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## A Study in Contrasts: Multiple-Case Perspectives on Teacher Preparation at New Graduate Schools of Education

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### ABSTRACT

This article takes a multi-case perspective on teacher preparation at new graduate schools of education (nGSEs) across four sites. The article argues that teacher preparation at nGSEs is a study in contrasts. On one hand, nGSE leaders frame teacher preparation at their institutions in terms of the marked contrasts they perceive between their programs and teacher preparation programs at universities, which is one of their principal justifications for the relocation of teacher preparation to new non-university organizations. On the other hand, there are stark contrasts within and across nGSE sites in how teacher preparation is conceptualized and enacted, depending primarily upon the interplay of underlying assumptions and values and the larger professional and political purposes to which particular nGSEs are attached.

In the short window between 2006 and 2018, a new phenomenon emerged in the increasingly crowded organizational field of teacher education in the United States – teacher preparation at “new graduate schools of education” (nGSEs) (Cochran-Smith, Carney, & Miller, 2016). By 2018, there were ten nGSEs in the United States with an 11<sup>th</sup> scheduled to begin operations in 2021<sup>1</sup> (Cochran-Smith, Keefe, Carney, Olivo, & Jewett Smith, 2020). As we have defined them, nGSEs are new organizations approved by their home state departments of education as higher education institutions that offer initial teacher preparation and grant master’s degrees, but they are not university-based or affiliated with universities as knowledge brokers or degree-granting bodies. This article takes a multi-case perspective by

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**Editor’s Note:** This article is the final one in a guest-edited issue of *The New Educator* on the topic of teacher preparation at “new graduate schools of education.” This term refers to the small, but growing phenomenon in the United States of new graduate schools that prepare and endorse teachers for certification and award master’s degrees, but are not university-based or formally affiliated with universities as knowledge brokers or degree-granting bodies. The six articles in the issue draw on data and analyses from a Spencer Foundation-funded study of teacher preparation at nGSEs. The issue’s first article locates nGSEs within the context of broad policy, political, and professional trends and describes the study. This is followed by four articles, each of which offers a theorized profile of teacher preparation at one nGSE. This final article concludes the issue with a multi-case perspective on the phenomenon of teacher preparation at nGSEs. Although each article in this issue has been designed to stand alone, readers will gain the richest understanding of teacher preparation at nGSEs by reading across the articles in the issue.

<sup>1</sup>The Rhode Island School for Progressive Education (RISPE), which will offer teacher preparation and is approved by the state of Rhode Island as an institution of higher education offering master’s degrees, will open in 2021.

looking across the four case profiles of teacher preparation at nGSEs included in this issue, utilizing an analytic framework (Cochran-Smith et al., 2020) designed to unpack and facilitate understanding of this new phenomenon. Organized according to the dimensions of the framework, this article makes a series of evidence-based assertions about teacher preparation at nGSEs regarding: mission, conceptualizing and enacting the project of learning to teach, institutional contexts, and funding.

Working across these dimensions, we argue in this article that teacher preparation at nGSEs was a study in contrasts, three of which are central. The first and most obvious contrast is that nGSEs are, by definition, *not* part of universities. Rather, they are new stand-alone organizations, or they are embedded within, or outgrowths of, other non-university educational organizations. Located within the complex organizational field of teacher education, nGSEs have laid claim to institutional ground and program legitimacy long reserved for schools of education at universities.

Second, nGSE founders and leaders framed teacher preparation at nGSEs in terms of the marked contrasts between what they perceived as the affordances and strengths of teacher preparation at nGSEs, on one hand, and what they perceived as the intractable constraints and limitations of university-based teacher preparation, on the other. Of course, university teacher preparation is not monolithic, static, or unresponsive to contemporary critiques and circumstances, and many university teacher educators have long been involved in major initiatives to transform the field. That said, however, the validity of the contrasts perceived by nGSE leaders between nGSE-based and university-based teacher preparation is not the point here. Rather, as we clarify below, the point is that the contrasts *perceived* by nGSE leaders and founders served principally (and often very effectively) to justify to funders and potential participants the relocation of teacher preparation away from universities and into new organizational spaces.

The third contrast has to do with differences *among and within* nGSEs themselves, which are highlighted in detail in the major section of this article. Along these lines, as we demonstrate below, despite some similar institutional arrangements and challenges, there were dramatic contrasts in the purposes and missions of teacher preparation at nGSEs. There were also marked contrasts in how teacher preparation was organized, conceptualized, and enacted across nGSEs. These striking contrasts depended primarily on how the tools and practices of particular nGSEs were influenced by their institutional contexts and by their different underlying assumptions and values about the nature of teaching, the knowledge needed to teach well, the pedagogies and practices assumed to be effective in teacher preparation, and the larger visions, professional purposes, and policy/political agendas to which particular nGSEs were attached.

### **Teacher preparation at nGSEs: Background and contexts**

Teacher preparation at nGSEs emerged out of the convergence of multiple trends related to education and teacher education (see Cochran-Smith, 2020),

including unprecedented international attention to teacher quality (Cochran-Smith, 2005), a new market-based educational policy paradigm (Mehta, 2013), and a new paradigm of “muscular” educational philanthropy (Hess, 2005, 2012). At the same time, there were growing teacher shortages in the United States, especially in urban schools and in science and math, special education, and education for English learners.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, there was a barrage of critiques of university teacher preparation from both university outsiders and insiders. Outsiders charged that there was a lack of evidence showing that university preparation was effective, that certification procedures and processes were cumbersome and unnecessary, and that alternate pathways were a superior policy model (Ballou & Podgursky, 2000; Duncan, 2009; United States Department of Education, 2002, 2003). Meanwhile a powerful professionalization agenda from within the university community called for rigorous and uniform professional standards and accountability systems across preparation, program approval, and licensure (National Commission on Teaching & America’s Future, 1996, 1997). In addition, from the 1980s onward, some teacher educators and professional organizations argued for the transformation of university teacher preparation through justice and equity-centered programming to prepare teachers to work with minoritized populations and to challenge the systems that reproduce inequities (Sleeter, 2000; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Zeichner, 1996). These and other critiques contributed to the widespread consensus by the late 1990s that there was an urgent need for change in the ways teachers were recruited, prepared, distributed, and retained (Cochran-Smith et al., 2018; Hollar, 2017; Zeichner & Conklin, 2016). Together, these trends created a policy climate that was at the very least, open to the emergence of teacher preparation at nGSEs, and in certain ways, privileged the expansion of teacher preparation at non-university professional schools and other non-university sites.

