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## Teach for America 20: Perspectives on TFA in its 20th year

*Our Chance to Make History*, by Wendy Kopp

*Teachers Preparation: Build on What Works*, by Linda Darling-Hammond

*Teaching & Unions*, by Randi Weingarten

This collection of articles on the 20th anniversary of Teach for America (TFA) offers different perspectives on what the organization has accomplished as well as speculations on the future. TFA has some shared history with independent schools and provides compelling data regarding teacher recruitment and training for all educators. In 1989 I published the results of a study\* of Columbia and Barnard graduating seniors' interest in teaching that showed 60% of seniors would elect to enter teaching provided the training was short and the commitment was limited to two years. At the time Princeton senior Wendy Kopp was completing her senior thesis on this very topic. Kopp used the results of the Columbia study to help raise funds for TFA. Her bold mission was to eliminate educational inequity by attracting the nation's most well-educated and idealistic recruits from elite colleges to teach in the most underserved communities. As a member of the first TFA advisory committee, I listened to the diatribes of teacher union leaders and my education professor colleagues who objected to the 5 week training model that short-circuited education schools' certification programs and aimed to place these recruits in the neediest schools.

Though the debates about TFA's model continue it's hard to argue with their success. 20 years later TFA has placed more than 20,000 young teachers in America's poorest school communities. Their studies show that over 60% remain in education and have as much success in the classroom as certified teachers. What's more, many TFA alumni have moved into important leadership roles in education. There is much that independent school can learn from what has worked for TFA, particularly their systematic recruitment approach. In addition to a demonstration lesson, TFA applicants are screened in a day-long interview with trained interviewers on various criteria including: a history of success no matter what the endeavor; taking full responsibility for achieving a positive outcome; critical thinking; organization and the ability to juggle multiple projects; and, the ability to motivate others.\*\*

Additional citations:

\*Kane, P. (1989). "A 'Teachers Corps' for Urban Schools." *Education Week* "Commentary," Vol. 9, No. 3, p. 32.

\*\*National Council on Teacher Quality. (2004). *Increasing the Odds: How Good Policies Can Yield Better Teachers*. National Council on Teacher Quality.

Pearl Rock Kane, Klingenstein Center, NY

*Education Week*, March 16, 2011

## ARTICLES, BLOGS, AND OTHER MEDIA



### Online Learning: Not Substitution but Enhancement

*Let's Use Video to Reinvent Education*, Salman Khan TED Talk

Many independent school educators have heard the story of Salman Khan. While working for a hedge fund back in 2004, he posted a few videos on You Tube to help his cousins learn math. 2200 videos and one-hundred-thousand-views-a-day later, the rest is history. Takeaways from Khan's recent TED Talk point to an increasingly valuable educational platform: Khan's videos allow students to review topics without embarrassment. They can pace themselves, slowing down when they don't understand and racing ahead when they are bored. They don't have to bug their teachers to show them formulas repeatedly. And, on the backend, Khan's system can produce reams of data for teachers to help them understand how - and how quickly - their students are learning. Beyond equations, Khan is aiming for educational pay dirt - improved motivation, differentiated instruction for all, and a more humanized classroom. That those items sound a lot like the chief virtues of Independent School classrooms should be all the prodding we need to make sure we pay attention to this fascinating intersection of technology and learning. And it's free.

Stephen J. Valentine, The Montclair Kimberley Academy, NJ

*TED Talks*, March 2011



### Michelle Rhee: Heroic Reformer or Grandstanding Polemicist?

*Miss Grundy was Fired Today*, by Andrew Rice

This engaging article in *New York Magazine* details the rise of Michelle Rhee's role as our times' most vocal educational reformer. From her first job in Teach for America to her work for Mayor Fenty in DC, Andrew Rice describes the evolution of Rhee's thinking and the sometimes unexpected and troubling political alliances she makes as she tries to ensure that America's most vulnerable children are not saddled with an education that will handicap them forever. Rhee's central belief that having a high quality teacher for three years in a row is the key determinant in a child's success is one that is shared widely in the current debates about public education, as is a blaming of the teachers' unions for keeping incompetent teachers in the classroom. Rice gives some balanced analysis of both of these assumptions, and asks us to consider the either-or thinking the increasing polemics in this debate promote. His conclusions, unsurprisingly, are that both assertions are more complicated than many would allow.

Stephanie Lipkowitz, Albuquerque Academy, NM

*New York Magazine*, March 20, 2011



### No Concept of Enough

*The Search for Sustainable Girls*, by Anne Pabst

Pabst, the Director of College Counseling at Convent of the Visitation School in Medota Heights, Minnesota, writes eloquently of the struggle that current high school girls have with the concept of "enough." Weighed down by expectations from parents and the larger society, these young women keep adding and adding - sports, APs, community service, internships, and more. Pabst points out that this is partially the result of the empowerment of women within our culture, but unfortunately, "the chance to become anything has become an impulse to become everything." Symptoms for these girls include fatigue, constant measuring of themselves, easy disappointment, worry over appearance, hyper-awareness of parental desires, coffee addiction, and obsession over college lists. At the same time, admission to selective colleges has gotten more and more difficult for girls, in large part due to the increasing numbers of female high-achievers. Pabst encourages educators to begin to "write a new female script," one that is healthy, sustainable, and provides opportunities for "youthful joy."

