

New Forms of Teacher Education

Connections to Charter Schools and Their Approaches

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Abstract

This article critically analyzes the application of charter school techniques in teacher education, especially in two noteworthy programs: the newly developed Relay Graduate School of Education and Match Teacher Residency. We describe how their approaches to teacher preparation differ from traditional teacher education programs. We also raise concern regarding the ways charter-inspired teacher preparation programs overlook the contributions of theory to good teaching, jeopardize teacher flexibility, alter understandings of the professional practice of teaching, and threaten the overarching purpose of educating for democracy that is integral to traditional teacher colleges. We emphasize educationally worthwhile approaches from this new domain of teacher preparation while also offering some words of caution regarding approaches that, given their ties to charter schooling, may be problematically celebrated by the media and public.

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PUBLIC OPINION AS well as state and federal policies have increasingly endorsed the charter school movement in the United States. From films like *Waiting for Superman* to news magazine television programs like NBC's *Education Nation*, the media frequently celebrates charter schools as a key component of good education reform. Media accounts combined with educational policies and anecdotes about charter school success have given two-thirds of the public a favorable impression of this mode of education (Guilfoyle, 2010).

Waiting for Superman, for example, argues that poor teacher quality stems from lack of sufficient teacher preparation, and lack of quality teaching leads to subpar educational performance. The film, and others like it, suggests that charter schools may be the solution needed to improve this situation. It is no surprise, then, that as frustrations with the quality of teacher education programs intensify, some leaders in the field of education have begun to explore whether aspects of charter schools might be useful for reforming teacher preparation. These distinguishing characteristics range from decreasing government oversight to teaching in unconventional locations and from emphasizing student test achievement to focusing more attention on struggling students.

One such education leader, Atkins, founded a graduate school for teacher preparation that he describes as being "like a charter school of education" (as cited in Caperton & Whitmire, 2012, p. 79)

He explains, "It's significant that we decided to become a higher education institution. We recognize that there's value in reforming higher ed from within higher ed" (as cited in Caperton & Whitmire, 2012, p. 79). Just as some charter schools have provided alternatives within the public school system, charter-oriented teacher preparation programs may also provide improved alternatives to the ways in which most teachers are educated. It may be that these pioneering programs provide the "revolutionary change—, not evolutionary tinkering" that Duncan (2009, para. 3) claims is needed within our "mediocre" (para. 3) teacher education colleges.

Sharing such beliefs about charter approaches to teacher preparation, Senator Bennett and Representatives Polis and Petri reintroduced the Growing Excellent Achievement Training Academies for Teachers and Principals Act (GREAT Act) in May

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2013. Using motivators similar to those of K–12 charter schools, the act requires increased accountability for student performance in exchange for less regulation and oversight of teacher training. The bill states that the new teacher education programs must be free from what NewSchools Venture Fund (NewSchools) contends are “unnecessary, input-based regulations” (Riley, 2011, para. 8) currently placed on traditional teacher education programs, which “create an unnecessary and stifling bureaucracy that no one likes.” (Riley, 2011, para. 6).

The reduced oversight includes eliminating what NewSchools Venture Fund (n.d.a) calls “antiquated” (para. 3) requirements of traditional teacher education programs, such as requiring faculty to “conduct research on issues unrelated to student achievement” (para. 3) or hold advanced degrees, imposing specific coursework or credit hour minimums on enrolled students, and imposing restrictions on the “physical infrastructure” (para. 3) of these programs. Furthermore, the proposed new academies would not be tied to universities. Participants would, however, be required to work with and learn from teachers whose students have demonstrated positive results on tests. In order for the academies to maintain their charters, their participants would have to demonstrate success at raising student achievement in the classrooms where they teach while in the program (Cody, 2013).

In this article, we consider the manifestation of charter-inspired teacher preparation programs, especially at one significant teacher preparation center in New York and, to a lesser degree, another in Boston, both of which have been celebrated by NewSchools, a major backer of the GREAT Act (Mikuta, 2013). Interrogating the rationale behind the GREAT Act, Zeichner (2013) warns:

The questions of whether or not deregulation, competition and markets are the ways to improve teacher education, how to assess the quality of teaching and teacher education programs, and what the peer-reviewed research shows about the impact of different pathways into teaching—these are all matters that remain unsettled among serious scholars. They warrant trenchant public discussion and debate. (para. 3)

One of this paper’s aims is to engage in and critique public discussion about the impact of charter ideologies on teacher education and how quality teacher education should be achieved.

