing narratives about the program reveal the ways in which TeachFirst continues to define itself *in opposition to* dominant perceptions of traditional teacher education programs, which participants perceived as overly theoretical, cumbersome, financially burdensome, and low status. Specifically, TeachFirst provides participants with an expedient and free postgraduate degree, emphasizes practical approaches to preparation, eschews overly theoretical notions of teaching, is highly selective, and offers career opportunities that transcend the confines of the classroom, all of which appealed to participants as much as, if not more than, the equity mission. In selecting a program that offers profound individual advantages in the name of rectifying historical inequities, participants' decisions are underpinned by neoliberal logic.

Financial Incentives/Finished With University

The majority of participants I interviewed foregrounded the financial incentives of the TFNZ pathway, noting not only that their postgraduate degrees would be paid for but that they would receive a salary while working as teachers of record in low-decile schools. For example, Quinn, a second-year participant, said that he was "sick of studying, sick of being in universities and wanted to get paid and liked the purpose of Teach First." Similarly, George, an alumnus of the program, mentioned a complementary set of concerns:

> I wasn't prepared to spend another year of my life in formal university education. If anything I have too much education rather than not enough. I couldn't have justified it to myself to leave what I was doing. So the fact is that I actually have a job and an income; otherwise, somebody in my position I don't know how you can justify it to yourself.

Max, a first-year participant who was looking into various job possibilities at the end of his undergraduate degree, viewed TFNZ as an opportunity to leave the university setting, join the workforce, and start earning a salary:

> Teach First came up on advert or something . . . I was looking for possible jobs. I thought wow this looks like a really good opportunity and I've got some of the skills to do it. And it checked a lot of those boxes that we were talking about. Like getting me a job a little bit more focused on people. Start teaching and start getting paid after doing 5 years of study was a big deal.

Colin echoed these sentiments, noting that doing a year of study without being paid was unfeasible. Additionally, Colin associated university lectures with "drudgery" and was thus not keen to return to the lecture hall:

> And I probably wouldn't have gone to teacher's college. It would have been unfeasible to take an entire year off to do a teaching diploma or something like that. And, yeah, it just seemed like a good opportunity given it's only 3 months as opposed to a full year of training, so time without salary—it's definitely a contributing factor. I'd say that's a big part of it. It's the fact that it is compressed. I feel like I've proven that I can study. So I don't feel like I need to go back and sit through the drudgery.

Lachlan, also a first-year participant, further emphasized the compelling financial incentives of the program and his desire to avoid having to pay for additional schooling:

> I was interested in teaching so when I heard about it and that you could earn money while you study and the fact that it completely lined up with my like philosophies anyway plus the not having to pay for a postscript diploma and being able to earn some money. . . . Not very much at all but you know that was definitely what appealed to me.

Though Lachlan did mention the ways in which TFNZ aligns with his philosophies (presumably related to efforts to address inequities), his narrative foregrounds the appeal of both the free university education and the salary that he would receive as a teacher of record in low-decile schools.

Stella, an alumna of the program, reinforced the centrality of being able to work and get paid. For her, the equity and social justice contours of the program were secondary because "I have always had that on my agenda and I would have that on my agenda whatever program I had gone through so didn't specifically do it for that."

Interestingly, personnel at the university also had strong opinions about why participants were eager to earn their credentials through TFNZ rather than one of the programs the university offered for postgraduate diplomas. For example, Sebastian, a university administrator, stated,

> I think the appeal of a job is one—the $30,000 salary is one. But I think—having met all the participants—I think that the vast majority are doing it because of the mission of TeachFirst. I think they really are committed to low-decile education. I don't think they are coming into it because, "Oh I can earn 38,000 dollars for a couple of years." I think that's the icing on the cake, that's the thing that might persuade them to think, I've been thinking about teaching, I'd like to make a difference to young people's lives. I like my subject. I'd like to teach it. I think that's the fundamental driving motivation. But I'm not going to go into a traditional program because I'm not prepared to give up a year's training, so the salary is the icing on the cake, I think that's part of it. I think the TeachFirst brand is part of it. You become an alumnus of something that that's got an international brand to it—a selectivity to it. And I don't know enough about whether they see the challenge of it as greater than the challenge of the traditional program. We're told that's one of the reasons they come in to it. I don't have a lot of evidence to say it is.