Alex Northrup, Foxcroft School, VA

Ed.M. Candidate, The Klingenstein Center, Teachers College, Columbia University, NY

*Journal of College Admission*, Fall 2010



### Can Diet Control the Symptoms of ADHD?

*Study: Diet May Help ADHD Kids More Than Drugs*, by NPR Staff, March 12, 2011

[Effects of a restricted elimination diet on the behaviour of children with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder \(INCA study\): a randomised controlled trial.](#)

In every classroom, some children are perpetually distracted, the loss of focus often leading to poor achievement and social issues. 4.5 million children have been diagnosed with ADD or ADHD, and about 2.5 million are medicated. Pharmaceuticals have become the treatment of choice. Dr. Lidy Pelsser and her colleagues at the ADHD Research Center in the Netherlands believe practitioners should treat the cause, not just the symptoms; drugs, she thinks, often do the latter. When they manipulated the diets of children with attention issues, they found that symptoms vastly improved in 65% of them. They have concluded that for many, ADHD is a hypersensitive reaction to various foods. The changes in behavior were so dramatic and immediate, Dr. Pelsser said, that teachers and others "were flabbergasted." The NPR story, both in print and as an audio feed, provides good, basic information about this research. The actual study, published in *The Lancet*, is for those with a scientific bent.

Bruce Shaw, Essex, MA

Trustee, Glen Urquhart School

*Pelsser LM, Frankena K, Toorman J, et al., Lancet 2011; 377: 494-503., 2010*



### From Documentary to Grassroots movement

*Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* and *Race to Nowhere* represent two visions of how we do or do not respond to the pressures placed on higher achieving youth in America. These two works, arousing controversy as they make the rounds, offer us a litmus test of our complex feeling about achievement in 21st century America.

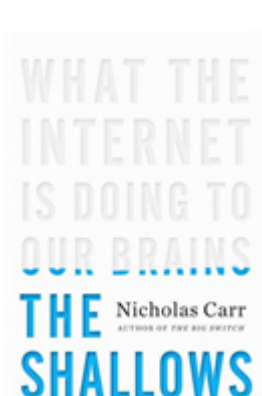
*Race to Nowhere* seems to be morphing from documentary film to a grassroots movement that captures the building wave of frustration that many parents seem to have with schools that emphasize standardized testing and college resume-building. The film, produced and directed by parent/filmmaker Vicki Abeles, explores the pressures that children experience in high-performing college preparatory schools, both public and private, as they grapple with increasing expectations. It includes a long list of perceived educational concerns, including an examination of the role of homework, the Advanced Placement curricula, the college admissions process, and the increase in diagnosed teenage anxiety. *Race to Nowhere* began circulation as a privately screened film in many schools and community centers, and was then featured in the *New York Times*, NPR, CNN, The Today Show, and other national news outlets. In its most hopeful incarnation *Race to Nowhere* might spark a re-examination of how schools might balance student workload and stress with a rigorous program that promotes critical thinking, true understanding, and positive college admissions outcomes. This is the hoped-for goal of a companion organization that has recently been started at <http://www.racetonowhere.com/>

Amy Chua's *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* is a personal parenting memoir that explores the differences between Chinese and Western philosophies of child rearing. The book has drawn quite a bit of critical ire, mostly for the anecdotes of Chua's philosophy in action. Yet *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* is far more nuanced and thought provoking than its press coverage would indicate. Chua, a Yale law professor, is quick to point out that some of her style - often direct, demanding, and confrontational - is a result of her culture, and some of it grows out of one generation's desire to ensure that their children elevate their circumstances rather than growing complacent. The American version is that children gain confidence and connectedness through finding a pursuit that they are passionate about and then demonstrating proficiency in this pursuit, which garners praise and recognition--a continuous cycle that continues and grounds the child in the self-confidence that comes with mastery. Chua embraces the virtuous cycle concept, which does not leave it up to her daughters to find their passion. She disdains the idea that children can find their passion at a young age and is incredulous that Western parents allow their children to move from pursuit to pursuit, rather than focusing their energy on some form of mastery. Chua's parenting style undoubtedly feels extreme to a Western mindset, but the book also provides an interesting insight into the cultural and familial expectations that may be fueling Asia's ascendancy on the world stage.

Christopher Lauricella, Park School, NY

[www.racetonowhere.com](http://www.racetonowhere.com) | Penguin Press, January, 2011

## BOOKS



### Wading or Swimming?

*The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to our Brains*, by Nicholas Carr

In *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to our Brain*, Nicholas Carr looks at the impact of technology on the way our brains work. He says that many people today do not read from left to right and top to bottom, but rather allow their eyes to flit about the page looking for key words. Carr describes how technology has altered the way his brain works. He describes feeling as though his brain were turning into a "high-speed data-processing machine" that needed to be constantly fed. He raises a fundamental question for schools to consider. Since Google can give us access to any piece of information, should we use our brain's "hard drive" to store lots of memorized data or could we outsource that work to the Internet and use more of our brain for other purposes? Carr asks the reader to consider the implication of a brain that may be processing more information but in far less depth, as the title of the book suggests. Carr does a good job of mixing science and observation to address this important topic.

Muddy Waters, The Pike School, MA

W.W. Norton, 2010

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