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Journal

Journal of Education for Teaching International Research and Pedagogy, ahead-of-print(ahead-of-print)

ISSN

0260-7476

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Publication Date

2024

DOI

10.1080/02607476.2023.2296446

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To cite this article: Kelly León, Paul M. Rogers, Reyes L. Quezada & Sobeida Velázquez (03 Jan 2024): A justice oriented examination of teacher education through the lens of deans' innovations and leadership in schools of education, Journal of Education for Teaching, DOI: [10.1080/02607476.2023.2296446](https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2023.2296446)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2023.2296446>



Published online: 03 Jan 2024.



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A justice oriented examination of teacher education through the lens of deans' innovations and leadership in schools of education

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ABSTRACT

Social-justice teacher education literature is widespread, but research highlighting the perspectives and insights from those who lead is far less common. This interview-based case-study of 20 deans from the Schools of Education across the United States addresses this gap and explores insights that pertain to the leadership and implementation of teacher education programs that advance social justice and teacher agency. Using conceptualisations of thin and strong equity, we identify, explain, and discuss three themes which emerged from the data. The first involves addressing barriers and access issues for prospective teacher candidates. The second includes programmatic actions taken by deans in attempts to further social justice goals and the third highlights an understanding that social justice work inevitably includes working to change systems and structures at the societal scale. We explore the extent to which these patterns reflect strong equity and provide ideas for deepening this work through the development and reframing of teacher agency.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 15 January 2023
Accepted 11 December 2023

KEYWORDS

Social Justice; Strong Equity; Teacher Agency; SoE Leadership; Deans; Teacher Education

Schools, colleges, and departments of education (SoE) were impacted in dramatic ways across their stakeholder communities by the health crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic, the economic downturn that resulted from the lockdown, and the manifestations of violence against people of Colour, which were occurring at the same time. This so-called triple-crisis (pandemic, recession, and systemic racism) spawned a wide range of new challenges and added pressures to existing problems that SoE faced. While many places around the world had previously dealt with education-related disruptions because of environmental disasters, war, or political upheaval, 'the COVID-19 pandemic changed the relations and activities of education systems worldwide' (Shultz and Viczko 2021, 221).

New problems included moving the majority of instruction online almost overnight (Kidd and Murray 2020), supporting K-12 partners (districts and schools), and ensuring that teacher education candidates could meet government level requirements for clinical practice even though schools were closed and classes were now being delivered through remote instruction (Barnes et al. 2020; Hill et al. 2020). In addition to these novel challenges, the persistent challenges related to teacher shortages (Carver-

Thomas et al. 2022), the lack of diversity in the teaching force (Carver-Thomas 2018; Gist and Bristol 2022), the need for more racially-literate teachers (Morgan and Lambert 2023; Sealey-Ruiz 2021), and the silencing of teachers' agency and professional authority (Brass and Holloway 2021; Dover 2022) continued to grow in size and complexity.

Given the many pivotal roles SoE serve in the global educational endeavour, we set out to research their responses to the triple-crisis with an eye towards better understanding the work of leadership and innovation in the overall activities of SoE in improving schooling in the United States (e.g. preparing administrative leaders and school counsellors, conducting research, advocating for policy change, and developing curriculum) (Rogers et al. 2022).

In addition to our inquiry into the responses of SoE to the triple crisis in their teacher preparation programs, we were also interested in the ways in which SoE were working to address persistent and ongoing challenges in teacher preparation. While comparing the challenges and responses of U.S. teacher preparation programs (which are the focus of our research) with SoE in other countries is beyond the scope of this article, the global nature of the pandemic brought a new set of shared challenges to SoE around the world, such as the pivot to remote instruction, increased stress and pressures on faculty, staff, and students, and the need to adapt methods of clinical practice in a remote teaching environment.

Further complicating matters, the pandemic intersected with responses to injustices at local, national, and global scales. This included the Movement against Anti-Asian, Asian American, and Pacific Islander racism and the Black Lives Matter Movement. Both movements called attention to systemic racial issues and had impacts well beyond the American context (Viczo and Li 2021). Local contexts also played a key role in shaping the activities of SoE, for example some communities were much more directly impacted by the incidents of racial violence. Surfacing the innovative practices that arose from this combination of shared global challenges and situated local responses was one of the primary goals of our research.