Although Sebastian emphasized the participants' presumed commitment to rectifying inequality and the draw of TFNZ's overall mission, like the participants, he noted the financial incentives *before* mentioning the moral commitments. Similarly, when asked her opinion regarding why potential teachers might select TFNZ, Matilda, a university faculty member, stated,

> Well, I would first like to hope they do it because of its philosophical or ideological commitments to doing what is good and right. And certainly you know in the last few years in talking to students I do get the sense that there is a genuine individual commitment to wanting to serve communities and be an advocate on behalf of students, so I think that is a reason. But I think the second way would be because it's free so they don't pay fees and that is appealing to anybody. There's also the whole two hundred people applied and there's only 20 spaces, so I think there is a there's an element of prestige.

Nina, a faculty member at the university who had initially opposed a partnership with TFNZ, expressed a slightly more cynical view. When asked why participants might pursue TFNZ in lieu of traditional teacher preparation, she immediately

discussed the financial incentives:

> Because of the money. Because it makes it possible, it makes it doable, and if you're a graduate with a degree in something and you've got no idea what you're gonna do with the rest of your life, it's quite a good idea.

Another faculty member, Denise, who had opposed the university's partnership with TFNZ, expressed a similar view:

> I think the fact that they get paid. They get their fees paid. So it's a part of that incentive. There's kind of a mystique around it. You know you are being selected and . . . I mean it's built up as this really important thing. And also the leadership training that goes . . . I mean that's another weird thing that here you are; you are being selected to make an individual difference in the face of socioeconomic challenges. And you're not really expected to fail because you've been trained as a leader. I mean you're trained for leadership in industries that are other than education. So there's an inherent contradiction in that.

In addition to mentioning the financial incentives, Denise cited the selectivity of the program and the leadership training that the participants receive—two elements that were also noted by participants as aspects that proved central to their decision to select TFNZ over other possible pathways.

Prestige and Selectivity

Many participants interviewed emphasized the selectivity and prestige of TFNZ as reasons for choosing this pathway in lieu of others. For example, when asked how his family and friends responded to his decision to become a teacher, Harrison, a first-year participant, focused on the relative prestige of TFNZ as compared to traditional pathways into the profession:

> [They were] probably mainly perplexed as to why I wasn't doing law or why didn't I want to go into policy or business or government. Because teaching is seen as something that I guess for my friends and my parents it was something that you'd do if you were less intelligent or less capable. So it was not the best decision but I guess a lot of people, like my parents, liked the idea of TeachFirst because it seemed more prestigious and had a selectivity attached to it. When I explained it to people, they thought it sounded relatively appealing and important. . . . But, yeah, people sort of wondered why I'd bother.

Benjamin, a second-year participant, who had taken on various leadership roles within the organization, echoed Harrison's sentiments:

> The prestige and the rigorous recruiting process was also very appealing. Being a part of a program that was practical but you are with the community . . . all the things that TeachFirst represents. Those were all very appealing.

Charlotte, a first-year participant, also implicitly discussed notions of prestige by referencing the high caliber of participants who elect to become teachers through TFNZ:

> I feel good because I'm glad I'm not at Uni for a year. I couldn't afford it anyway. What I really like about TeachFirst is the community of participants. The actual caliber of the people that are in it are really good.