The emergence of teacher preparation at nGSEs prompted extremely mixed reactions and responses in the news, on social media, and in the professional and scholarly literature (see Cochran-Smith, 2020, for a review of responses.) Despite these controversies, however, there has been very little independent, empirical research about teacher preparation at nGSEs based on direct access to programs and participants themselves.

### **A national study of teacher preparation at nGSEs**

To address this gap in the research and with the support of grants from the Spencer Foundation, we have been conducting a three-phase, within-case and cross-case study of teacher preparation at nGSEs. The study takes up questions about what it means for the field of teacher education and for professional education more broadly to relocate teacher preparation to private sector nGSEs, organized and labeled institutionally as “graduate schools of education.” These

questions are highly significant given ongoing debates in the United States about the relevance and substance of teacher preparation and the steady growth across the country of nGSEs designed primarily to serve minoritized populations in urban areas.

Of the ten nGSEs in the United States that offer initial teacher preparation, we conducted within-case studies of four – Sposato GSE (Sposato) in Boston, Massachusetts; High Tech High/High Tech High GSE (High Tech High/GSE)<sup>2</sup> in San Diego, California; TEACH-NOW GSE (TEACH-NOW),<sup>3</sup> an online, for-profit program headquartered in Washington, DC; and the MAT program at the Richard Gilder Graduate School at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) in New York. These sites were selected for their variation in program approach and origin, their willingness and availability to participate, and together, their national span. We regarded each of the four sites as an information-rich and intrinsically interesting example of teacher preparation within a new kind of organization. We also regarded each site instrumentally in that each was an instance or “case” of the larger phenomenon of teacher preparation at nGSEs (Stake, 2006).<sup>4</sup>

The construction of each case study was based on: interviews with program founders, leaders, faculty, teacher candidates and graduates; observations of courses, learning modules, supervision sessions, and other key program activities; collection of publicly available documents, materials, and news items over time; and, collection of proprietary and other program materials, handbooks, syllabi, tools, assignments, evaluations, and institutional reports. The four profiles of teacher preparation presented in this issue are drawn from the case study data and from the analyses completed as part of the larger study.

The purpose of each profile is to examine how teacher preparation is conceptualized and enacted within the organizational contexts of a particular nGSE and in relation to larger policy, political, and professional contexts. The purpose is *not* to judge or evaluate programs from the perspective of the *a priori* values and beliefs of the research team. It is also worth noting that none of the research team members is (or ever was) affiliated with any of the nGSE programs we studied. In short, the research team wanted to know how programs’ missions, purposes, practices, pedagogies, and tools were shaped by their institutional environments and constraints. To explore these questions, we drew on ideas about teacher learning (Cochran-Smith & Lytle,

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<sup>2</sup>We use the term, High Tech High/GSE to emphasize that at the time data were collected for the case study, teacher education occurred across High Tech High and High Tech High GSE.

<sup>3</sup>On July 9, 2020, the Higher Education Licensing Commission (Washington, DC) approved a “name change” – to Moreland University – for the TEACH-NOW Graduate School of Education. TEACH-NOW will continue to exist under the Moreland University umbrella. Given its evolution from a graduate school of education to an online university, TEACH-NOW no longer fits with our definition of nGSEs. However all of the data about TEACH-NOW in this and other articles in this issue were obtained while it was an nGSE.

<sup>4</sup>For more general information about the characteristics of nGSEs, see Cochran-Smith et al. (2020). For information and analysis of each site, see: Carney (2019, 2020), Keefe and Miller (2020), Miller (2017), Olivo and Jewett Smith (2020), and, Sánchez (2019, 2020).

1999) and “communities of practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). In addition, the study was guided by ideas from new institutional theory (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Meyer & Rowan, 2006; Scott, Ruef, Mendel, & Caronna, 2000), which suggests that the practices and structures of organizations reflect broader environmental rules, traditions, and beliefs (Powell, 2007; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). (For further information on the study design, see Cochran-Smith, 2020).

### **Looking across multiple cases**

In the remainder of this article, we explore the phenomenon of teacher preparation at nGSEs by looking across the four cases using an analytic framework we developed for this purpose (see Figure 1). The framework is comprised of four interrelated dimensions: (a) mission, (b) conceptualization and enactment of the project of learning to teach, (c) institutional contexts and environments, and (d) funding.

As the outer frame of Figure 1 suggests, underlying all four dimensions are values, beliefs, and assumptions that create nuances of meaning. We use these dimensions to organize and present an overview of key evidence-based assertions about teacher preparation at nGSEs as well as how nGSE teacher preparation varied across cases. It is important to note here that space limitations preclude a detailed discussion of cross-site variations and patterns; these are examined in detail in multiple other articles currently in preparation.

