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Citation Details

Published as: Bowen McBeath & Michael J. Austin (2021) Redesigning Schools of Social Work Into Schools of Social Work and Social Justice: Opportunities for Civic and Organizational Renewal in a Justice Reform Environment, *Journal of Social Work Education*, 57:sup1, 224-237, DOI: 10.1080/10437797.2021.1912677

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Redesigning Schools of Social Work into Schools of Social Work and Social Justice:
Opportunities for Civic and Organizational Renewal in a Justice Reform Environment

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Abstract

This paper explores the re-envisioning of a school of social work into a School of Social Work and Social Justice. The thought experiment identifies how a school can meet its educational and social justice mission in response to the historic crises of 2020. An outgrowth of the aspirational strategic vision statement is the proposed strengthening of democratic learning spaces involving students and faculty members, better alignment of school curricular reform with human service workforce dynamics and social work practice needs, and an emphasis on culturally responsive leadership. The overall intention is to identify opportunities for social work schools and departments at public and private universities to advance anti-racist, community-centered innovations in social work education in an uncharted environment.

Keywords: social work education; strategic planning; social justice; community engagement; advocacy.

Redesigning Schools of Social Work into Schools of Social Work and Social Justice:
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A disaster ... changes the world and our view of it. Our focus shifts, and what matters shifts. What is weak breaks under new pressure, what is strong holds, and what was hidden emerges ... We may feel free to pursue change in ways that seemed impossible while the ice of the status quo was locked up. We may have a profoundly different sense of ourselves, our communities, our systems of production and our future.

--- Rebecca Solnit (2020).

As an organizational form, the school of social work reflects its historic origins in American universities and its longstanding focus on social action in community-based settings (Specht & Courtney, 1994). The concept of a school of social work is also viewed as the institutional embodiment of the social work profession. Regardless of the mission of the university, the school of social work is founded on social justice and seeks to ensure that its educational and training initiatives, service and community outreach, and scholarship and research embody the spirit and practice of the concept.

This commentary involves a thought experiment focused on U.S. schools of social work rearticulating their commitments to social justice through their involvement in social action. Over the decades, thought experiments have been part of American approaches to the development of social work as a profession in order to translate aspirational visions into institutional change and transformation. For example, high-level thought experiments spurred the civic and organizational planning of Progressive-era social reformers (notably Jane Addams) and the longstanding efforts to bridge the gap between micro and macro social work practice (Specht & Courtney, 1994). A thought experiment informed the development of the Grand Challenges for Social Work that sought to connect the signature contributions of social work with social welfare institutions and other disciplines and professions (Fong et al., 2018). Finally, leaders in social work education use aspirational vision statements to reaffirm the place of social work and

social justice in the competitive marketplace of ideas in universities.

The thought experiment that we propose involves a special case of organizational renewal in the midst of the historic crises brought by COVID-19, severe economic dislocation particularly for communities of color, and the call for racial equity as expressed in support of Black Lives Matter. Organizational renewal can involve fundamental changes brought about by deep-rooted tensions, as mature organizations find that their stated goals and objectives are not in alignment with the resources needed for implementation, and their programmatic efforts are not well connected to the needs of internal and external stakeholders; and as they identify new ways to support and promote the individuals, groups, and associations within them (Bryson, 2018).

In the university context, organizational renewal involves a progression of strategic visioning, planning, implementation, and evaluation while demonstrating accountability to espoused values. As a school of social work engages in strategic visioning, the school clarifies its relationships with institutional stakeholders (e.g., diverse groups of students, faculty, staff, and administrators within the school and in other professional schools and units on campus), assesses the strength and quality of its alliances with community-based supporters, and either re-centers itself around its core ethics or moves in a radically unexamined direction (Dooris et al., 2004). Organizational renewal thus requires much more than rebranding, reaffirmation, or incremental adjustments for the school of social work to refresh its social justice commitments.

We propose the need for the organizational redesign of schools of social work into schools of social work *and* social justice, focusing explicitly on a commitment to anti-racist community engagement as elucidated by an aspirational strategic vision statement. This is a vision of a school that:

- Focuses on issues of racism, privilege, and oppression inside the boundaries of the

university, and outside in the form of alliances with community-based organizations and other societal institutions (notably policymakers, philanthropic organizations, and professional bodies) (Tate & Bagguley, 2017);

- Demonstrates a serious investment in these issues across all levels of social work practice (Austin et al., 2016);
- Creates integrative educational opportunities that involve micro and macro practice in collaborative student and faculty projects focused on social action (Mehrotra et al., 2018); and
- Dedicates resources to support them internally and externally (Sousa et al., 2019).