At the global level, organisations like UNESCO (2015, 2020) and the OECD (2019) continue to emphasise the importance of educational policies related to teacher quality and teacher effectiveness. As Arikawai and Benwari (2015) note, 'The bedrock of a dynamic educational system thus, lies on the core of a devoted, knowledgeable, competent and a well-trained teacher in any given society' (49). While there are exemplary countries that often serve as case-studies for teacher preparation such as in Finland, Singapore, Australia, and Canada (r; Darling-Hamond, 2017), many countries, including the U.S. and England continue to grapple with a wide variety of systemic challenges such as high attrition rates among teachers and a lack of professional recognition for teachers. In both countries, concerns with traditional teacher education programs housed within universities have led to increased accountability mandates tied to accreditation. Attacks against the profession and often untested, alternative pathways into teaching have contributed to decreases in enrolments of prospective teachers (Tatto and Menter 2019). Similarly, most multi-ethnic nation-states such as Australia, Canada, England, and the United States have struggled to diversify the teacher workforce (Darling-Hammond 2017; Gilroy, 2014). What is clear is that in many countries around the world, the system of teacher education is increasingly being seen as a policy problem (Gilroy, 2014).

In the United States, and elsewhere, one of the most pressing concerns for teacher educators is to prepare prospective teachers to successfully teach in highly diverse schools that are situated within an historical and present-day context of racial injustice, income inequality, increased political polarisation, and persistent inequality in educational opportunities across groups (Cochran-Smith and Stringer Keefe 2022). Addressing this concern and the other persistent challenges faced by SoE demands a shift away from a focus on instrumental goals (helping prospective teachers to pass certification requirements) towards a reflective engagement with the standing of the teaching profession in society (Biesta, Priestley, and Robinson 2015). For a more socially just education to be enacted in the United States (and elsewhere), K12 schools and teacher preparation programs need to see themselves as having agency to participate and actively lead the policy discussions concerning the role of education in a just society, while also enabling teachers to see themselves as agentive, educational professionals (Lambert 2018). As our study reveals, the triple crises provided an incentive for SoE to reimagine their role in preparing future teachers and to enhance their influence over public education systems (Rogers et al. 2022).

Overview of the study

We present findings from a research study which centres data from 20 interviews with deans from SoE in the United States. The broader study focused on the perspectives of deans across the areas of leadership, innovation, and K12 partnerships and here we examine a subset of the data pertaining exclusively to the ways deans discussed and articulated their work in relation to teacher preparation. The assumption that drove our inquiry and analysis is that SoE and deans in particular play critical roles across various stakeholder groups and within their respective communities (Wepner and Henk 2022). Therefore, they are well positioned to problem-solve, lead, and transform in ground-breaking ways.

In our study, we sought to determine the extent to which SoE and their leaders advanced a focus on social justice in their teacher education programs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, our inquiry probed for the ways deans' spoke about their work within societal systems and their perceptions and actions in relation to unsettling and challenging dominant ideologies in education, which contributes to the marginalisation of students of Colour. Cochran-Smith and Stringer Keefe (2022) argue, there is a need to *reframe* teacher-education and public education more broadly, including thinking about the ways in which society views education and the work of teachers. We contend that the necessary reframing also involves the very particular ways teacher candidates are taught to think of their work within a theory of education (Siegel and Biesta 2022), which includes engaging with the purpose of public schooling in an unequal and fraught world. In examining our data set, teacher education, anti-racism, equity, and social justice dominated the deans' responses to our questions. Given this, we examined the subset of our interview data focused on teacher preparation to address the following question: *What identifiable patterns emerge within SoE pertaining to the design, implementation, and evaluation of teacher education programs that advance social justice?*

While research on social justice in teacher-education is ubiquitous, less attention has been paid to the role of leadership, and especially the leadership of deans in colleges/

schools of education in advancing this work. As Wepner and Henk (2022) assert, 'education deans must balance individual, institutional, community, and societal needs with their own needs' (p. 2). Given the significant role deans play in leading their respective programs, representing the profession to external stakeholders, and influencing educational policy, examining their contributions to the social justice conversations warranted, in our view, deeper investigation. We begin by examining the perspectives surrounding social justice teacher education with a focus on the professionalisation of teachers and agency, implying these are necessary components of social justice in SoE. After describing our theoretical lens and explaining our study design, we go on to identify, explain, and discuss three themes which emerged from the data. The first involves addressing barriers and access issues for prospective teacher candidates. The second includes the programmatic actions taken by deans in attempts to further social justice goals and the final theme highlights deans' understanding that social justice work inevitably includes working to change systems and structures at the societal scale. We explore what our findings reveal about social justice in and beyond teacher education, ending with implications for teacher education programs and a call for future research.