Discussion of the organization's prestige also occurred among TFNZ personnel, and the 7% acceptance rate was noted by a number of participants and discussed by the TFNZ personnel I spoke with. Ethan, a key thought leader within TFNZ at the time of the study, directly addressed the issue of prestige, noting the efforts of TeachFirst to fundamentally shift perspectives on becoming a teacher within New Zealand, a profession that, according to many of the participants, was seen as low status:

> I always feel funny when I say this because obviously I feel that there is a status problem . . . I think TeachFirst could shift that because it makes clear the challenge . . . it's not something you're doing just to be good. It's something you do because it's actually a genuine and very worthwhile challenge to do. Just as being a surgeon would be or being a really good lawyer. But you're not just doing it because you kind of feel sorry for people. It's actually high-level, complex professional engagement that you're doing which is a deep goal not just something in which you kind of pitch up in the morning and hang out with kids. I don't know. I'd like to see that the people that come through our organization actually make a difference in our profession enough that it actually starts to shift the way that people see what teaching is about.

One of the key assumptions in Ethan's narrative is that TFNZ, rather than traditional providers of teacher education, has the capacity to advance the status of the teaching field. In an interesting paradox, Ethan both acknowledged the complexity of teaching and implied that the cadre of New Zealand educators who have been prepared through traditional pathways are partly to blame for the faltering reputation of the profession. More interesting still are the strategic ways in which TFNZ sought an initial partnership with the University of Auckland, which is one of the most selective and respected universities in New Zealand, only to dissolve it several years later, once the organization had garnered a national reputation.

Practice Based

Another key assumption leveraged by TFNZ participants involves the notion that traditional colleges of education emphasize theoretical perspectives at the expensive of practice-based or hands-on strategies, which was a common reason participants cited for selecting TFNZ. For example, Sorin, a program alumnus, noted the following:

> It was more competitive and I felt like I wanted to do something that was not the mainstream because the mainstream—from what the people I talked to said—felt like it was going to be lots of theory and then the practical was really gonna be the most useful thing. . . . I'd already been through 4 years of Uni.

Oliver expressed similar concerns about university-based programs based on what he had been told from others who had selected the traditional route as a means of preparation:

> So I've had other friends who have left law and gone into teaching. I have a friend who runs a charity, who is the CEO of a charity here, and her husband was in law and became a teacher and she encouraged me to sit down and talk to him about it, but I never did. And part of that was he had so many bad experiences about what it's like to be in teacher's college. And Casey my partner had been through that. But that was, to be fair, over 20 years ago.

Dennis, a second-year participant, echoed these sentiments when he asserted, "Personally I've learned better doing rather than sitting back and learning theory. So that was the fact that I can just get into a classroom and try my craft." Although programs at the University of Auckland offer 14 weeks (or approximately 350 hours) of supervised teaching practice in schools, Dennis maintained concerns that going through a traditional pathway program would mean "sitting back and learning theory." Additionally, Dennis was eager to enter the classroom to try his craft but did not necessarily problematize his role as an underprepared teacher entering underresourced schools.

Amelia possessed similar conceptualizations that teaching is something you learn while on the job:

> I'd already done 4 years of tertiary study and the idea of a fifth was just like oh no. I wouldn't have gone into a fifth year of teaching. It just, I was over being a student in that sense. So, yeah, that was a really great thing to feel that I could be working and on the job and learning. So that was a really big incentive and I think teaching is one of those things that is really hard—you have to do it—so that was a really cool way of thinking about the program.

Paige, an alumna, also specifically cited the experiential and hands-on elements of TFNZ as appealing and mentioned the network of support the organization offers:

> I think it just seemed more hands-on and I liked that it was a program where you were supported through a 3-year process. It seemed like it was quite a challenge but that you were going to be supported. The kind of emphasis behind the program and what they were gunning towards seemed like the kind of thing that I would want to get onboard with and if I was going to into teaching I'd like to go about in a way that seems like it's really towards the right thing.