Employing a critical analysis of the discourse of the program materials, textbook samples, websites, and newspaper accounts, we look at how the approaches of charter-inspired teacher preparation programs differ from traditional teacher education programs by offering some innovative tactics for developing quality teachers. We also raise concern regarding the ways in which such programs overlook the theory underlying good teaching, jeopardize teacher flexibility, and propose to alter fundamental understandings of the professional practice of teaching. Most important, we argue that these new teacher training centers risk their graduates’ ability to understand and work to fulfill the democratic purposes of education. Our overarching concern is with the democratizing aims of teacher education and practice. It is within this broader context

that our critique of particular teacher preparation programs should be read. We hope to highlight educationally worthwhile approaches from this new domain of teacher preparation while also offering some words of caution regarding other approaches often tied to charter schooling that may be problematically celebrated by the media and public, and may soon be solidified in new legislation.

A Call for Change in Teacher Education

At the outset of 2012, President Obama announced a Race to the Top–type initiative for teacher education programs that would use a competition model to identify innovative approaches and reward those with objectively measurable achievement results. This federal initiative marks a commitment to competition and a spirit of innovation and a focus on improving achievement, as well as a shift toward alternatives to traditional educational approaches—all features also central to the charter school movement. Other nationwide proposals—like those stemming from the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education’s Blue Ribbon Panel on Clinical Preparation and Partnerships for Improved Student Learning, Cochran-Smith and Zeichner’s (2005) *Studying Teacher Education: The Report of the AERA Panel on Research and Teacher Education*, and Levine’s (2006) *Educating School Teachers*—call for major changes in traditional teacher education that focus on direct experience and mentorship in classrooms. Most recently the *Teacher Prep Review*, authored by the National Council on Teacher Quality (2013), offered a harsh critique of teacher education colleges across the country and called for better preparation in content knowledge and classroom management in diverse classrooms and emphasis on effective teaching methods.

There is quite a bit of variation among teacher education programs, but we consider as traditional both campus-based undergraduate general education programs as well as campus-based master’s degree programs that bring together coursework in teaching methods, content knowledge, and foundations of education (history, philosophy, and psychology of education). These programs also involve a student-teaching experience overseen by a practicing teacher and often a university representative. It is this aspect of teacher education programs that seems especially to vary in terms of quality and approach, some involving a full-year immersion experience with highly experienced teachers and others placing preservice teachers in classrooms for brief periods with few opportunities for significant engagement. The reports mentioned above rightly highlight the current weaknesses of some teacher education programs, which provide little or limited mentorship and only transitory experience in classrooms under the guidance of successful teachers.

At the state level, implications for teacher colleges have varied. Some states, such as New York, which houses one of the programs we highlight, have also offered competitive grants to new, “clinically rich” master’s degree programs in teacher preparation that provide extensive mentorship by successful teachers. In New York, these grants are no small deal, as over \$12 million are available, and nonacademic institutions have been especially encouraged to

apply (New York State Education Department, 2011). These reports and incentive programs have the potential to substantially influence the way teacher preparation programs operate and which programs receive public acclaim.

A New Approach to Teacher Preparation

The most noteworthy example of charter school impact on the preparation of teachers is the recent establishment of the charter-aligned Relay Graduate School of Education (Relay). Relay is a revised and now independent form of Teacher U, previously hosted by Hunter College, part of the City University of New York system. Relay currently trains teachers in New York, New Jersey, and New Orleans and may soon expand to Chicago. “Relay is the model,” proclaims Levine, a Relay board member. “It is the future” (Kronholz, 2012, para. 5). Following on its heels, Massachusetts approved the Match Teacher Residency (Match) as part of the Sposato Graduate School of Education in 2012. Although Match has been certifying teachers since 2009, spring 2013 marked the first graduating class of students with master’s degrees in Effective Teaching (Match Education, 2012c; Sawchuk, 2013).

Relay was licensed by the New York State Board of Regents, is led by charter school network founders, and was created by three charter school management organizations: Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP), Achievement First, and Uncommon Schools. These charter management organizations are also closely tied to major business interests, including foundations and investors such as J.P. Morgan, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and Credit Suisse, each of whom have financially supported Relay. Similarly, Match is intimately connected to Match Education, a nonprofit charter-management organization with powerful ties to businesses and NewSchools (Sawchuk, 2013).

These unique connections to entrepreneurs and well-funded education management organizations mean Relay and Match have powerful political and financial backing relatively free from public scrutiny and oversight, setting them apart from most public colleges. Related, these programs and the GREAT Act are supported by education reformers and venture philanthropists. Specifically, the bill has been backed by NewSchools, which operates 331 charter schools: “To date, 350,000 students have been taught by teachers trained in [NewSchools] ventures. Its K–12 ventures include ASPIRE, the Achievement Network, KIPP, Match, Rocketship, Uncommon Schools and the Academy for Urban School Leadership” (Zeichner, 2013).