Theoretical framing and perspectives

In recent years, teacher education literature focused or framed by social justice has increased dramatically (for a recent summary, see Cochran-Smith and Stringer Keefe 2022). This literature documents, identifies and explores multiple dimensions of social justice, which are highly relevant to SoE who are committed to preparing future educators who will carry forth with them a long-term commitment to social justice in their schools and classrooms. Fabionar (2020) identified four skill areas that could drive social-justice teacher education programs and serve as learning outcomes for future teachers:

- (1) developing a social justice pedagogy for systems change;
- (2) understanding, navigating, and shifting organisational cultures;
- (3) participating in educational governance; and
- (4) building coalitions within and beyond schools' (146).

Teachers with the skills, beliefs, and dispositions to work towards social justice by taking the actions of developing, understanding, participating, and building are exercising an 'ecological' form of agency described by Biesta, Priestly, and Biesta et al. (2015) who do not see agency as a variable residing within individuals, but instead as something to be achieved as an emergent phenomenon of actor-situation transaction[s] (626):

[T]his concept of agency highlights that actors always act by means of their environment rather than simply in their environment [so that] the achievement of agency will always result from the interplay of individual efforts, available resources and contextual and structural factors (emphasis ours) as they come together in particular and, in a sense, always unique situations. (Biesta and Tedder, 2007, 137)

From this perspective, teacher agency operates as a construct that involves the development and education of agentive teacher candidates through coursework and clinical experience (what teacher preparation programs do). Additionally, teacher agency, from

this point of view, operates as a framework that is closely tied to how society views the work of teachers and the purpose of schools (this acknowledges the role of resources and environment in particular contexts).

While deans may not collaborate directly with teacher candidates, their role as leaders of SoE allows them the positionality to influence that which is experienced by teacher candidates and also the way society (at both local and regional scales) views education and the work of teachers. In the next section, we briefly outline various ways scholars and teacher educators have written about agency, and the role teacher education programs play in its amplification.

Social justice commitments and teacher agency

Improving teacher quality and educational quality more broadly has been the focus of countless initiatives at various scales, both in the United States and internationally. National and international assessments have driven much of this fervour and teachers themselves are increasingly measured by their students' success on these exams. As a result, Biesta (2019) asserts that teachers have moved 'from a thinking, judging and acting professional to a "factor" in the production of measurable learning outcomes' (663). He explains how improvement efforts tend to be narrow (increasingly so) and that they feed into the idea that schools are the problem in society. Labelling schools as the problem inevitably leads to conclusions about teachers being the problem. As a result, we see attempts at technical 'fixes' and educational research that seeks to document 'what supposedly works' (663). Conversely, we argue that teachers achieving agency might question, as Biesta does, whether all that is demanded of schools by society is, in fact, desirable. Ultimately, a teacher education program focused on social justice aims must contend with the ways in which schools and teachers might, as Biesta asserts, *resist* (emphasis ours) particular aspects of society and particular demands of schools.

A clear understanding of educational purposes ties agency to inquiry and knowing. Cochran-Smith and Stringer Keefe (2022) describe the importance of paying attention to what teacher educators teach candidates in implicit and explicit ways about 'knowledge for, in, and about teaching' (446). By engaging teacher candidates with knowledge questions, they must think not only about what knowledge is needed to teach their subject or grade level well but also ask questions pertaining to who gets categorised as a knower and whose questions about teaching and its challenges get asked and debated. Deans of SoE hold the potential and positionality to play an instrumental role in encouraging the sorts of programs that take up these questions. In the following section, we examine a helpful framework for considering the extent to which teacher education programs are advancing social justice aims, and we point out where and how teachers' agency is instrumental in those advancements.