In addition to noting the hands-on nature of TFNZ, Paige implied that the organization's emphasis on equity is what made her choose TFNZ over a traditional program. Interestingly, both the University of Auckland and other New Zealand universities in nearby cities feature teacher education programs designed to support the achievement of historically marginalized populations and utilize pedagogies and curricular approaches aimed at fostering deeper understandings of factors, such as

poverty, colonialism, racism, and language bias, that impact student achievement in urban and rural contexts. However, because these teacher education programs often lack the financial or political capital to disseminate their programmatic mission or recruit from a nationwide pool of candidates, their programs are less successful at attracting the kinds of candidates who select TFNZ. Moreover, neither TFNZ participants nor TFNZ personnel mentioned these programs as having the kind of equity focus that participants found appealing. Eventually, as the partnership between the University of Auckland and TFNZ dissolved due to ideological differences regarding teacher preparation, TFNZ personnel used the opportunity to design a more practical, less theoretical preparation program in collaboration with a new tertiary partner—a technical institution without a previous history of offering teacher education programs. These changes parallel TFA's gradual shift away from university partnerships (Myers, Fisher, Alicea, & Bloxson, 2014) and toward providers, such as the Relay Graduate School of Education, that purport to provide preservice teachers with a set of clear, practical tools for immediate classroom use.

Commitment to Equity

Recruiting participants deeply committed to rectifying inequities was a central and fundamental concern of personnel within TFNZ, as expressed by the key personnel I spoke to during the study. For example, Neveah, a recruitment specialist for TFNZ, uses the recruitment process as a means through which to assess participants' commitment to promoting equity in urban and rural schools: "If your reasons for joining the program are not focused on educational inequality that's going to be a real problem for your application."

Interestingly, most of the participants I interviewed (who were also interviewed and selected by TFNZ) did not cite concerns about equity as *the* defining reason for choosing the TFNZ pathway. While the opportunity to work in low-decile schools and communities certainly factored into their decisions, few of them mentioned this commitment as the most compelling factor in the decision-making process.

This occurred despite the fact that TeachFirst utilized recruitment seminars as a means of raising awareness about inequality in New Zealand, an effective tool for participants who had not previously recognized New Zealand's deep societal disparities. For example, Amelia, a second-year participant, stated,

> I didn't realize that educational inequality was a thing until I went to the TeachFirst presentation. And I guess I always went to a high-decile, very White school so I just had no idea of the challenges that people face. I think you know about poverty, but you don't understand all the implications that poverty has and so many different areas in society and so that really compelled me to think about actually that's a really big problem. I have loved my education and valued my education, and my parents really valued education, and to think that some people didn't have the opportunity or as quality kind of opportunity for so many different reasons, whatever those may be.

Benjamin, a second-year participant and a leader among his peers, was also drawn to the equity mission, noting the ways in which TFNZ helped raise his awareness about inequality within New Zealand:

> The low socioeconomic side of things—teaching in the low-decile was different and I thought, oh this would be a good challenge but I had no concept of the level of poverty. I had no concept of inequality. I come from a very White middle-class community where a few months before getting accepted into TeachFirst I was sitting in a Victorian literature tutorial boldly claiming that New Zealand didn't have a class issue.

Kavita, a first-year participant, was one of the few who did not mention the financial incentives when I asked her why she chose TFNZ and focused, instead, entirely on the equity mission of the organization, an emphasis which might be explained by her background as an Indian woman who had witnessed intense levels of poverty firsthand:

> I started becoming a little more interested and mainly how they're aimed at low-decile schools and what they do to help. So rather than the teaching aspect that's what I was interested in. Teaching was sort of like a secondary attribute to that profession and I'm enjoying it. So the main thing that attracted me to the program was the target of low-decile schools. And I think that's the most important thing because I've seen. I'm from India and I know what the rural areas are like. I'm not from there, but I have seen them and how deprived they are. And seeing something like that in a much more developed country it's a little odd. So I just wanted to be a part of changing that.

Eli, a second-year participant, came into TFNZ with substantial experience working with marginalized youth in another position and felt as though his long-standing commitment to issues of equity was evident as a result of his experience. Like others, he did not want to pay the fees associated with traditional preparation pathways given his extensive experience:

> Well, I don't pay any fees with TeachFirst because I felt that I had 5 years maybe even more than 5, 6, I'm not sure, experience in schools, high schools. So they had a program with kids who'd been excluded or self-excluded from state schools out in [neighborhood], a really poor part of the city and I was working with them to get vocational training. So these kids are into drugs, gangs. So, you know, just reading and learning about TeachFirst, I thought you know this is something I could do. And obviously like a commitment goes without saying to equity and education. [I] didn't fully understand TeachFirst's position within that project at first.