Meanwhile, an opposing bill, the Educator Preparation Reform Act, has been reintroduced into Congress with the support of more traditional teacher education programs, represented by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, the American Association of Universities, and the American Council on Education. This bill also emphasizes extended in-residency training under the guidance of expert teachers and tracks student academic achievement, but some critics cast them as maintaining the status quo in education, whereas the work aligned with major philanthropists and businesses is more likely to be seen as innovative. This is perhaps in part because NewSchools and other related organizations have spearheaded a public relations campaign in

major newspapers to celebrate their efforts as innovative (Sawchuk, 2013; Zeichner, 2013).

One of the chief motivations behind Relay echoes concerns voiced by Secretary of Education Duncan, popular films about charter schools, and other media. On their website, the leaders of Relay state what they consider the central problem: “Teacher quality is the biggest determinant of student achievement . . . Yet, by and large, teacher preparation programs do not prepare teachers for the demands of the classroom” (NewSchools Venture Fund, 2013, para. 1). Indeed, as Levine (2006) notes, “More than three out of five teacher education alumni surveyed (62 percent) report that schools of education do not prepare their graduates to cope with the realities of today’s classrooms” (p. 4). The assertion is not only that good teachers are important but also that traditional teacher preparation programs are failing to produce good teachers, especially those prepared for the practical challenges of daily life in classrooms.

Relay’s clinical approaches are distinctly centered on immediate classroom preparation in a way that is quite different from the slow, and sometimes partial or short-lived, immersion into actual schools (i.e., student teaching) that is common in what Levine (2006) considers poor-quality traditional education colleges. Moreover, its graduate students are already teaching in schools, so they have the opportunity in such immersion experiences to immediately apply the techniques they have learned at Relay. In this setting, actual students and actual classrooms (many of which are struggling or underperforming) are always first in the minds of Relay participants (Relay Graduate School of Education, 2013b). Match operates in much the same way, quickly and substantially immersing participants in teaching. This differs from many teacher education programs that only introduce students to prolonged, real-life classroom settings late in their study, if at all. Students in those programs lack the opportunity for immediate application and testing of learned skills, as well as familiarity with some of the types of situations they will encounter once they have their own classrooms (Levine, 2006).

Cochran-Smith and Zeichner’s (2005) AERA report argues that many preservice teachers enter the field through traditional education programs having had no personal experience with struggling schools and underperforming populations. Because of this, they tend to envision the types of schools that they attended as children when visualizing educational methods taught in their college classes, and they lack the immersion experiences necessary to broaden their understanding of school contexts. Moreover, some leave university halls to begin teaching in poor urban communities that differ considerably from those of their own childhoods, only to find themselves unprepared and overwhelmed. First-time teachers “are more likely to find their first jobs in hard-to-staff, low-performing, rural, and central city schools with higher proportions of minority and low-income students” (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005, p. 6). The Relay and Match approaches may potentially better prepare teachers for the difficult realities of teaching in high-needs classrooms by situating their primary learning experiences in these settings from the start, as well as foregrounding the unique needs of children in these communities.

One of the most noteworthy aspects of both programs is that they strive to produce teachers who demonstrate significant results in improving student test scores while in the process of completing their student teaching, thereby tying student performance to teacher credentialing. This shift attempts to acknowledge the importance of demonstrating measurable success in the age of accountability and high-stakes testing. Whereas most teacher education colleges expect preservice teachers to spend a certain number of satisfactory hours supervised in classrooms without having to prove growth in student knowledge or skills, Relay and Match require demonstrated student improvement on achievement tests during participants' process of completing their student teaching (Match Education, 2012a). This well reflects the stated NewSchools Venture Fund's (n.d.) goal that NewSchools:

aims to seed a market of autonomous, outcomes-oriented teacher preparation organizations, and set a new standard for teacher preparation with student learning at the center. The result will be performance-based teacher preparation organizations that consistently produce teachers whose students make, on average, at least one year of academic growth each school year.¹

Moreover, this approach is aligned with the new Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) Standards, for which CAEP board members Ginsberg and Levine claim "programs will be judged by the real-world impact of their graduates in the classroom," thereby "dismissing the ghosts of failed process-oriented efforts that enabled providers to produce educators without any direct sense of the impact of their training on instruction and learning" (Ginsberg & Levine, 2013).

This focus on student test achievement will likely provoke fresh thinking about the norms established for upcoming teachers during their preparation and ideally will set a higher bar for program completion. However, it is also likely to encounter some challenges regarding the feasibility of students meeting certain levels of achievement—especially for teachers working with particular groups of challenging students. Even stating this, however, runs counter to the founding pillars of a charter network like KIPP (2013), which states, "KIPP schools have clearly defined and measurable high expectations for academic achievement and conduct that make no excuses based on the students' backgrounds." This no-excuses approach popular at KIPP and other charter schools may provide some motivation to aim for demonstrable improvement, but the goal may prove too lofty in all cases, and some potentially good teachers may be denied certification if it is strictly upheld. At the same time, graduates of Match must endeavor to master and demonstrate a list of teaching competencies (Sawchuk, 2013). A high bar does seem warranted in the preparation of teachers, and programs like these are taking steps to articulate expectations and measure their fulfillment. CAEP has been moving in this direction in terms of their standards for accreditation. As explained by two CAEP board members, Ginsberg and Levine, the new standards

are "dismissing the ghosts of failed process-oriented efforts that enabled providers to produce educators without any direct sense of the impact of their training on instruction and learning" (Ginsberg & Levine, 2013). Perhaps it could be argued that programs like Relay and Match are making strides in this area.