The components of this social justice vision statement, and the accompanying calls to maximize the combination of micro and macro practice and education in order to address the structural roots of racial injustice, are not new to schools of social work (McBeath, 2016). What would be new is the implementation of this strategic vision under the banner of a School of Social Work and Social Justice.

While defining social justice within a social work context is beyond the scope of this commentary, because the meaning of social justice is not self-evident (Gill, 1998), the following definition by Bannerjee (2011) will suffice:

Social work scholars commonly suggest that social justice means arranging social, economic, and political institutions in such a way that all people, especially the poor, vulnerable, oppressed, and marginalized people are able to meet their basic and developmental needs including democratic participation in decision-making processes. This requires equal political and civil freedoms, fair equality of opportunity in socioeconomic spheres, as well as special consideration for access to material and

nonmaterial resources, services, and opportunities for differently abled people (p. 209).

We therefore locate our call for organizational renewal of the institution known as a school of social work in the midst of our major societal disruptions. The context of this commentary includes the disruptive crises of 2020 that have taken the form of the COVID-19 pandemic that is impacting global economies and further illuminating structural racism. Our focal point or unit of analysis includes social work schools and departments at public and private universities that need to seize the opportunity for a major sea change in the form of anti-racist, community-centered innovations in social work education in an uncharted environment.

The thought experiment proceeds as follows. We first summarize current calls for the reform of schools of social work in alignment with macro practice, involving community practice, human service organizational and management practice, and policy practice. An emphasis of this first section concerns the conceptualization of a school of social work that aims to be more explicitly anti-racist and community-centered. The second section provides a social justice case example of the development of democratic learning spaces and an effort to be more culturally responsive inside and outside of the school, in response to calls for reform in regard to student food insecurity. The third section includes an aspirational strategic vision of a school of social work transforming into a school of social work and social justice, accompanied by a set of dimensions and possible indicators that can support more specific strategic visioning and strategic plan development. Section four concludes the commentary with an elaboration of the potential challenges to the strategic vision statement, and proposes possible responses to them.

Calls for Reform of U.S. Schools of Social Work

Some of the recent calls for reform can be found in the social problem and population-based issues found in the Grand Challenges for Social Work (Fong et al., 2018) as well as the

rebalancing of micro and macro practice reflected in the Rothman Report (2013) and the accompanying Special Commission to Advance Macro Practice in Social Work. While other calls for reform can be found in the policy arena related to health and behavioral health care reform, prison reform, and housing reform, these topics are beyond the scope of this commentary.

These calls have anticipated the need for social reform and activism in response to five major societal disruptions in the summer of 2020: the COVID-19 pandemic, its associated recession, increased recognition of police violence, further documentation of structural racism, and sustained political stalemate at state and national levels of U.S. government. Since these disruptions have received considerable media coverage, their elaboration is beyond the scope of this commentary. Yet their possible future influence on schools of social work cannot be understated. Specifically, calls for a more integrative approach to social work practice—with corresponding curricular emphases and needed faculty and student resources—have argued that macro practice is needed for schools of social work to strengthen the connections between social work education and social action, thereby infusing social justice more visibly into university and civic contexts (Austin et al., 2016; Mehrotra et al., 2018).

Schools and departments of social work across the U.S. are the primary unit of analysis that reflects complex institutions, often as units of large public universities. These bureaucratic environments can be characterized in terms of *vertical* relationships characterized by hierarchy and formalization, as seen in organizational charts focused on the structuring of programs and committees with ancillary attention to the formal involvement of students and community members. A consequence can be the anonymization of large groups of individuals that make up the great majority of stakeholders, including students and communities of color who are expected

to be disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 and associated disruptions.

This commentary, in contrast, focuses on *horizontal* relationships with respect to the role of schools of social work in the community and society as a whole. This horizontal perspective has been influenced by the individualistic perspective dominant in U.S. society, with overwhelming attention to micro social work practice as seen in clinical social work licensure. In contrast, this commentary features more collectivist, macro practice-based perspectives that help social workers move from “me” to “we”, especially when engaging service users (e.g., social work students) from the lens of “nothing about us, without us” (Goossen & Austin, 2017).