Although he did not expand upon this point, Eli alluded to concerns about TeachFirst's role in disrupting educational inequities. As I have documented elsewhere (Crawford-Garrett, 2017), participants expressed similar concerns, but only after their tenure with TFNZ had begun.

Leadership Development

Last, TFNZ participants were attracted to the organization's deliberate branding as a leadership development organization rather than a pathway into teaching—a distinction that also contributed to the eventual dissolution between TFNZ and the University of Auckland, as it exposed the competing goals and priorities of each institution. Ethan, a key thought leader within TFNZ at the time, articulated the organization's perspectives on leadership:

> So I think our vision is slightly broader. And I'm not saying the university hasn't got a broad vision. The university has got a broader breadth. But in this particular program they've partnered with us because of its focus on low-decile communities and serving those kids but they only see it as almost a numbers game of getting those teachers into a school. Where we see it as a longer-term game. Well game is the wrong the word. Where we see it as a longer-term piece where we get those teachers in; but the question we then ask is how are they going to make a difference in a leadership sense so that the actual system changes. The system is just too unfair for those kids at the moment. So it's a slightly different perspective.

Several key assumptions about traditional teacher education programs are embedded in Ethan's narrative, including the perception that making long-term commitments to classroom teaching would not substantially contribute to systemic educational change—a narrative that originates with TFA, which rebranded itself as a leadership organization in 2002, thus shifting its focus from filling teacher shortages to rectifying educational inequality on a national scale (Horn, 2016; Schneider, 2014). Moreover, by calling recruits "participants" rather than "teachers," the Teach for All enterprise instills notions that teaching is ancillary to the organization's primary mission. As Elliott (2018) noted, "the use of these terms serves to set the Teach First teacher apart from the educational profession, suggesting that the trainees are different, active, high-ranking and on a mission" (p. 268). Fitting within this discourse, Ethan suggests that true change is generated within sectors beyond the classroom; therefore traditional teacher education programs cannot contribute to long-standing change and transformation.

Interestingly, in the following narrative, Sienna, a first-year participant, refers to the program as a "scholarship-based development program," which clearly illustrates the ways in which narratives that deemphasize the teaching dimensions of TFNZ have taken hold for the participants:

> I got to my last year of my university and didn't want to be a university student for any longer. I wanted to go into a master's in the future but at the moment just . . . yeah sick of the system a little bit. So I wanted a job for 1 or 2 years and then I saw the TeachFirst program, and the leadership development part of it was quite enticing to me. And of course my background with the tutoring and such. I'd been a scout leader so really it seemed like something I knew I would enjoy. It had all this benefit of being a scholarship-based development program. I've done a lot in the past that is leadership focused. I think part of my personality is that I like

> to go in and take charge. I have got to scale it back in some situations but it was definitely good to say something that was challenging and you would develop as a person throughout it.

While Sienna already identified herself as a leader able to take charge of various situations, she recognized that TFNZ would offer her opportunities to further develop these capacities, a dimension of the program that seemed to hold more promise for Sienna than classroom teaching.

Discussion

Analyzing the ways in which differently positioned stakeholders articulate the motivations of Teach for All participants is critical not only to understanding the organization's global success but to recognizing the ways in which this success is predicated on defining itself in opposition to traditional university-based programs and considering how this matters for teacher education more broadly. Specifically, Teach for All perpetuates a binary between "traditional" university-based programs and its own enterprise as a means of recruiting participants, securing philanthropic funding, and disseminating its mission. Additionally, as Teach for All increasingly constructs itself as a force for rectifying educational inequality, it sets up an interesting paradox, as participation in the organization unequivocally benefits the participants themselves, while benefits to the low-income students it targets remain mixed (Clark, Isenberg, Liu, Mkowsky, & Zukiewicz, 2017; Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, & Heilig, 2005; Decker, Mayer, & Glazerman, 2004; Grossman, Hammerness, & McDonald, 2008; Laczko-Kerr & Berliner, 2002; Xu, Hannaway, & Taylor, 2011). Last, Teach for All clearly aligns with a neoliberal logic that can be traced to settler colonial ideologies, which proves particularly problematic in postcolonial settings like New Zealand, where indigenous communities are often the object of educational reform efforts. These key points should shape the ways in which university-based programs aim to counter Teach for All's reach and scope, specifically by countering efforts that work *on* and *against* rather than *with* and *for* historically marginalized populations.