To address the gap between teacher preparation and quality teaching, Relay and Match seek innovative approaches that distinguish them from traditional education colleges. One such approach is not confining teaching to traditional college classrooms or by lecturing professors. Instead, Relay students are led by recent and current practitioners who share their classroom expertise. Sometimes these practitioners are employed in the same schools where the Match and Relay participants are placed. There are no courses in the traditional sense. In the K–12 schools where they are already working, Relay graduate students receive mini-lessons about effective applied practice approaches that are tested out in real K–12 classrooms, or they receive lessons delivered online. K–12 practitioners, rather than scholarly faculty members who connect to their students relatively briefly while teaching a course at the preservice teacher's college, follow the Relay students throughout their training. Finally, rather than traditional courses, participants at Relay complete what are deemed to be "developmentally appropriate modules" for new teachers. Participants then try out the techniques they learn in the modules, videotape themselves doing so, and write a reflection on trying them (American RadioWorks, 2013).

These mini-lessons may gain legitimacy in the eyes of students who witness the facilitators successfully at work in their schools, providing important insight into the everyday life of good teachers in ways that traditional professors more removed from K–12 classrooms (and the immediate need to demonstrate measurable student achievement) may be unable to accomplish, despite their knowledge of educational research and effective teaching strategies. This approach mirrors similar techniques popular with other venture philanthropy organizations such as the Broad Foundation, which runs the Broad Residency and the Broad Superintendents Academy, which turn to noted practitioners and business leaders rather than academics to emphasize successful applications and methodologies in the training of teachers and administrators (The Broad Foundation, 2013). If it is indeed the case, as reported in a 2006 study, that "12 percent of education-school faculty members never taught in elementary or secondary schools themselves" (Green, 2010, para. 23), the Match and Relay facilitators may be able to offer recent experiences and insight into the practicalities of teaching of which some professors may not have as much firsthand or recent knowledge.

Likely making some unsupported assumptions about many teacher education faculty members, a recent job posting for a faculty position at Relay embodies the supposed break-the-mold spirit by calling for instructors who teach, model, and assess achievement-gear practice alongside their students over time:

Assistant Professors of Practice will break the traditional model of an education professor; they will teach, observe, support, and evaluate cohorts of teachers in order to provide them with the best possible,

1 This text originally appeared on a page of the NewSchools website (<http://www.newschools.org/funds/investment/people>) that has subsequently been removed. Last accessed April 14, 2014.

differentiated preparation. By working with the same group of teachers over two years, Assistant Professors of Practice will build deep relationships with these teachers and will support them to generate significant, measurable student achievement gains. (Relay Graduate School of Education, 2012)

Like the charter schools where they place their students in practica and their graduates in jobs, Relay seeks unorthodox approaches to education—indicated here by extended contact with a particular professor of practice who carries a commitment to measurable student achievement throughout all aspects of her work, rather than several professors who share varied topics of expertise through classes that may or may not foreground the same type of student achievement. Or, as David Steiner, former state education commissioner and current dean of education at Hunter College, told the *New York Times*, “We don’t think that all the wisdom is lodged in the education schools . . . The fundamental point is that we need people to think outside of the box, to shake things up a little bit” (Otterman, 2011, para. 46).

Some Changes Warrant Caution

To be sure, positive types of change may result from some of the new approaches in these programs, but one must be careful not to uncritically celebrate different approaches without first considering what they may leave behind. One of the ways that Relay and Match shake things up is by divorcing themselves from a university campus. This disconnect mirrors other trends in seeing education as distinct from traditional brick-and-mortar institutions, as in trends among charter schools that choose to locate in nontraditional spaces, like old warehouses and retail centers. This physical departure begins to fulfill Levine’s (2006) top recommendation for improving teacher education: “Transform education schools from ivory towers into professional schools focused on school practice” (p. 9). It situates teacher training directly in places of real school practice.

Separation from the traditional ivory tower may positively free Relay and Match from some of the same types of bureaucracy that charter schools similarly shirk, but it also deprives participants of being informed by multiple disciplines, engaging public resources such as libraries, and partaking in the intellectual rigor and spirit of a campus environment. By being removed from the multidisciplinary settings of college campuses, students may miss out on the chance to develop a broader understanding of their content areas and their role among other disciplines, as well as the serendipitous learning experiences that can occur in a place teeming with those who value academic growth for its own sake, as opposed to as job training.