Moving beyond the instrumental in teacher education: thin and strong equity

In analysing the responses of deans to the triple crisis, we examined our data using a theory of teacher education for social justice by Cochran-Smith and Stringer Keefe (2022), which challenges structural inequalities and distinguishes between thin and strong equity. Borrowing from Barber's (1984) contrast between 'thin' and 'strong'

democracy, Cochran-Smith and Stringer Keefe (2022) describe *thin equity* in an educational setting as one that assumes that by providing individuals with fair (or improved) access to educational resources, one is advancing equity and justice. It parallels neoliberal views underpinning Barber's thin democracy, whereby once access to resources is provided, the onus is on the individual to act in rational ways and improve their position or condition. In teacher education, policies and practices that might contribute to thin equity assume equity is concerned with the redistribution of resources or providing more (and/or better) resources for students who have been historically disadvantaged. Thin equity then is connected to notions of distributive justice, which dominated justice orientations post Rawls's seminal discussion in 1971 (Cochran-Smith and Stringer Keefe 2022).

Although redistributing resources is a vital component of *strong equity*, Cochran-Smith and Stringer-Keefe argue, it is an incomplete pursuit of justice if the systems and structures that have produced the inequities are not challenged. In applying this thinking specifically to teacher agency, it is clear that teacher education programs that work to develop individual teachers who actively pursue professional agency in their work are not sufficient. The promotion of teacher agency simultaneously must include shifting societal views on teaching and reframing discourses around the purpose(s) of education and the role of teachers (Biesta, Priestley, and Robinson 2015).

Recognizing that the redistribution of resources was only one essential element of justice, Fraser (2003) and (2009) further conceptualised justice to include recognition and representation (Cochran-Smith and Stringer Keefe 2022). Recognition ensures an understanding of justice recognises and respects differences across socialised groups, including those based on race, ethnicity, culture, and/or gender. By addressing the economic dimension of justice through redistribution and the cultural dimension through recognition, Fraser then addressed the issues of participation in society's structures and systems (the political dimension) by adding representation. Applying this framework to teacher education, Cochran-Smith and Stringer-Keefe articulate justice as including the *redistribution* of resources, the *recognition* of differences across various socialised and cultural groups, and their *representation* in the political sphere. Finally, they added *reframing so as* to challenge dominant ideologies about equity and justice in teacher education and in schooling more broadly. Reframing relates to challenging the constructs in our educational systems that position students in relation to dominant ideologies, (re)producing what currently occurs in schools and in SoE. These four Rs (redistribution, recognition, representation, and reframing) represent 'mutually reinforcing' (21) conceptions of justice, contextualised by political, historical, economic, and cultural systems that maintain inequitable access to high-quality schooling. Together, the 4 Rs characterise *strong equity and are significantly different from conceptions of thin equity, which only address one form of inequity*. The 4 Rs (individually and collectively) served to ground analysis of our data as we sought to identify how deans of SoE acted in ways that advanced social justice within their teacher preparation programs.

Methods and data collection

To answer our question about the role of deans in advancing social justice teacher education, we elected to conduct interviews with the deans themselves. Interviews are helpful for eliciting individual differences and proved equally as helpful in identifying

themes across leaders and institutions. We recorded and transcribed Zoom interviews ($n = 20$) with deans from SoE between September 2020 and January 2022. In some cases, we supplemented our interview data by reviewing and analysing resource documents, national and state licensure reports, memos, and anecdotal notes. Participants stemmed from a range of universities that included small liberal-arts colleges, larger private universities, and public universities. We also sought a balance between universities located in rural and urban areas from throughout the United States to generate data with geographical representation. The one-hour interviews were structured and quite similar across participants. We maintained fidelity through the interview protocols by reading the interview questions verbatim, with only slight modifications made to questions in response to the changing conditions of the COVID pandemic. The interviews consisted of ten questions (Appendix A) stemming from three categories (leadership, innovation, and K12 partnerships), and the protocols were developed and piloted prior to implementation for this study. We recognise that interviews, our principal data source, provide only one level of insight into programs or experiences. Yet, interviews have proven to be a particularly important method for surfacing attitudes, values, and beliefs of participants and for documenting change over time (Rogers 2008).

Given the exploratory nature of this initial research, we opted for a qualitative case-study approach. We analysed our data using an interpretive paradigm. Instead of thinking of each dean as their own case, we elected to see our case as the social justice pursuits within teacher education programs as described by the deans. This means that we constructed our case across participants' interviews, documents, and memos in the form of a theoretical construct. While recognising our principal role was to make meaning from the words of our participants, we were also driven by notions of 'what is and should be valued' (Schwandt and Gates 2017, 351). This reflects our understanding that the research is not just concerned with the empirical as if it existed in a vacuum, but also with our own interpretations about what is desirable and undesirable in teacher education programs.