#### ***Mission: Purpose, problem, and logic***

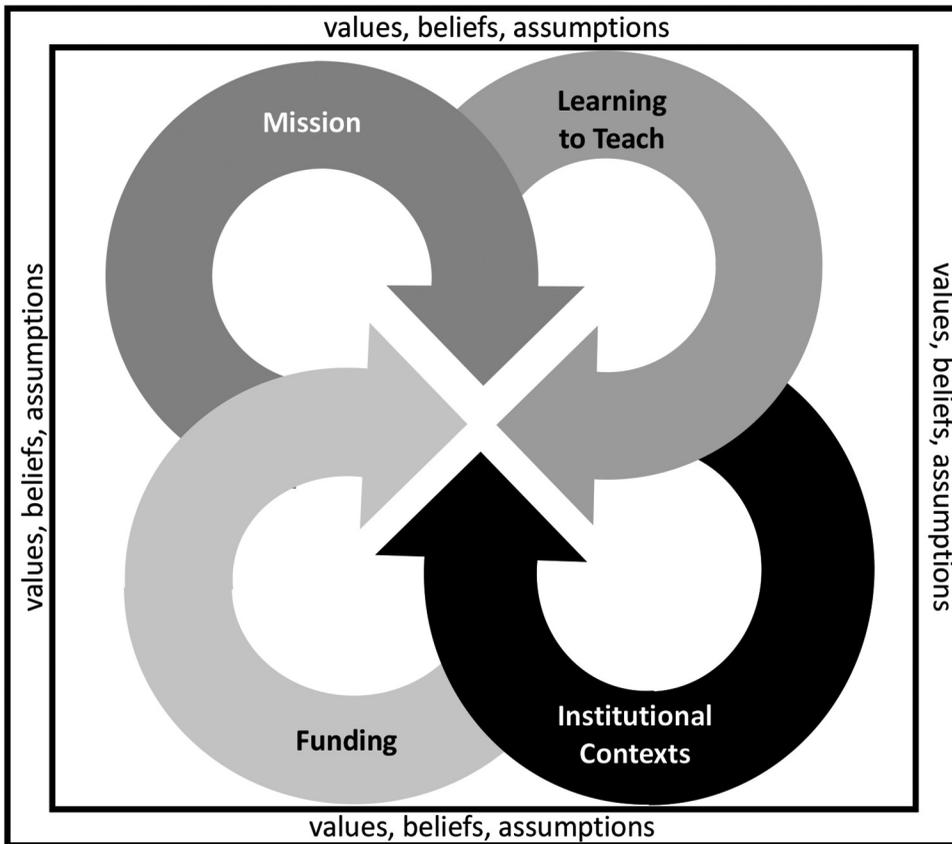
We use “mission” as an umbrella term encompassing the purposes, rationales, values, and broader aspirations that motivated teacher preparation at nGSEs. Mission also includes underlying “institutional logics” (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008) and the history of nGSEs, including why their founders perceived the need for a new graduate school organization outside universities.

#### ***Purpose and goals***

The day-to-day work of teacher preparation at each of the four nGSEs was animated by different, but very clear goals, which were consistent with the broader assumptions of each nGSE regarding the roles of teaching and teacher education in society and with their conceptions of educational equity and access. Along these lines, Sposato sought to create “jaw-droppingly effective rookie teachers” for “no-excuses” schools working effectively with “low-income” urban populations (Miller, 2017).<sup>5</sup> Based on the assumption that

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<sup>5</sup>This was the language used by Sposato GSE when we collected data at this site in 2016–2017. Since that time, Sposato has shifted to the language of preparing “unusually effective novice teachers” for “high-performing, high poverty” urban charter and “turnaround” schools (Keefe & Miller, 2020).



**Figure 1.** A framework for unpacking the phenomenon of teacher preparation at nGSEs. Cochran-Smith, M., Keefe, E.S., Carney, M.C., Olivo, M., & Smith, R.J. (2020). Teacher preparation at new graduate schools of education: Studying a controversial innovation. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 47(2):8–37. Used with permission.

schools (and teachers) can redress inequality and poverty (Kantor & Lowe, 2016), Sposato’s goals for teacher education were consistent with its broader institutional mission to tackle the “achievement gap” by ensuring that new teachers had the right tools for working efficiently and effectively with students in “high poverty” urban settings (Miller, 2017). In contrast, High Tech High/GSE aimed “to develop reflective practitioner leaders” to effectively use “project-based learning” pedagogies designed to promote “deeper learning” for students from all economic and geographic sectors of the San Diego area (Sánchez, 2019). Leaders of teacher preparation at High Tech High/GSE aimed to be “innovative” and “disruptive” by being more practice-oriented than what they perceived to be the case with university programs, but also by being consistent with broader equity goals aligned with the vision of the High Tech High charter school organization (Sánchez, 2019).

Like Sposato and High Tech High/GSE, the MAT program in Earth Science at the AMNH had a very specific purpose. It was designed to mitigate the

severe shortage of earth science teachers in New York's high-need schools by preparing teachers to "develop identities not simply as schoolteachers, but as teachers of science" (Olivo & Jewett Smith, 2020). This goal was highly consistent with the historic mission of the AMNH to generate knowledge about the natural world and human culture through scientific research and to disseminate that knowledge to the general public (Olivo & Jewett Smith, 2020). Finally, as a for-profit and fully-online program, TEACH-NOW was somewhat of an outlier among the four nGSEs we studied. As a stand-alone organization, TEACH-NOW had neither the obligation – nor the inspiration – of a parent organization. Nevertheless, its aim was clear and specific – to prepare teachers around the globe to be "resourceful problem solvers and tech-savvy educators" with "next-generation" tools and technology that would be effective with any student and in any context (Carney, 2019).

It is important to note that for three of the four nGSEs we studied, the goal was preparing teachers for urban schools serving primarily minoritized populations in the United States. As we show, however, within this general goal, there was significant variation based on differing beliefs about the value of the cultural and experiential resources of urban and/or minoritized communities (Zygmunt & Clark, 2015), different assumptions about the power of teachers (and schools) to redress inequality and poverty (Kantor & Lowe, 2016), and different ideas about the meaning of "equity" as an agenda for teacher preparation (Cochran-Smith et al., 2016).