Traditional teacher education programs associated with larger universities have the benefit of affiliations, official and otherwise, with specialists in multiple disciplines, allowing preservice teachers opportunities to deepen their content knowledge and expertise. The presence of multiple disciplines in an institution affords possibilities—including highly specialized coursework, cross-disciplinary lectures, and the development of broad background knowledge—that can only exist when a diversity of

expertise and experience are focused toward the common goal of a liberal education. Notably, the GREAT Act calls for reduced course requirements for teachers trained in the proposed academies and highlights Match and Relay as successful examples.

In addition to distancing themselves from a traditional college campus, Relay and Match distance themselves from the traditional learning of educational theory, including the study of philosophy of education, educational psychology, and the research basis for teaching techniques. In the case of a class being taught at Relay, one reporter notes:

There was no mention of John Dewey, Howard Gardner or Paulo Freire, the canon of intellectuals that tend to take up an outsize portion of the theory taught at traditional education graduate schools. But that seemed fine with the students, who chatted avidly about their own experiences. After class, they told me about the improvements they saw in how they managed their classes. (Otterman, 2011, para. 30)

Related, one Relay student commented, “I can study Vygotsky later . . . right now, my kids need to learn how to read,” while another celebrated, “Everything I learn here I can use the next day” (Kronholz, 2012, para. 28). Finally, in an interview on American RadioWorks (2013), Relay Dean Mamie Hostetter said:

We found that folks who were leading really great schools in New York and Newark, New Jersey—the folks who were closing the opportunity gap for their students—were frustrated by the offerings of the more traditional schools of education because they were focused less on the day-to-day practice of teaching (how do you become a great teacher) and a little bit more on the history, the theory, the sociology of teaching, which are important topics if you want to become a historian, or a sociologist, or a theoretician of education. But we wanted to help produce great teachers and so we felt like a more practical approach to teacher preparation was really key to that end.

Match positions itself similarly relative to theory and the need to quickly prepare teachers for challenging classrooms, though it does at least require a course called Culture, Community, and Context. They claim:

We feel like we’re in a race to prepare you so that once you become a full-time teacher, you’re unusually well prepared. A traditional Ed School might be a better fit for you if you’re looking for an intellectual exploration of lots of different ideas. In our program, it will be more akin to music or sports training you’ve gotten—the coaching is very prescriptive . . . Practice, practice, practice. Whereas students at traditional Ed Schools spend more time writing papers and reading theory, MTRs [Match Teacher Residents] spend more hours practicing the specific moves that make first year teachers successful (Match Education, 2012a, paras. 4 & 6)

The careful practice of specified techniques corresponds with Match’s close use of Lemov’s (2010) instructional book *Teach Like a Champion*. Lemov notes:

One of the biggest ironies I hope you will take away from reading this book is that many of the tools likely to yield the strongest classroom results remain essentially beneath the notice of our theories and theorists of education. (p. 7)

He then proceeds to explain a “dizzily efficient technique” (p.8) of passing out papers, also featured in Match’s homepage video on “Speedy Transitions” (Match Education, 2012d), claiming the practice is “so efficient it is all but a moral imperative for teachers to use it” (Lemov, 2010, p. 8). These aspects of teaching, while important for day-to-day operations, are more the realm of educational technicians as opposed to educational experts. That is, techniques such as these help teachers with the very important how-to questions associated with classroom management but not with the why questions about lasting student learning. One recent Match tutor we spoke with, Barrett Smith, noted that while Match leaders rarely engaged with why questions, they often delivered what-to-dos (which even carried their own initials, WTD) as inflexible and certain.

Desire for immediate applicability, shock of initial exposure to the challenges of real teaching, and frustrations with the focus of traditional university programs on educational theories are not confined to those enrolled in Relay or Match; rather they are widely held by graduates of many schools of education (Levine, 2011; Rubenstein, 2007). While there should be no guaranteed position of prominence for intellectuals like Dewey, Gardner, Freire, and Vygotsky in the preparation of teachers, the frequent privileging of personal experience of the individual teacher over theoretical discussion of the collective group is worrisome. Yet this shift does honor changes in the preservice student population that education professors anecdotally note: a strong desire for techniques that are immediately applicable in the classroom today, less reading of dense theory, and interest in sharing one’s own personal experiences.