The concept of collectivization, in which micro and macro practitioners support civic engagement in civil society, calls for schools of social work to renew a core value of the profession related to social justice. Schools of social work may not need to become community centers, but do need to move towards the centers of their local and regional communities to help them address the societal challenges that they face (McBeath, 2016). The social justice perspective also calls on schools of social work to reflect a more communitarian point of view, enhanced by deans and other school leaders who function as public intellectuals who enable the public to address social problems (Tropman & McBeath, 2019). These actions involve professional risk-taking (in distinguishing between what is essential/needed vs. what is wanted/preferred) in order to identify sensible strategies to assist vulnerable populations rather than simply serving as the keepers of repositories of research and instruction. In essence, leaders of schools of social work must regularly and actively model to the public as well as elected and appointed government officials and decision-makers in philanthropic organizations “why we do the work we do” when addressing the needs of low-income populations and communities of color (Barnes & Schmitz, 2016).

Towards a Vision of Organizational Renewal through Organizational Redesign

The question thus becomes how to renew schools of social work to be more community-centered and anti-racist. In their systematic literature review, Ramsundarsingh and Shier (2017) identified approaches to address oppression in human service organizational contexts (i.e., client participation, advocacy, cultural competence, power sharing, reflective practice, intersectionality, empowerment, safety, collective work, and accessibility) as well as needed organizational change strategies relating to organizational mission, leadership, workplace culture, staffing and training, and programming. Their review highlighted the importance of anti-racist values and shared decision-making at multiple organizational levels. Similar emphases can be seen in research on service user advocacy in human service organizations and schools of social work, with a particular emphasis on the degree of meaningful involvement of service users in social work education (Goossen & Austin, 2017).

These scholarly overviews set the stage for two complementary approaches to re-envisioning and community building in schools of social work. First, Sinkinson (2018) argued that democratic learning spaces should reflect the concepts of access and equity, community and connection, agency and ownership, and risk and responsibility. *Access and equity* involve addressing the economic, social, technical, cultural, and political factors that prevent equitable access to education. *Community and connection* include the promotion of boundary-spanning between campuses and communities (externally) as well as within classrooms (internally) calling for authentic student collaboration with peers, experts, and the public. *Agency and ownership* involve promoting one's learning experiences, degrees of participation, and forms of expression. The fourth set of concepts includes *risk and responsibility* that relates to critical thinking about the tools and practices that connect learning, knowledge building, and sharing in order to

promote the active dimensions of open pedagogy. Supporting these four sets of concepts are the needed norms of curiosity, empathy, participation, and responsibility that serve as the essential social lubricant connecting learners and educators within schools and in community settings (Matthews, Andrews, & Adams, 2011; Sinkinson, 2018).

Second, Chow and Austin (2008) identified an evolving framework for culturally responsive organizations characterized by organizational philosophy, processes, policies and procedures, agency-community relations, and organizational renewal that are explicitly attentive to issues of race and anti-oppression. For example, a culturally responsive school of social work or human service organization could seek to ensure accountability for community engagement, by:

- Engaging with an array of advocacy groups representing different cultural and ethnic communities;
- Celebrating the existing community strengths in order to empower disenfranchised populations to assess and monitor culturally responsive organizational policies and procedures;
- Linking horizontally to client communities and community networks, and vertically to professional, legislative, and funding sources (including local, national, and international networks);
- Promoting consciousness-raising among organizational participants about how structural power, privilege, and oppression operate inside and outside of the workplace;
- Recognizing through dialogue with community groups that the changes needed to create a culturally responsive organization can threaten the core culture of an agency,

- foster resistance, and compromise the effectiveness of a diverse workforce; and
- Demonstrating proficiency in receiving and integrating divergent forms of input from all parts of the community and within the organization itself as it hires and engages a culturally diverse staff (Chow & Austin, 2008, pp. 48-49).

In summary, setting the stage for envisioning a future role of schools of social work includes moving from vertical to horizontal relationships, exploring new forms of community engagement, and fostering an anti-racist/sexist/classist/ableist learning environment. These three elements are featured in the case vignette in the next section that also provides support for the organizational redesign of schools of social work.

A Social Justice Case Example of the Development of Democratic Learning Spaces and Culturally Responsive Organizational Reforms in a School of Social Work

The policy context of the case reflects a focus on U.S. food insecurity, defined as the lack of or limited access to regular, nutritious food by adults and/or children. As of 2018, 11% of US households had experienced some degree of food insecurity, with higher prevalence rates of food insecurity for households of color and low-income communities (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2019).