### *Universities as problem, nGSEs as solution*

The nGSEs we studied shared a line of reasoning about the relocation of teacher preparation wherein they constructed university teacher preparation as a problem, and teacher preparation at new organizations outside of and unaffiliated with universities – but able to function as graduate schools – as a solution. At both Sposato and High Tech High/GSE, part of the motivation to establish a graduate school was that new teachers from university programs were perceived as unprepared to teach in ways consistent with the (very different) philosophies of the schools in their respective charter networks. Sposato charged that university graduates had too much theory and too little knowledge of the nuts and bolts of practice (Miller, 2017), while High Tech High/GSE claimed that university grads were not prepared for a curriculum aimed at deeper learning through projects and inquiry (Sánchez, 2019). Along different lines, TEACH-NOW founders charged that university preparation was too expensive and time-consuming, out of sync with consumer demands, and inattentive to technology's impact on education (Carney, 2019). Meanwhile the leaders of the AMNH MAT program believed that university science teacher education programs were constrained by their failure to establish essential connections across science disciplines and education (Olivo & Jewett Smith, 2020).

What is most interesting here is that the founders and leaders of teacher preparation at nGSEs did not make the same claims about what they perceived was wrong with university teacher preparation. Nevertheless they shared the conclusion that in order to fix teacher preparation, a new set of organizational and structural arrangements external to, and disruptive of, the bureaucracy, knowledge traditions, and priorities of universities was needed.

### *Remaking teacher preparation*

Closely related to the ways they perceived the problem of teacher education, the founders and leaders of all four nGSEs had broad aspirations about disrupting and remaking the educational enterprise of teacher preparation in the United States. The founder of TEACH-NOW wanted her online, for-profit program to be a “game changer in the industry and a solution to everybody’s problem” (Carney, 2019) by offering inexpensive, universally accessible, and speedy teacher certification consistent with professional standards in the field. Somewhat differently, the leaders of Sposato wanted their program to disrupt and revolutionize traditional teacher education by serving as what they referred to as a “proof point,” demonstrating that context-specific preparation could produce extremely effective first year teachers for charter and other schools where quantifiable student achievement was the top priority (Keefe & Miller, 2020). In contrast, High Tech High/GSE aspired to be recognized in the United States and beyond as a “hub of progressive practice . . . and a model of thoughtful, integrated, and transformative graduate education that has a direct impact on K-12 schools” (Sánchez, 2019). Finally, although the AMNH MAT program was intended primarily to help solve the New York science teacher shortage, it also aspired to be an innovative model of teacher preparation for museums and other informal science education institutions (Olivo & Jewett Smith, 2020).

In short, all the nGSEs we studied perceived that they had a “better idea” about how to do teacher preparation. Although quite different from one another, each of these “better ideas” reflects a response to one or more critiques of the perceived inadequacies of university teacher preparation that have been propagated (and contested) for decades (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2005; Fraser & Lefty, 2018; Zeichner, 2016). It is important to note, however, as we pointed out above, that implicit in these critiques is the assumption that the enterprise of university-based teacher preparation is monolithic and more or less unresponsive to contemporary critiques and issues, an assumption not supported by evidence about the considerable differences within and among teacher preparation programs at universities (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2016; National Research Council, Committee on the Study of Teacher Preparation Programs in the United States, 2010).

### *Institutional logics*

Institutional theorists suggest that “logics” are bigger than the goals of particular organizations and are influenced by broader external institutional

environments (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Heinze & Weber, 2016; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). Institutional logics link individuals and individual institutions with “socially constructed institutional practices and rule structures” (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008) and thus give meaning to institutional reality. All the nGSEs we studied were born out of the market logic that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, which supported the deregulation of teacher education and encouraged the proliferation of multiple non-university providers (Cochran-Smith et al., 2018).

However, we found that even though nGSEs as organizations were invented in opposition to universities, across nGSEs, individual institutional logics and realities were not the same. High Tech High/GSE was animated by a democratic and more particularly, a constructivist logic that connected authenticity, humanism, and inquiry (Sánchez, 2019); however it was also driven by the desire to be innovative and disruptive, motivations consistent with broader market logics (Sánchez, 2019). The AMNH MAT program extended the museum’s long-time democratic and public logic of serving the common good by educating people about science and science issues (Olivo & Jewett Smith, 2020). In contrast, both TEACH-NOW and Sposato were animated by institutional logics firmly grounded in the market. At TEACH-NOW, the logic of the market focused on accessibility, affordability, and profitability (Carney, 2019); at Sposato, market logic was manifested in the program’s emphasis on efficiency, competition, and effectiveness (Miller, 2017).

### ***The project of learning to teach***

The “project of learning to teach” refers to a program’s implicit or explicit conceptions of what it means to teach well and what it means to learn to teach along with the program elements, structures, pedagogies, tools, and practices designed to instantiate those concepts. Their substantial differences notwithstanding, the four nGSEs we studied shared the assumption that teaching is a learned activity, not an innate talent or a skill picked up on the job.

### ***Vision of good teaching***

Teacher preparation at each of the four nGSEs was organized around a consistent vision of what it means to teach well. At Sposato, good teaching was defined as novice teachers’ consistently and automatically engaging in a set of “highly-prescribed” teaching “moves” related to presence, management, and instruction (Keefe & Miller, 2020). In stark contrast, High Tech High/GSE defined good teaching as facilitating strong student engagement in personalized, authentic learning experiences, accomplished through project-based learning that emphasized thinking and doing (Sánchez, 2019). Along somewhat similar lines, leaders of the AMNH MAT program envisioned good teaching as the integration of deep science content knowledge coupled with a toolkit of skills

that instilled scientific literacy and curiosity and a respectful disposition for diverse learners (Olivo & Jewett Smith, 2020). In keeping with its universal technology-focused approach to teacher preparation, TEACH-NOW defined good teaching as addressing the needs of all learners in the digital age by blending effective instruction with the meaningful use of technology (Carney, 2019).