Interestingly, longer-term data coming out of successful and well-established teacher education colleges, such as the University of New Hampshire, that carefully blend educational theory with a year-long teaching internship, show that most experienced teachers who reflect on their teacher education programs conclude that courses in educational philosophy and educational psychology were helpful or very helpful for their teaching. According to a 2010 study, 67.1% of teachers found their educational philosophy course and 75.4% found their educational psychology course to be helpful or very helpful for their classroom practice (Andrew & Jelmberg, 2010). Larger national studies by Darling-Hammond (2000 and 2006) also found that “exemplary teacher education programs offer extensive course work in child and adolescent development, learning theory, and theories about cognition and motivation and subject matter pedagogy that is taught in the context of practice” (Zeichner & Conklin, 2008, p. 274). Additionally, Howe and Zimpher (1989) found that the best programs have high academic rigor and intellectual challenge. They “assert that exemplary programs offer a balance between pedagogical knowledge and general knowledge so that teacher candidates do not come away from their preparation with ideas

about teaching that are too narrow or technical” (Zeichner & Conklin, 2008, p. 274).

Notably the theorists left out of the Relay and Match programs are also those credited with drawing attention to individual children’s learning experiences, children’s unique learning styles, and educational needs of oppressed populations. In a program that relies on personal anecdotes and experiences of novice and veteran teachers alike, these perspectives may remain unaccounted for if not explicitly introduced through guided engagement with their complex and often eye-opening theories. Research has shown that even within teacher education settings that have strong mentorship programs connecting preservice and practicing teachers, preservice teachers who fail to engage in critical and self-reflective analysis of the contexts, theories, and purposes of teaching are unable to participate effectively in education reform (Penny, Harley, & Jessop, 1996). While Relay and Match architects may see themselves as reformers, their approach to educating teachers does not emphasize the skills or knowledge needed for teachers to themselves engage in or lead reform.

By not holding overt discussions of the types of theories developed by these noted intellectuals, Relay and Match risk producing teachers incapable of critically investigating their own practice or the larger goals of the schools they serve. This may mean that new teachers become socialized into a narrow technician perspective, focused on measurable achievement results without the ability or desire to critique this focus, thereby jeopardizing their professional voice, their ability to flexibly adapt practice in light of theory, and the privileging of the common good. Cochran-Smith (2004) aptly responds to the move toward heavy emphasis on teaching applications:

Teaching has technical aspects to be sure, and teachers can be trained to perform these. But teaching is also and, more importantly, an intellectual, cultural, and contextual activity that requires skillful decisions about how to convey subject matter knowledge, apply pedagogical skills, develop human relationships, and both generate and utilize local knowledge. (p. 299)

Relay and Match provide their students with short videos that demonstrate what they believe to be effective teaching techniques. One of those videos from the Relay website (www.relay.edu) features a classroom discussion of a literary character in which the teacher engages in low-level questioning of individual students about basic story and character facts. This video, “Rigorous Classroom Discussion,” has attracted considerable online outrage from award-winning school administrators and teachers, who find the example lacking in depth, caring demeanor for students, and a larger understanding of how to engage in learning discussions that dig deeper than short questions and responses between one teacher and a student (Strauss, 2012). While the video, removed from the site, may provide some insight into leading class discussions for new teachers, without a meta conversation about the purposes of classroom discussion and exploration of how student voice plays a role in learning, preparing new teachers in this way seems lacking at best and harmful at worst.

Another video example, entitled “A Culture of Support,” contains enacted evidence of social learning theories, schema theory, and expectancy-value theories of motivation, but none of these theories are mentioned by name. Rather than explaining how the theories are being employed, the instructor in the video serves more as a pop-up video commentator, pausing the clip and merely saying, “Look how good this teaching is,” rather than explaining in detail why the technique is successful or how the theories back it. Such an approach may lead to inflexibility among teachers who seek to emulate the teaching technique because when they are placed in a novel situation whose conditions do not allow for mimicry, they will have no guiding knowledge base of theory that would allow crafting effective instruction on-the-fly.

Although not a video, Match provides a similarly superficial example of good teaching in one of their graduate-level textbooks, *MTR 114: Instructional Methods Guidebook: Core Beliefs about Effective Instruction*. It describes a classroom lesson and shows how the teacher could do a better job engaging the students in questioning and learning about the book *Animal Farm*. The example does not, however, provide any background about the psychological or learning theories that are employed, rendering its justification for why one method is better than another shallow (Match Education, 2012b).

Relay and Match are not alone in using approaches that mimic those seen in many prominent but controversial charter schools to improve teacher education, but their intensive focus on immediate application sets their practices apart from those endorsed in the small handful of analogous programs. This includes California’s similarly organized charter school graduate school of education, High Tech High, which more overtly values educational theory and aims to unite theory and practice in its teacher education program (HTH Graduate School of Education, 2013). In sum, while Relay and Match may provide helpful immediate techniques for the classroom, their practices risk larger benefits offered by courses in educational theory and ties to a more traditional campus setting.