The more specific context concerns student food insecurity, and sits at the confluence of three interrelated factors: (1) relatively high rates of student food insecurity on U.S. campuses, with studies' prevalence estimates varying considerably but averaging around 20-50% in survey-based studies (Lee et al., 2018); (2) available data suggesting that social work student food insecurity can be considerable, particularly for first-generation students and students of color (Miles et al., 2017); and (3) growing interest in addressing student food insecurity in colleges and universities, with prominent social justice examples including support of student food banks, enrollment of students in federally sponsored programs (e.g., SNAP, WIC), greater calls for

student financial assistance, and internal (i.e., university-based) and external (e.g., with state legislative bodies) advocacy efforts to promote student health and wellbeing (see:

<https://hope4college.com/>).

The current focus of the case was a survey-based student assessment of student food insecurity in a Pacific Northwestern school of social work (Miles et al., 2017). Prior to the emergence of this effort, the issue of student food insecurity was brought up in a few MSW courses in Fall 2012 as a social justice issue affecting groups of less-privileged students. This led to a Winter 2013 MSW program faculty meeting in which the following faculty quotes were prominent: “I never thought the phrase “starving student” actually meant what it did”; “What is our obligation as professors to this?”; “A SSW should not seek to become a social service agency”; and “Why doesn’t this university have an official position on student hunger and poverty?” These anecdotal findings were sufficiently powerful that MSW faculty vested the Social Justice, Diversity, and Inclusion (SJDI) Committee to conduct a student needs assessment of student experiences with food insecurity.

While the administration and results of the Spring 2013 student survey are summarized elsewhere (Miles et al., 2017), the following issues are worth noting: (a) SJDI student co-chairs engaged with prominent student leaders of the major programs, to ask them to serve as “champions” in raising the issue of student food insecurity with professors and students, and encouraging students to complete the survey; (b) SJDI faculty and staff co-chairs asked faculty leaders (responsible for each curricular area) to ask individual faculty members to dedicate the first two weeks of their course to a discussion of student food security issues and to encourage completion of the survey; and (c) SJDI co-chairs asked the dean and his administrative team to encourage students to participate. The overall design was to map the central nodes of the student

social network (organized by concentration, class, and student champion/leader), and then to publicize the survey initiative until the issue went viral (in an effort to link micro and macro practice students and faculty in supporting social awareness and social action).

As Spring 2013 survey results were shared schoolwide, student champions began to partner with select staff and faculty to create more welcoming spaces in classes and in particular the student kitchen and lounge, including bringing different foods for students to “give and take”. Predictably, all Spring 2013 classes, groups, and teams expressed hope that school administrators would make sustained progress on the issue.

The SJDI Committee continued to meet over Summer 2013, and identified opportunities to “take the show on the road” to raise the issue of student food insecurity *internally* on campus and *externally* in the state and community. Internal efforts involved sharing survey results with university administrators (e.g., the president’s cabinet, key university student support administrators). External efforts involved partnering with the state NASW chapter to advocate for increased access to student food supports by reducing the 20 hours/week requirement for SNAP eligibility. This effort involved policy advocacy at state and federal levels; but was unsuccessful at each level.

Concomitantly, various university administrators began to develop a more coordinated response to the related issues of student food insecurity, health, and wellbeing. Over the 2013-2014 academic year, the survey findings and unsuccessful external advocacy efforts resulted, in part, in the formation of a new university committee focused on addressing student food insecurity (<https://www.pdx.edu/student-access-center/>). The committee began to collaborate with the metropolitan food bank (one of the largest food repositories on the West Coast), the corporation that supplies university food services, and private donors to develop different student

food support/sustainability initiatives.

A goal has been to increase university student access to SNAP, the university student food pantry, as well as what is called the “free food market”, in which students can regularly access fresh fruits and vegetables. At a central administrative level, the university now regularly surveys its undergraduate students regarding food insecurity. Finally, the school of social work continues to secure student donations, mostly for student financial aid (although limited funds are available for student emergency relief, including for gas and food).