What the four nGSEs have in common is that visions of good teaching were clearly articulated and closely aligned to their context-specific purposes. However, these visions were dramatically different from one another, ranging along a continuum from, on one side, good teaching defined as automatically applying decontextualized and technical teacher behaviors to, on the other side, good teaching defined as enacting deliberate, contextualized, and complex principles of practice (Cochran-Smith, 2014; Philip, 2019).

*Pedagogy.* Each of the nGSEs had explicit pedagogies and program structures designed to ensure that teacher candidates learned to teach in ways aligned with the institutions' purposes and visions. Despite dramatic differences across sites, the pedagogies enacted to help candidates learn to teach were generally analogous with the pedagogies program graduates were expected to use in their work with K-12 students. Along these lines, High Tech High/GSE is well-known for parallelism between its approaches to teacher learning and student learning, with both based on projects, inquiry, and dialogue designed to promote deeper learning (Mehta & Fine, 2015), a connection mirrored in the organization's choice to embed a GSE within a set of K-12 schools (Sánchez, 2020). On the other hand, teacher educators at Sposato trained teacher candidates to use "cycles of practice and feedback" to teach K-12 students; they did so by teaching candidates through intense repetition of highly technical "moves" assumed to make first year teachers successful (Keefe & Miller, 2020). Meanwhile, with the AMNH MAT program, candidates learned to teach through participation in multiple overlapping communities of practice (Wenger, 1998), some focused on teaching and some on working as scientists; in turn, candidates were expected to engage their students in real science discourse and practice (Olivo & Jewett Smith, 2020). Finally, the "learn by doing" TEACH-NOW pedagogy, which featured small cohorts of candidates meeting in weekly, synchronous virtual classes, was parallel to the program's emphasis on teachers working with K-12 students using digital tools (Carney, 2020).

### ***Knowledge sources/relationships of knowledge and practice***

Underlying the pedagogy and program structures of the four nGSEs were strikingly different assumptions about the knowledge teachers need to teach well, knowledge sources, and the relationships of knowledge and practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). At Sposato, the source of knowledge for good teaching was the daily practical work of teachers who were deemed by Sposato leaders as successful at increasing student achievement in high-

poverty urban charter schools; this practical knowledge was accumulated into a collection of 50–100 teaching moves, which teacher candidates were expected to apply (Miller, 2017). In contrast, for the AMNH MAT (Olivo & Jewett Smith, 2020), scientific expertise, which was derived from engaging in scientific inquiry *as* scientists, was a central source of knowledge for teaching, coupled with knowledge of practice, derived from research about specific practices involved in successful science teaching (McNeill & Krajcik, 2012; Windschitl, Thompson, & Braaten, 2018). At High Tech High/GSE, a “practicing with theory” (Sánchez, 2019) approach emphasized that knowledge of practice was inseparable from theory; this knowledge emerged in part from teacher candidates’ inquiry-oriented investigations. TEACH-NOW’s technology-centric approach paired the principles underlying the InTASC standards<sup>6</sup> for new teachers with required clinical experiences, assuming that effective teaching strategies were universal and applicable to any school environment (Carney, 2019).

A key assumption that discriminates views of knowledge across the sites has to do with the certainty or uncertainty of knowledge. Conceptualizing knowledge for teaching at nGSEs along a continuum, on one side is the certainty associated with pre-determined techniques that are automatically applied; on the other side is uncertainty and negotiability, akin to what Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) called “knowledge of practice,” wherein teachers and others engage in ongoing inquiry and interrogation of their own and others’ work with diverse learners in multiple contexts.

### *Highly-coherent programs*

Despite obvious differences, all the nGSEs we studied exhibited high degrees of internal program coherence, a program characteristic touted as a feature of powerful teacher preparation (Darling-Hammond, 2006). One way Sposato achieved tight program coherence was by “off-ramping” candidates who did not buy-in wholeheartedly to the Sposato approach (Miller, 2017), while in contrast, at High Tech High/GSE, candidates were invited to join with experienced colleagues who were themselves engaged in efforts to question and rethink their assumptions and practices related to deeper learning (Sánchez, 2019). Along still different lines, “senior specialists” at the AMNH MAT program supported teacher residents in the schools with the explicit goal of connecting the science teaching practices introduced in courses to the decisions candidates made in classrooms (Olivo & Jewett Smith, 2020). TEACH-NOW achieved tight program coherence by employing a series of uniform, sequential modules delivered via its online learning platform and featuring the same format and kinds of assignments for all modules (Carney, 2019).

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<sup>6</sup>The Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) Model Standards for Beginning Teachers Licensing and Development, which include ten standards for new teachers, are widely used by teacher education accreditors, programs, and states.

“Program coherence” has long been identified as an aspiration for teacher preparation (Hammerness, 2006). Years ago, however, Buchmann and Floden (1991) rightly pointed out that coherence is a relative term, depending on what is intended to cohere with what else and for what purpose, including “the extent to which a predetermined set of outcomes guides (or constrains) the curriculum” (p. 69). Looking across nGSEs suggests that program coherence can be achieved by imposition of a highly-prescribed approach that excludes divergent perspectives or by creating multiple opportunities for candidates to join others in reflecting on and questioning a set of principles. Even though tightly-coherent programs may indeed be more powerful influences on teacher candidates than fragmented programs (Darling-Hammond, 2006), the differences we have identified among nGSEs calls into question the idea that program coherence per se is an essential characteristic of “good” or “powerful” teacher education; rather, preparation program coherence is a complex issue, nuanced by the larger political and professional agendas to which programs are attached and their underlying values and assumptions.