A Charter School Circle

There is a close and intentional connection among Relay, Match, and the staffing of charter schools. The leaders of Relay have laid out an ambitious growth plan, intending to quadruple in size in the first five years. While they hope that half of their graduates will go out into traditional district schools, much of their current focus is on producing teachers who will largely supply charter schools in New York. All of their incoming students last year already worked in charter schools, and many were participants in Teach for America (Caperton & Whitmire, 2012). Additionally, most of the model teachers in the schools where the participants are placed are themselves recent Match, Relay, or Teachfor America alumni. Moreover, the founders of Relay, all leaders of charter management organizations, set out to “develop a new pipeline of well-trained, well-aligned teachers for their growing networks of schools” (Relay Graduate School of Education, 2013a). Match is similarly transparent, stating:

Our program is 100% geared towards preparing teachers for a specific type of urban charter school that tends to offer a very different

experience for teachers and students than the surrounding district schools. Because of that, we strongly believe that our graduates will be most effective in these types of charter schools. We also have great relationships with charter school leaders around the country, which we leverage to help our teachers get jobs. (Match Education, 2012a, para. 17)

However, Ravitch (2012) cautions: “There is something incestuous about a ‘graduate’ program created by charter schools to give masters’ degrees to their own teachers” (para. 4).

Rather than preparing teachers who can instruct in any setting, as most public teacher education programs have historically been tasked—though, admittedly, have had limited success in doing (Çelik & Amaç, 2012; Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002; Zeichner, 2003;)—Relay and Match place heavy emphasis on preparing teachers for a certain type of role in large charter school organizations. Given that the founders endorse charter schools, it seems that students attending Relay and Match will likely be enculturated to do likewise. While in itself this is not necessarily a bad thing, potential problems from this approach could be avoided by ensuring a space within the Relay and Match programs for critique of charter school movements, especially for-profit educational management organizations (EMOs), whose practices raise many ethical and civic problems (Ben-Porath, 2012; Stitzlein, 2013).

It seems that Relay has already stacked the cards insofar as their faculty position announcement requires professors to “actively develop collaborative relationships with relevant partner organizations (e.g. Uncommon Schools, KIPP, Achievement First, and Teach For America) and with leaders of the [charter] schools in which participating teachers work” (Relay, 2012). Developing too narrow of a connection between teacher education programs and specific charter schools may limit flexibility in participants’ future careers. It may also create an insularity that risks the innovation those programs seek, especially as they may become inward-looking with limited perspective, thereby no longer thinking outside of the box at all.

This insularity may also narrow the public served by those teachers to specific sets of students who attend schools aligned with particular missions or organizational approaches. As a result, graduates of teacher education programs like this may not be well prepared to teach all types of students in all types of settings. This is troubling if completion of Relay-type programs results in graduates obtaining state teacher certification, licensing them to teach in any public school, including those with diverse populations, diverse student needs, and philosophies and guidelines dramatically different from the charter schools where they were trained to teach.

Democracy and Teacher Education

One of the most longstanding and overarching purposes of schools in America has been educating for democracy. Citizens have depended on schools to develop the habits and skills of good citizenship, which cross over into aspects of contributing to the economy, participating in civic life, and working well with others. Traditional colleges of education have upheld a tenuous and changing commitment to democracy, while this mission and related coursework appear absent from Relay and Match.

Many contemporary colleges of education trace their roots to normal colleges established at the middle and end of the nineteenth century (Harper, 1970). It was during that era that Mann made the first major push toward emphasizing democracy in teacher education by explicitly calling for future teachers to cultivate consensus building, universal communication, community participation, and moral and civic virtues in youth to ensure future generations of active citizens. Dewey deepened the commitment to democracy as a way of life and as participatory action with his influence on teacher education colleges in the twentieth century. This mission lingers in the guiding visions and required courses of many teacher education colleges, which often recognize that in order to cultivate the skills of democracy within their own students, teachers must first learn and practice those skills themselves in the university setting (Stitzlein, 2010).

Teacher education programs are not always, or perhaps even often, successful in these aims, but many continue to strive for them nonetheless (Stitzlein, 2010). In their materials, neither Relay nor Match describes the role of democracy in K–12 schools or in teacher preparation, and neither offers coursework in areas typical of teacher education programs—courses such as school and society, philosophy of education, and teaching in democracy—potentially jeopardizing the development of these important skills within their graduates and within the students those graduates will teach.

It is during university teacher preparation coursework that preservice teachers often first discover the democratic mission of their future careers. Through historical and philosophical coursework, they learn about the democratic purposes of schools and discern their unique position in maintaining and perpetuating a robust democracy. Quality classroom discussions engage preservice teachers in larger debates about how the purposes of schools are set, defined, and achieved. As those teachers are nurtured into professionals, they come to see teaching as not just a practical endeavor but one of refined judgment about social, political, and moral living that is best shaped through exposure to multiple and conflicting viewpoints and ideas:

Teacher education colleges are social institutions that pose moral, ethical, social, philosophical, and ideological questions. Although questions of value and ideology underlie many of the most contentious disagreements about teacher education, these disagreements are often mistakenly treated as if they were value-neutral and ideology-free.
(Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005, p. 3)

Whereas programs like Relay and Match usher participants into teaching with some good practical techniques in tow, they do not develop the skills of critique and interpretation that preservice teachers need in order to recognize ideology and values at work in their jobs and practices.