Case-based Lessons Learned

For students, this form of project-based learning (organized around the specific issue of student food insecurity) helped to tie the concept of social justice to its practical application via social dialogue, social support, and social action internally and externally. It provided a *democratic learning space* (Matthews, Andrews, & Adams, 2011; Sinkinson, 2018) that supported student dialogue and reflection on their own food insecurity experiences. It also provided an opportunity for a subset of the members of a school of social work to practice the attributes of a *culturally responsive organization*, in which students could be viewed as both participants in the educational enterprise but also service users requiring a special form of advocacy (Goossen & Austin, 2017). In addition, project-based learning (in this case outside the confines of a credit-oriented unit) provided all participants with an opportunity to move from problem-based learning to evidence-informed advocacy and action.

While not all faculty, staff, and students were involved in the project, many appreciated regular updates related to student wellbeing. For some faculty involved, it became clear that reciprocal learning was taking place as participants were learning alongside and from each other about food insecurity and its impacts. Without strong and consistent support from administration,

projects like this one are difficult to sustain—especially as the composition and needs of each student cohort change over time. However, there was some evidence that issues of student health and wellbeing began to appear in faculty-developed course outlines to facilitate classroom discussion and understanding. Similarly, the staff involved in the project were sensitized to the connection between student financial aid and student food insecurity.

Finally, one of the more enduring lessons from this project relates to the value of creating institutional research mechanisms to gather current information on student wellbeing and changing needs to inform both collective decision-making and social action. In the next section, we return to the importance of institutional research to support social work education and its connection to practice-based learning.

Redesigning Schools of Social Work into Schools of Social Work and Social Justice

In order to capture some of the opportunities to fully incorporate social justice learning and social action in schools of social work, the redesign process can be captured by framing current and future organizational imperatives as well as some of the leadership needed to guide organizational redesign. As noted in Figure 1, the goal of this section is to showcase how schools of social work can infuse the concepts of anti-racism and community-centeredness into their educational program efforts. The major constructs of internal and external dynamics that support the figure include the following:

- 1) *Internal to the school's role in developing knowledge*, the value of building connections between social work education and social work research to identify needed anti-racist workforces, programs, and policies; and
- 2) *External to the school's role in preparing future practitioners*, the increasing importance of strengthening practice-based connections between schools of social

work and human service organizations, focusing in particular on social work practice innovations in response to longstanding issues that have been uncovered in the midst of recent societal disruptions.

In the section on current realities, we propose dimensions that reflect the curriculum, organizational constraints, and the impact of the changing nature of practice. These three dimensions, among many that could have been selected, represent themes in social work education; namely, the selection of what is taught with regard to curricula, the organizational culture in which teaching and research take place, and the changing nature of practice (often ignored when considering changes in the curriculum or developing practice-relevant research). These foundational dimensions are essential for the creation and sustainment of democratic, culturally responsive learning spaces.

[Figure 1 About Here]

The first curriculum element includes the use of national CSWE competencies to guide the structure of the curriculum without a systematic national system to measure professional outcomes of anti-racism. A second element relates to the implicit curriculum and the infusion of anti-racism into schools' pedagogical and curricular program objectives. A third curriculum element includes the unchanging structure and function of fieldwork and its prominent role over four decades. These curricular limitations reflect local needs of human service organizations as major employers of future social workers, and may not focus explicitly on anti-racist practice or community engagement.

In contrast, future curricular possibilities include the potential to expand on competencies by including end-of-course job competencies through the development and use of rubric-based job readiness scores designed by faculty in collaboration with agency-based fieldwork

instructors, with significant attention given to preparation for anti-racist and community-based practice. A second curriculum possibility involves making anti-oppressive, community-centered practice an explicit goal across micro and macro educational program concentrations. A third possibility involves the redesign of fieldwork in the form of advanced year block placement planning designed to enhance agency staffing resources and the restructuring of course scheduling dedicated specifically to anti-racist practice education.

In the domain of organizational constraints and opportunities, current constraints relate to the tenure system that protects individual work agendas but may limit organizational redesign efforts related to anti-oppressive practice and civic engagement. Similarly, scholarly productivity is measured primarily in terms of specialized research funding and publications. This substantial job component can slow opportunities for faculty assuming roles as public intellectuals, thereby inhibiting knowledge dissemination and utilization in diverse communities and the larger society. In addition, the evolution of the role of the dean as a university middle-manager may limit their leadership role in the civic and cultural context, beyond membership in various state and national organizations of deans.