### ***Institutional contexts and environments***

We analyze nGSEs as institutions given their foray into territory that has historically been the jurisdiction of traditional, university-based teacher preparation programs. This requires an examination of the institutional contexts in which nGSEs operate: the institutional actors charged with decision making and processes; nGSE structures and infrastructures; the accreditors and regulatory agencies that govern them; and their chosen professional affiliations with organizations, projects, and people. The institutional contexts and environments of nGSEs have a highly reciprocal relationship with their internal actors’ decisions and actions, and ultimately influence the design and structure of their respective teacher preparation programs. We focus here on two defining features that have emerged from our data – the characteristics of nGSE actors and nGSEs’ quest for legitimacy in the field of graduate teacher preparation.

### ***Actors***

Teacher preparation at nGSEs is led primarily by teacher educators who see themselves as reformers. Generally, they assume that “traditional” teacher preparation is obsolete and/or ineffective, and they subscribe to many of the same education reform ideals that gave rise to nGSEs. Not surprisingly, their experience is a departure from the experience and credentials of university-based educators. At many nGSEs, faculty are identified and selected for their context expertise as either industry experts who hold credentials outside of education, or who are school-based educators, former charter school alumni, teachers, and administrators, who in many cases are credentialed at the same level as graduates of their programs (rather than as PhDs). In most cases,

faculty at nGSEs have been deemed effective experts or practitioners as a central qualification for their leadership.

The use of practitioner experts as faculty was a defining feature of how both Sposato GSE and TEACH-NOW differentiated themselves from other teacher preparation programs. Along these lines, Sposato markets its program by noting that the faculty is comprised entirely of “practitioners . . . experienced classroom teachers and school leaders” in contrast to what they perceive to be the case with traditional university programs – that “faculty is primarily composed of researchers,” (CSCSE, “What Makes Sposato Unique”) a point they celebrate given their emphasis on intense technique-based practice over theory (Keefe & Miller, 2020). Similarly, the identification of the faculty as “master educators” who excel in the classroom was leveraged as a key marketing strategy at TEACH-NOW where the majority of faculty held M.Ed., MAT, or MS degrees (and even one faculty member who was a master’s degree candidate) with few faculty holding doctoral degrees (Carney, 2019). High Tech High/GSE leaders believed that “what happened at the K-12 level informed what happened at the teacher education level, and vice versa” and given their embrace of project-based learning, faculty adopted a heavily constructivist approach (Sánchez, 2019). Faculty at High Tech High/GSE hold the title “practitioner faculty;” their founding vision (unrealized due to a state credentialing law) was that some teacher educators would be industry experts (Arnett, 2015), such as engineers and artists. At the AMNH MAT program, all courses are taught jointly, either by a museum scientist and a teacher educator or by two teacher educators, though unlike the other three nGSEs, all faculty involved with the AMNH MAT have credentials at the doctoral level (Olivo & Jewett Smith, 2020). Reflected in its use of a new cadre of teacher educators, nGSE providers aim to be effective by being disruptive; in some cases, nGSE leaders believe the current system needs to be unseated.

### **Legitimacy**

The nGSEs we studied were caught in the tension between innovation and legitimacy, what Carney (2019) calls the “innovation-legitimation push and pull” where teacher preparation operates at the “nexus of a complex tension between the push to be innovative and pull to be legitimate” (p.18). This is striking in nGSEs’ efforts both to *reject* university-based knowledge traditions and priorities and at the same time to *adopt* some of universities’ trappings, reflected most obviously in nGSEs’ use of the academic nomenclature of universities (e.g., “graduate school of education,” “dean,” “provost”). The leaders of nGSEs rejected what they perceived to be “traditional” university-based teacher education approaches, and in fact, this was a central defining feature of their work. However, their status as non university-based graduate schools, although state-approved, was in some ways an obstacle to their credibility and in some cases, to attracting candidates. This was

a central theme in nGSEs' decisions about seeking, navigating, and obtaining institutional accreditation. Without accreditation, students at nGSEs are unable to seek federal financial aid or to transfer credits; in addition, graduates of some nGSEs may be unable to pursue terminal degrees and/or their degrees may not be recognized for salary purposes by the schools where they ultimately work. One approach to establishing legitimacy in the field was to seek regional or national institutional accreditation, since accreditation is intended to promote and assure the public about quality. Interestingly, this decision is somewhat contradictory to nGSEs' stance toward innovation and disruption, given that accreditors are often considered to be conservative, and they expect regulatory compliance. This means accreditation can influence nGSEs' internal organizational capabilities (Arnett, 2015) and affect their approaches.

The issue of legitimacy was especially clear at Sposato GSE, where they are currently pursuing accreditation through the Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges, a new institutional accreditor, noting that “one clear disadvantage to the lack of accreditation is that the Sposato Graduate School of Education students do not qualify for federal financial aid” (CSGSE, “The M.E.T. Degree” [Master’s of Effective Teaching]). In contrast, with the MAT program at AMNH, which unlike other nGSEs provides full funding and a stipend to their MAT candidates, federal financial aid was not the motivation for pursuing accreditation. Rather institutional and programmatic accreditation were regarded as essential to AMNH’s status and reputation, an issue emphasized by the program’s location in New York State wherein programmatic accreditation was mandatory. High Tech High/GSE pursued regional accreditation with the prestigious Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), which forced HTHGSE to “create specific structures in line with other teacher education programs, indicating isomorphic pressures to conform” (Sánchez, 2019, p. 30). TEACH-NOW was the first online teacher preparation program to receive national programmatic accreditation through the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), partly to strengthen its professional reputation and signify its credibility in the eyes of teacher preparation consumers (Carney, 2019). While their reasons for negotiating accreditation varied, nGSEs’ interests in accreditation is ultimately related to credibility and legitimacy.

### **Funding**

The final dimension of our analytic framework for unpacking teacher preparation at nGSEs is funding. This dimension includes external funding sources and seed money, new business models, and innovative tuition arrangements. It also encompasses the larger network of funders, both private and public, that has enabled the rise of nGSEs. With the single exception of TEACH-NOW, which is a for-profit business, the nGSEs we studied are

nonprofits embedded in larger educational organizations. Nevertheless, several aspects of nGSE funding models cut across all four cases and business models.