Deconstructing False Binaries

Interestingly, even as TFA and its global counterparts seek to distance themselves from traditional institutions of teacher preparation, making specific claims about what it means to increase access and equity, their programs have, over time, come to mirror traditional teacher education more closely (Schneider, 2014). In New Zealand, TeachFirst recently added an additional week of summer preparation. In the United States, the TFA Summer Institute has evolved to include more focus on lesson planning, classroom management, and culturally responsive practices—some of which are core components of mainstream teacher education (Schneider,

2014). Despite these growing similarities, funders, policy makers, and school reformers continue to view the Teach For enterprise as a radical departure from traditional teacher education with the expectation that investment in alternative pathways will yield increased educational access for marginalized youth, even as empirical studies have yet to illustrate any concrete academic gains (Clark et al., 2017; Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; Decker et al., 2004; Grossman et al., 2008; Laczko-Kerr & Berliner, 2002; Xu et al., 2011).

Similarly, university-based teacher education is, of course, subject to the same market mechanisms and neoliberal ideologies that are reshaping the broader enterprise of teacher preparation (Casey, 2013). In fact, university-based programs have been influenced by the appeal of Teach For programs, and teacher education scholarship increasingly focuses on the efficacy of core practices, field-based experiences, residency programs, and accountability measures (McDonald, Kazemi, & Kavanagh, 2013; Zeichner, 2010). Thus, even though Teach for All works diligently to set the organization apart from the traditional enterprise of teacher education, the similarities merit examination, as each institution competes for students and credibility and attempts to define what constitutes a "well-prepared" educator capable of addressing disparities in schooling.

Problematizing Educational Equity

A second tension revealed by the data is the paradox that as organizations like TFNZ seek to rectify educational disparities, they simultaneously reinforce existing social structures by conferring more privilege onto an elite group of educators at the expense of those prepared by less prestigious university-based programs (Labaree, 2010; Maier, 2012). As Stern and Johnston (2013) noted, "those who really benefit from doing TFA are the recruits themselves" (p. 13). The focus on the individual, noted in the discourse of participants, can be traced back to the organization's rhetoric used to market the program and recruit participants (Southern, 2018, p. 595). This tension evokes important questions about what it means to advance educational equity in a neoliberal age in which the very mechanisms for rectifying disparities are highly contested within education and beyond.

Although Ethan argued that TFNZ could lift the status of the teaching profession by attracting a new cadre of potential teachers and elevating their status through the selectivity and rigor of the program, the absence of the term *teacher* in organizational discourse suggests otherwise (Elliott, 2018). Specifically, utilizing the term *leader* (Blumenreich & Gupta, 2015) indexes notions that teaching for the long-term is not consonant with the organizational mission. Rather, Teach for All is focused on preparing leaders capable of fundamentally reshaping society—a notion that confers individual advantage even as it suggests the centrality of equity and transformation.

Critiquing Neoliberal Logic

Last, while neoliberalism's encroachment into the public sphere has been extensively critiqued within the realm of education (Apple, 2004; Giroux, 2014; Lipman, 2011), in postcolonial settings like New Zealand, these critiques are explicitly linked to legacies of settler colonialism (Bargh, 2007; Tuck, 2013). Not only does the focus on the self in neoliberal discourse run counter to indigenous ways of being and knowing (Battiste, 2009) but the emphasis on privatization and marketization perpetuates, rather than disrupts, endemic poverty (Tuck, 2013), a tension that must be acknowledged by all educational institutions that claim to be focused on rectifying long-standing disparities. Moreover, indigenous scholars—particularly those in New Zealand—have expressed concerns about the "civilizing mission" hidden beneath neoliberal discourse that purports to offer "freedom" but actually reeks of paternalism (Bargh, 2007). Despite the power of these critiques from within the very communities that neoliberalism purports to help, these ideologies continue to gain power, momentum, and, most notably, financial investment that allows them to proliferate.