In contrast, future possibilities related to organizational imperatives could include a redefinition of the tenure system that encourages the recently-tenured faculty member to spend time in agency practice settings to strengthen research-practice connections, enrich classroom teaching, and foster anti-racist research collaboration and consultation. An elaboration on a research agenda could include opportunities to promote evidence-informed policy and practice development as well as opportunities to assist with the transformation of the agency culture in supporting anti-oppressive learning. The role of dean could expand to include social entrepreneurship with the use of a select advisory committee formed of communities of color and

expanded relationships with their nonprofit, public, and for-profit human service leaders. The role of the dean could also include major investments in institutional research that feature data collection and analysis of workforce development issues focusing in particular on students of color (e.g., tracking students beyond matriculation, including identification of needed post-graduation practice skills).

The third dimension of current challenges and future imperatives facing schools of social work involves the changing nature of social work practice. In the present context, the changing nature of practice is poorly monitored and, as a result, provides little guidance for the ongoing renewal of curriculum. Similarly, the increased reliance on client and service documentation fails to inform the importance of writing skill development in social work education. The ongoing challenges of promoting anti-racist practices, programs, and policies call for increased assessment and action in classrooms as well as agencies. Ongoing agency relations are frequently confined to the managing of fieldwork placements and job fairs, with limited attention to other community organizations related to race, income inequality, and a wide array of advocacy organizations.

In contrast, future opportunities regarding the changing nature of practice call for an expanded definition of practice to include the skills associated with community, organizational, and policy engagement, assessment, development, implementation, and evaluation needed to address multiple reform movements (e.g., student participation in system-wide reform of police departments, school-to-prison pipelines, healthcare, and affordable housing systems). Similarly, considerable data-mining opportunities exist in the case records of agency-based practitioners as a way to identify and build on promising practices as well as specify the need for anti-oppressive practices. Moving beyond commitments to bilingual and culturally responsive practice, there is a

need to significantly invest in expanding the enrollment of students of color in social work education over the next several decades. At the same time, there is a need to transform the collaborative roles of students from serving as allies in various social justice causes to the role of activist practitioners with the accompanying social work advocacy practice skills.

Leadership Needed to Facilitate and Guide Organizational Redesign

Managing for the long-term suggests that deans and tenured faculty need to make commitments to successfully address some of the challenges noted above. For example, it took the University of Michigan social work faculty ten years to frame and refine their approach to infusing social justice diversity thinking into their curriculum (Reed & Lehning, 2014). Similar to the investments made by the Michigan faculty, comparable faculty and dean leadership will be needed to renew social work course content further in the direction of social justice. For example, social justice perspectives can be infused when:

- Foundation courses on practice are flipped (beginning with macro practice before introducing micro practice skills) (Austin, Coombs, & Barr, 2005; Austin, Anthony, Knee, & Mathias, 2015);
- Courses in human behavior and the social environment are flipped by beginning with the social environment before focusing on human behavior and the reciprocal impacts on each other (Mulroy & Austin, 2004; Stone, Austin, Berzin & Taylor, 2007);
- Social policy courses are flipped so that they begin with social advocacy and empowerment skills (agency, community, legal, and legislative) before focusing on the history of the social safety net and related legislation linked to fields of practice (child welfare, mental health, etc.) (Ezell, 2000);
- Research courses begin with active engagement-focused skills associated with

participatory action research and clinical data-mining (Epstein, 2009; Israel, Eng, Schulz, & Parker, 2005; Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008); and

- Courses on diversity and inclusion focus on the evolving thinking of structural racism and systemic inequality (e.g., DiAngelo, 2018; Wilkerson, 2020).

Efforts to advance social justice in bureaucratic settings may be constrained by multiple factors. Therefore, school leaders need to demonstrate how their community investments and partnerships are beneficial for community leaders and university stakeholders. Similarly, the redefined role of the dean calls for far more investment and leadership in promoting innovations and building and sustaining community partnerships.

These two leadership factors related to flipping course content and advancing community investments and partnerships assume that deans and faculty leaders have established what they see to be the lessons learned from the COVID-19 crisis in order to design and assess ongoing changes in social work education. From a technology perspective, it will be important to assess the increased use of online learning, and the accelerated transition to automation on campus and in community agencies, given concerns that automation and the reinforcement of standard operating policies and procedures may isolate if not injure persons of color.