### ***Streamlined tuition***

The four nGSEs we analyzed sought to streamline tuition for teacher candidates by making it affordable and straightforward, largely by circumventing the federal financial aid system, which is the traditional mechanism for defraying the cost of graduate school. Instead of requiring candidates to navigate their own ways of covering the sticker price of tuition by securing loans, fellowships, and scholarships, nGSEs made tuition affordable and also took it upon themselves to be responsible for making the payment process straightforward. In many cases, as noted, this was part of a larger process of differentiation whereby nGSEs sought to distinguish themselves from traditional schools of education.

Along these lines, Sposato, which, as we noted, was not eligible for federal aid because it was not regionally or nationally institutionally accredited, used an “income-share agreement” that shifted the risk of unemployment onto the GSE by deferring collection of interest-free tuition installments until the graduate’s first three years of full-time employment (Goldstein & McCue, 2020). TEACH-NOW operated as a for-profit enterprise and did not offer financial aid. Rather, the institution deliberately kept its programs affordable. For example, tuition for the certification-only program was \$6000. USD and candidates could pay in interest-free monthly installments (Carney, 2020). TEACH-NOW prided itself on the cost-savings of operating entirely online and avoiding the federal aid bureaucracy, which enabled affordability for candidates (Carney, 2020). The AMNH MAT also operated outside of the federal aid system by fully subsidizing the cost of tuition (\$44,750. USD). That is, AMNH teacher candidates paid nothing, received a \$30,000. USD stipend, and depending on the primary grant source, some cohorts of graduates also received a \$10,000. USD annual salary supplement during the first four years of teaching (Olivo & Jewett Smith, 2020). Finally, at High Tech High/GSE, candidates in the district intern program worked for pay as teachers or student coaches at charter schools, often in the High Tech High network (Sanchez, 2020). Given that candidates were paid and classes were relatively inexpensive, the program cost was considerably less than university-based preparation programs (Goldstein & McCue, 2020; Sanchez, 2020). For all four of the programs we studied, candidates were freed of the burden of navigating external subsidies, grants, or loans. Individually and according to different logics, each nGSE streamlined tuition and maximized affordability as part of a deliberate attempt to distinguish its program from traditional schools of education.

### ***Funding sources***

The ability of nGSEs to offer streamlined tuition models was due, in large part, to their abundance of external funding sources, both public and private, many

of which were tied to larger education reform movements. All of the nGSEs we studied accepted at least some contributions from private donors and major foundations. In several cases, these funds enabled programs to offset the cost of tuition and simplify funding for the candidate. Sposato, for example, received substantial annual funding from its parent entity, the Match Foundation, and advertised other external donors as partially underwriting the cost of tuition (Sposato Graduate School of Education, 2018; “Costs,” *in press*). A significant portion of its revenue also came from placement fees paid by charter networks that hired program graduates (Sposato Graduate School of Education, 2018). Like Sposato, the AMNH MAT program was fed by its parent organization, the American Museum of Natural History, and its fount of well-heeled private donors (American Museum of Natural History, 2018; Olivo & Jewett Smith, 2020). For example, the Richard Gilder Graduate School at AMNH was made possible by a \$50 million USD gift from Wall Street philanthropist Richard Gilder (Roberts, 2020). In addition, the AMNH MAT program received competitive federal grants that helped it appeal to private donors and ultimately enabled it to fully subsidize the \$74,750 USD program cost (Olivo & Jewett Smith, 2020).

High Tech High/GSE also drew on public funds, private donations, and local lead donors, especially Gary Jacobs of Qualcomm (Sánchez, 2019). High Tech High/GSE also had corporate support for the graduate school from localized foundations such as the Amar Foundation and the James Irvine Foundation as well as national grant makers, including the Walton Family Foundation and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. TEACH-NOW is the clear outlier here, running a fully for-profit business. However, it too received early private seed money from the NewSchools Venture Fund before it began operating exclusively from candidate tuition (Carney, 2019). Minimizing or eliminating dependence on federal subsidies for student tuition, nGSE funding models relied on low cost tuition, public grants, and/or donations from private foundations that reflected the market logic underlying many education reforms.

### *Network of funders*

Looking across the nGSEs currently operating in the United States reveals a common pattern of funding consistent with the rise of the new education philanthropy that takes a more “muscular” approach to giving guided by market logic and accountability measures (Hess, 2005; Lincove, Osborne, Mills, & Bellows, 2015; Zeichner, 2016; Zeichner & Peña-Sandoval, 2015). With the exception of TEACH-NOW, ongoing reliance on private funding is the common denominator for nGSE funding models at the nGSEs we studied, and this is also the case for many, but not all, of the other nGSEs in the field as a whole (Cochran-Smith et al., 2020). Along these lines, several nGSEs disclose their relationships with private foundations on their websites, often promoting these as partnerships. For example, Relay Graduate School of Education, the largest

nGSE although not one of our case studies, refers to its major donors as “partners making investments in local communities” (Relay Graduate School of Education, [in press](#)), including the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation, the Walton Family Foundation, and Venture Philanthropy Partners. High Tech High/GSE also names its supporters, listed above, on its “About Us” webpage (High Tech High/GSE, [in press b](#)). Reform-oriented family foundations also helped fund other nGSEs, including the Woodrow Wilson Graduate School of Teaching and Learning and Reach Institute, demonstrating that members of this network of foundations were eager to fund privatized entrepreneurial solutions to perceived problems in teacher education. Influential and wealthy, this network of private foundations has supported the rapid proliferation of nGSEs since the early 2000s.