Conclusion

Teach for All continues to expand unabated across the globe, impacting and reshaping local communities, global policy networks, and the field of teacher education writ large. As Teach for All struggles to maintain its university partnerships and TFA increasingly outsources teacher preparation to providers like the Relay Graduate School of Education, these relationships should be studied and critiqued. The success of Teach for All and its subsidiaries continues to be predicated on the organization's ability to define itself in opposition to traditional colleges of teacher education, as university-based teacher education is increasingly depicted as less prestigious, too theoretical, financially burdensome, and lacking a robust focus on issues of equity. This article offers a window into how participants and stakeholders within one country context interpret and act upon these key distinctions and suggests that these distinctions matter with regard to how teachers understand themselves as well as the work they attempt to do in historically marginalized communities. In particular, I sought to reveal how specific *assumptions* about traditional teacher education play a pivotal role in the overall success of TFNZ. Even as the organization articulates concerns about the low status of the teaching profession, the program perpetuates narratives that depict teacher education as a site of mediocrity and failure. Teacher education, which is often ill-equipped to counter these depictions, continues to advocate for its relevance on the margins of a global society that is increasingly accepting alternative routes as the most viable pathway forward. If equity is central to the work of teacher education, then scholars and practitioners must collaborate in strategic ways to counter the rhetoric of Teach for All and create

a collective vision that advances social justice and appeals to the next generation of educators.

Notes

[1] According to the TFNZ Web site, Summer Institute has been changed to 8 weeks' duration.

[2] For example, the Education Council required that participants receive 15 visits from a curriculum specialist in Year 1 and 10 visits in Year 2. In addition, the university paid for the teaching, the mentor training, half the research costs, the university team to be present at selection centers, and the 3-week practicum, all of which led to a financial loss that was greater than the university could sustain.

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Appendix A
Interview Protocol

TeachFirst NZ Interview Questions:
Questions Pertaining to Experiences Before TeachFirst

1. What made you decide to become a teacher? Why did you decide to do so through TFNZ?
2. Can you describe the recruitment process with TFNZ and describe your experiences from the first time you heard of TFNZ through your decision to join?
3. What made TFNZ personally appealing to you? Why did it resonate with you?
4. How would you describe the TeachFirst mission?
5. What do you know about Teach for America and/or other Teach for All programs?
6. Tell me about your past experiences with teaching. (Probes: formal, informal)
   a. What knowledge and skills might you bring from past formal and informal experiences?

Questions About the Broader Educational Context

7. How would you describe the broader educational context of New Zealand?

8. How would you describe issues of educational inequity in New Zealand? What are the causes?
9. How would you describe your familiarity with (or knowledge of) teaching in low-decile schools, teaching students from low-decile communities, interacting with parents?
    a. What knowledge/skills/dispositions do you think are necessary for teachers who work in these schools and with these students?
10. How would you define school and student success?

Questions Pertaining to Experiences in Summer Institute

11. Describe your experience so far in the Summer Institute.
12. What sessions/workshops/experiences stand out as particularly significant and why?
13. What have you learned that you think will be most valuable for you as a teacher?
14. What has been the most challenging part of Summer Institute?
15. Tell me a story from Summer Institute that exemplifies your overall experience.
16. Tell me a story about a specific interaction with a student/participant/instructor/TFNZ thought leader?
    a. Why does this story stand out to you? What's important about it?
17. At the end of Summer Institute, what do you hope you will have gained or accomplished?
18. Looking forward to your future work as a teacher after Summer Institute, what makes you most excited?
    a. Most nervous?
19. Is there anything else that you'd like to add? Were there any questions I should have asked but didn't?