One of the early, major lessons learned from COVID-19 is the importance of current and accessible information (which is severely lacking with respect to the management of the supply chain related to masks, ventilators, protective equipment, and the availability of intensive care beds in local hospitals). The analogue for the management of schools of social work relates to the lack of institutional research concerning essential educational program resources and student resources. Outside of CSWE reaffirmation documents, few schools of social work provide needed information concerning the complex issues of human service workforce development;

namely, where do our social work university applicants come from, to what extent are MSW students prepared to enter micro, mezzo, and/or macro practice, and for what kinds of organizational roles are students prepared on graduation? The organizational data needed to address this multipart question are generally limited to whatever appears on admissions applications or what is collected via exit or alumni surveys. Nor do schools of social work provide sufficient knowledge on the changing nature of practice and the future needs of the profession. In essence, little attention has been given to the supply of those entering the social work workforce and the diverse needs of students and alumni.

On the other end are demand-based issues of job placement, advancement, and retooling from the perspective of public and nonprofit human service organizations. Little attention is given to preparing graduates for the job market beyond what they experience in their agency fieldwork placements. In particular, beyond helping students articulate their collective learning experiences (possibly in the form of digital portfolio construction) and helping faculty articulate the job relevance of their course content (possibly in the form of rubric-based job readiness scores for each course), far more institutional research support is needed to impact the exit phase of the social work education pipeline.

Discussion

Our conceptual analysis explored the re-envisioning of a school of social work into a School of Social Work and Social Justice. The thought experiment involved imagining how a school can meet its educational and social justice mission amidst immense societal upheaval involving COVID-19, economic dislocation, and ongoing calls for racial justice. Two premises undergirded the analysis: (a) collectivization through intra- and inter-group dialogue involving students, alumni, and civic leaders, faculty in collaboration with educational program

administrators, and deans and directors; and (b) group identification of opportunities to connect deep knowledge of structural oppression with action strategies to promote anti-racist advocacy around equity and inclusion.

The overall intention was to connect the concept of social justice with its practical application involving education and practice in the university and community. We offered a brief case vignette of an effort that connected social dialogue, social support, and social action within the school of social work, in the broader university space, and externally with local human service organizations. The student food insecurity vignette exemplified one way to introduce difficult concepts of social justice and connect them with different fields of practice and diverse types of students. Although the result of the case example remains a work-in-progress, it clearly provided a practical lens for reconsidering how schools of social work can discuss issues of serious interest (i.e., student health and wellbeing as essential for student educational performance and professional development). The case vignette also provides a mechanism for connecting to other topics relating to racism, sexism, classism, and ableism in the school, university, and broader civic space.

These propositions and the case example led us to identify organizational redesign elements pertaining to social work curricula, the organizational context of educational reform (notably organizational culture and structure), and the changing nature of practice in human service organizations. The proposed transition from current institutional realities to future institutional possibilities concerned a series of organizational imperatives that involved:

- Making the implicit social work curriculum more explicit, as pertaining to student engagement in anti-racist social action;
- Creating opportunities for faculty to align their scholarship, research, and teaching with

- a stronger focus on community engagement (as exemplified in the future contributions of students, faculty, and administrators in public discourse and political advocacy);
- Engaging in institutional research to understand the evolving nature of social work practice;
 - Aligning school curricular reform with human service workforce dynamics and social work practice needs; and
 - Searching for opportunities to redesign the work of social work and transform job markets, particularly focused on anti-racism for the long term.

Anticipating Resistance to Strategic Visioning

As deans and other school leaders anticipate difficulties in moving from a conceptual strategic vision statement to the development of an operational strategic plan, they may begin to identify challenges to the culture of the organization, its history and current operations, and its existing commitments to the university and external partners. Leaders can begin to examine how an anti-racist and community-centered vision statement may conflict with their understandings of the evolution of school curricula, organizational imperatives, and approaches to practice. The operational process of anticipating resistance to strategic visioning can thus involve identifying possible challenges and posing alternatives in response to them.

In the current case, we focus our discussion of expected resistance on two internal items: curriculum and culture change. First, key stakeholders may not be comfortable with proposed curricular changes brought about as part of the strategic vision. For example, some administrators, faculty, staff, students, and alumni may judge that the proposed curriculum will detract from their current plans and hinder their future opportunities. Other stakeholders may argue that changes are too incremental given the enormity of the issues being identified.