### **Synthesizing across cases**

As we have shown, teacher preparation across nGSEs shares several key institutional and organizational characteristics. The phenomenon emerged in the early 2000s within the context of a loose collection of “education reforms,” given the widespread consensus that teachers had a major impact on both overall school success and national prosperity (Lewis & Young, 2013; Mehta, 2013). Although for different reasons, nGSEs were established in part because their founders and leaders believed they had a “better idea” about how to organize, conceptualize, enact, and fund teacher preparation outside of what they perceived to be the constraints and shortcomings of universities. Given the history of teacher preparation at universities and the complex program approval and teacher certification mechanisms in place in each state, all nGSEs faced the challenges of establishing legitimacy and claiming jurisdiction as newcomers in the field of teacher preparation. In addition to these organizational and institutional similarities, there were also some programmatic features of teacher preparation shared by the nGSEs we studied. These centered on: very clear missions, including increasing the access of all students to well-prepared and effective teachers; strong internal program coherence; parallel approaches to teacher learning and student learning; and, inclusion of new teacher educators in major program roles.

Despite these similarities, however, and as we argue in this article and demonstrate throughout this issue of *The New Educator*, there was also stark variation among and across nGSEs. Our analysis makes it clear that to treat teacher preparation at nGSEs as if it is a uniform phenomenon, as has sometimes been done in both praise and condemnation of nGSEs, is a mistake (just as it is a mistake to assume that teacher preparation at universities is monolithic). To regard all nGSEs as the same is to overlook the fundamental differences among their teacher preparation programs, which reflect their

varying local and institutional circumstances as well as their dramatically different underlying beliefs and values. In fact, our analysis shows that teacher preparation across nGSEs diverged sharply in terms of the concepts and assumptions that many people believe are the most important animating ideas in teacher preparation – mission, vision of good teaching, beliefs about the capacity of teaching and teacher education to change society, conceptions of what it means to learn to teach, assumptions about the knowledge needed to teach well and the sources of knowledge for teaching, and the essential program elements, pedagogies, tools, and practices believed to support teacher candidates in the process of becoming teachers.

### **Conclusion: Teacher preparation at nGSEs in 2020 and beyond**

This issue of *The New Educator* focuses on understanding the phenomenon of teacher preparation at nGSEs, which first emerged in the United States in 2006 and has continued to grow since then. As the articles for this issue were being completed in the spring of 2020, the country was embroiled in a highly politicized global pandemic, which forced teaching and learning at universities and schools to shift abruptly to online instruction with plans to return to in-person classrooms uncertain. At the same time, in late May of 2020, the country exploded with major protests against the murders of unarmed Black men and women by white police and against the long history of systemic racism in policing and other social institutions that make it possible for acts of this kind to continue to occur. Although intertwined in time and space and implicated with one another in many ways, these crises did not emerge from the same histories, social structures, or geopolitical trends, and they will have far-reaching, but different, impacts on the course of human events.

Differences notwithstanding, one thing these interlocking crises have in common is that they put many of teacher education's shortcomings on full display, including *both* its general reluctance to embrace digital technology and digital teaching competencies as part of teacher preparation (Keefe, 2020) *and*, along very different lines, its deep failure to address issues related to race and racism in teaching, learning, schooling, and teacher preparation (Brown, 2013; Philip et al., 2018). Despite their profound differences, however, the extraordinary force and indelible impact of these interlocking crises render them “un-ignorable” in any discussion of teacher preparation in 2020 (and beyond) in the United States (and beyond), regardless of provider type, organizational structure, or affiliation.

These crises have brought intense attention to complex questions and concerns in many teacher preparation programs across the country, including nGSEs. First, many teacher preparation programs – most out of necessity – have expressed new interest in hybrid and fully online teacher preparation programs, a shift that may permanently reframe how teacher educators think

about the role of technology in teacher preparation program design, the possibilities of learning to teach online, and the importance of digital literacy as a competency to be achieved by teacher candidates (Carney, 2020). Of course some programs were far better prepared than others in the spring of 2020 to embrace technology, pivoting quickly to the creation of progressive new virtual environments for teacher learning and new approaches to coaching, reflection, and practice (Keefe, 2020), thus simultaneously “protect[ing] the integrity of preparation while acknowledging the need for change” (p. 226). Not surprisingly, TEACH-NOW, the only online program in this study of teacher preparation at nGSEs, was uniquely prepared to address these issues and also to provide leadership in this area, influencing its conversion to an online university (Carney, 2020).

The second and more profound area that these interconnected crises have brought into very sharp relief in teacher preparation has to do with questions about whether, how, and to what extent issues related to race and racism in teaching, learning, and schooling are or should be central parts of the teacher education curriculum. Calling for teacher preparation programs to address issues of race in theory and in practice is not a new agenda in teacher education (e.g., Cochran-Smith, 1995a, 1995b; King & Castenell, 2001; Sleeter, 2000), and, as we have shown, most contemporary teacher education programs, including programs at nGSEs, already claim to have an equity agenda. But equity is not a unitary concept, and the equity perspectives underlying some programs assume that equal access to good schools and teachers can redress inequality without challenging the systems that produce and reproduce inequalities in the first place (Cochran-Smith, Carney & Miller, 2016). In addition, in some preparation programs, discourses that position Black students as “troubled” or “troubling” are prevalent (Brown, 2013, p. 316), and deficit-oriented practices and policies purported to be neutral rather than value-laden help to relegate deep consideration of race and justice to the margins rather than the center of teacher preparation (Philip et al., 2018). Many graduate schools of education, including some nGSEs, have posted statements related to the protests against systemic racism that are occurring all over the country. Some of these try to acknowledge the shortcomings of their own current curricula, instruction, and activities despite previously-stated institutional intentions to work for social justice and challenge inequity.

As this issue goes to press, it is a time imbued with both fear and hope. It remains to be seen whether the current crises will generate genuinely transformational efforts in teacher preparation.

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