Relay and Match participants who are forced to quickly apply best practices without learning why they are good or when they should be altered may lack both an important democratic skill and a professional knowledge set. A key aspect of living democratically is being able to give persuasive reasons for one's practices, particularly when they so deeply impact the public, as does the work of

teachers. Citizens, and especially public servants like teachers, provide defensible accounts for their actions, and question, negotiate, or alter their practices when discussions with others reveal them to be faulty or not in the best interest of the public. This includes listening and attending to the voices and needs of the student populations teachers serve so that teachers' practices are not simply imposed on student populations but respond to their unique interests, thereby making pedagogical practice more shared and more authentic (Freire, 1970, p. 35). Providing a persuasive defense of one's practice is not just a rhetorical skill—it also requires knowledge about learning theory, the population served, and philosophy of education.

Public in nature, the aims of schools and their achievement should be open to community debate and input. Relay and Match have adopted a fixed definition of educational success, one largely tied to test scores and demonstrated "academic achievement." How we define success is a value-laden endeavor that has been taken out of a democratic context within these charter programs. They seem to indoctrinate participants into set practices geared toward preselected benchmarks that define success, risking multiple ways of understanding good education and signs of its achievement. Moreover, preservice teachers are not provided the opportunity to become professionals who name, debate, and shape successful practice in their field. Finally, narrowly predefining educational success as measurable academic achievement demarcated largely on tests risks many of the aspects of educating for democracy. Democratic skills, including working together to identify and solve social problems, debating and persuading others about visions of the good life, and the like, cannot be boiled down into something measurable by a standardized or multiple-choice format.

As a democratic practice, education is not meant to simply perpetuate the status quo but rather to identify and fill areas of weakness. Part of what Americans expect of teachers is to improve and adapt their practice to transform society into a more economically secure, intelligent, and just place. As education is a public institution, teachers and citizens should be working together to discuss how both school and society should be transformed and why. Teachers need to learn how to perceive and respond to the demands of society and how to act as agents of change within their classrooms.

While a difficult task, some courses in traditional teacher education programs at minimum introduce preservice teachers to the relationships between school and society as well as to the role of the teacher in mediating and changing them. In the case of Relay and Match, however, their agenda for change seems to be determined in advance by education reformers and entrepreneurs who are spearheading the charter school movement. Having identified traditional K–12 public schools and teacher education colleges as "failing," programs like these should be working with their leaders and participants to explain that assessment and democratically construct robust alternatives.

Conclusion

While one must be careful not to generalize too much from these early examples of charter-driven teacher preparation programs, some tentative conclusions may be drawn. Notably, such programs

may be more appropriately labeled *teacher training* rather than *teacher education*. As described by Johnson (1967), “Training implies learning for use in a predictable situation; education implies learning for use in unpredictable situations . . . The uses of training are replicative and applicative. The uses of education are associative and interpretive” (pp. 132–133). The name teacher training better reflects the focus of Match and Relay on replicating applications geared heavily toward student test achievement, rather than developing a more comprehensive understanding of the social purposes of schooling, the cognitive process of learning, and the political and economic implications of schools. While they may come to demonstrate some improved aspects of teacher training, these teacher preparation programs must be careful that their narrow focus on applying effective test-score enhancing techniques without critical analysis does not prevent new teachers from learning to critique their role in shaping and carrying out the purposes of schooling.

Under this approach, teachers are trained as workers who carry out specific sets of practices largely predetermined by others. Unlike true professionals, they are prepared to produce a product without understanding why, how, or even if it should be produced in the first place. Commended for their benefits of immediate application in classrooms, these teacher training programs may dumb down teaching in the long run, rendering teachers unable to develop, adapt, or assess good teaching on their own. This short-sighted approach may produce teachers who are unable to see the larger picture of successful teaching, which includes psychological, social, and political aspects of the profession. And when considered in the context of the overarching purposes of education and the democracy that schools sustain, the charter-aligned programs may risk something much greater among their teacher graduates. Hansen (2008) warns that approaches like the ones used by Relay and Match could lead teachers to “feel solely like functionaries” (p. 12). Teachers may lose perspective on the importance of caring for their students and their communities and not fully appreciate the whys of their subject matters, focusing only on the hows. Charter-aligned programs may train efficient technicians for their own programs, but they may fall short of educating and preparing educational experts, true masters of their fields.

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