In response, deans and directors can state at the outset that any new curriculum will be developed and implemented in a collaborative and participatory manner over a sensible length of time (e.g., 2-3 years). In the interim, faculty and students can be encouraged to pursue curricular modification through authorized course customization. Such formal workarounds can provide opportunities for students to complete field-based projects that are more intensively anti-racist and community-based. At the same time, administrators and faculty leaders can partner with established and new student groups to support intergroup engagement opportunities around curricular redevelopment. For example, deans can invite faculty and student leaders of micro and macro practice concentrations to explore team teaching/learning, bringing all classes together for a course module coinciding with the beginning of fall term as well as MLK Day around an integrative case study focused on how each practice concentrations would address the issue.

Second, the culture of the faculty has been identified earlier as a possible opportunity for change. It is generally presumed that faculty professional development should reflect their expertise as educators, scholars, and researchers. Yet faculty are commonly encouraged to align their teaching and service duties with the needs of the school vis-à-vis the strengths and preferences of the faculty. The result may be that some faculty members are better prepared to advance a new strategic vision of the school, whereas other faculty members may be less suitable and/or ready to actively support it.

One possible response involves encouraging individual faculty to serve as early promoters of the strategic vision. For example, faculty members can support student field-based anti-racism projects, perhaps in collaboration with local social welfare agencies designed to better connect the school of social work with specific communities of color around a joint education, training, and service initiative. Such efforts can be particularly fruitful if faculty

members' research agendas involve collaborations with communities of color focused on anti-oppressive service learning and research projects.

Deans and other administrative leaders can also propose more structural changes to operational program policies and school structures, depending on the degree to which they formally require shared faculty governance. Deans can collaborate with standing faculty promotion and tenure committees to incorporate more explicit attention to anti-racism and community engagement in faculty members' research/scholarship, teaching, and university service and community outreach. Such an effort can often provide a significant benefit for faculty of color and those engaged in participatory, collaborative initiatives with communities of color. Deans can also organize faculty workgroups and clusters expressly focused on anti-oppressive teaching, research, scholarship, and community outreach. Finally, deans can restructure meetings to be more participatory and collaborative. For example, deans can invite student and community leaders to participate actively in faculty meetings, thereby broadening the norm of community engagement.

Externally: Connecting School to University and Community

During COVID-19, deans will be at the forefront of promoting their commitment to anti-racism in their educational programs. Such ongoing efforts to integrate lessons learned from COVID-19 and social justice activism also need to be based more broadly in the university and community.

It is possible to envision the contours of a community-based and culturally responsive school of social work and social justice. The school would be: in the vanguard of anti-racism within the university, locally, and in the state if not nationally; committed to data-based exploration of anti-oppressive social work practice innovations; and collaborative in connecting

with public and private human service organizations in developing needed school-to-employment pipelines for students of color and anti-racist organizational reform efforts. Given COVID-19 and anticipated budgetary reductions in public higher education and human services, schools of social work and human service organizations will most likely be focused on responding to workforce reductions and technological disruptions. Yet a goal should be the development and strengthening of university-agency educational collaborations with partner agencies, to support social work education-to-practice pipelines.

Internally: Acknowledging Institutional Silos and Identifying Integrative Possibilities

The efforts of school leaders also need to be rooted more deeply within the school, in connecting the traditionally disparate divisions of social work education (led by social work educational scholars), research (led by social work researchers), and service (led by social work administrators). This tripartite focus is commonplace, but often creates a siloing effect in which professionals are distinguished based on their separate organizational role(s) as opposed to their shared commitments to social justice. It is the role of social work leaders to acknowledge these silos, identify shared points of connection involving social work education, research, and civic service, and mobilize different groups of faculty, staff, and students to strengthen anti-racist programs and policies.

While all faculty may not be equally interested in and prepared to discuss issues of racism and oppression within the school and university, specific strategies to support faculty could include: a) sharing information on anti-racism in syllabi, scholarship, grant proposals, and community engagement documents; b) facilitating self-led learning and online faculty dialogue on anti-oppressive pedagogies, research methodologies, and service approaches; and c) partnering with faculty colleagues, student alumni, and/or human service leaders to share

tentative lessons learned and identify plausible action steps.

Finally, a re-envisioned school of social work and social justice would be attuned to the civic-minded perspectives of diverse students. Student engagement in social activism can underscore what is currently being done in response to issues of racism, privilege, and oppression inside the school and university, and with partnering human service organizations. Social activist efforts to organize across micro and macro practice will likely involve a focus on student educational and socio-emotional wellbeing as well as the building of communities of practice organized by student leaders, key alumni, and faculty mentors.

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Figure 1:
Organizational redesign from current realities to future possibilities: Social work educational opportunities emerging from disruption