All four authors reviewed and coded the data independently using both NVivo and thematic coding strategies. Coding was an interactive process that led to categorising, which subsequently led to the refining and negotiation of categories and ultimately, theme development which we conducted as a team. Once data saturation occurred, our coding shifted from inductive to deductive, and the focus became checking for the existence of identified themes (Corbin and Strauss 2014) and discussing how our individual subjectivities were informing our interpretations and judgements (Bhattacharya 2017). Our analysis of the data was driven by Cochran-Smith and Stringer-Keefe's mutually reinforcing conceptions of justice, which they describe as the 4 Rs (redistribution, recognition, representation, and reframing), all of which are needed for *strong equity*. In the following section, we discuss our findings and demonstrate how notions of strong equity are helpful for determining the extent to which deans conceptualise and act in accordance with socially-just teacher education.

Findings and discussion

In examining the interview results, three themes were identified. They are described using quotations from the deans (all of whom have been given pseudonyms) and discussed in

relation to thin/strong equity and teacher agency. Themes emerging from the perceptions and actions described by the deans relate to 1) barriers to entering the teaching profession, 2) program-level changes for advancing justice and agency, and 3) systems level change. We strive for the voices of the deans with whom we spoke to come through in the following section.

Barriers to entering the teaching profession

The first theme, *barriers to entering the teaching profession*, acknowledges that at the most basic and obvious level, for an individual to achieve agency as a teacher requires that they meet state licensure and degree requirements to become a teacher, which requires that they have the motivation to enter the profession and have access to a supportive teacher education program. Given teacher shortages, downward trends in enrolments in teacher education programs (Darling-Hammond, Leib Sutcher, and Carver-Thomas 2018), and the challenges of diversifying the teacher workforce, basic issues of access represent non-trivial and necessary conditions for gaining agency as a teacher. Moreover, the profession of teaching must hold some attraction to an individual as a viable and possible career and life path, particularly for groups who are currently underrepresented in the field.

Given the role of SoE in developing teachers and recruiting students into teacher education programs, it makes sense that many of the deans that we interviewed addressed the foundational issues of recruitment into the profession, (i.e. issues related to the teacher pipeline). As we suggest in our introduction, many countries are grappling with how to bring more students of Colour into initial teacher education programs (Darling-Hammond 2017; Gilroy, 2014). In our study, we found one of the most fundamental issues to emerge in relation to this and recruiting candidates of Colour relates to the experience of schooling for Black and brown students. As Dean Alejandro noted, ‘why in the world would I want to go into a profession that treated me so poorly when I was a student?’

Given the breadth of responsibility that Deans of SoE carry in modern education, they have a vested interest and professional and ethical obligations to do their part in transforming the experience of schooling, including recruiting traditionally underrepresented populations into the teaching profession. Dean Alejandro elaborated,

I felt like **** going to school. And, now you’re asking me [referring to a student and prospective teacher candidate] to go back. So what kind of person does it take to say, ‘yeah, but you’re going to be the change agent, right, to make a difference?’ And, so, that’s sort of the tactic that we take to try to recruit more Latino men [into teaching]. And, you could apply this to African Americans, you know, whatever communities that are important to you.

This kind of long-term systemic thinking forms an important backdrop for the work taking place related to removing barriers to diversity, equity, and inclusion. To understand and address these barriers, program level activities need to be *reframed* within the context of broader systemic change, especially in relation to access and building pathways to teaching at the earliest grades. Dean Eric noted,

... like the south side of Chicago where [many] kids aren’t thinking, ‘I’m going to college at some point’. So, when I would actually talk to those kindergartners about becoming teachers and say, ‘You should think about this, it’s a possibility for you’. I think it begins way before

they show up in their first year on campus at a university. It has to start really in elementary and middle school, so that there begins to be a narrative that students across the spectrum can see themselves in that position and begin to think this is a worthy occupation.

In revisiting the 4 Rs of strong equity, deans are thinking not only about *representation* in that they want to ensure the teaching force more closely resembles the racialised and ethnic diversity of U.S. schools, but they also acknowledge that this work involves a *reframing* at the societal level so that students from particular groups are able to envision themselves as educators. This includes helping young men of Colour see teaching, particularly at the early grades, as a real professional possibility.

Besides addressing basic issues of access grounded in the schooling experience itself, the deans identified other barriers to the profession, especially for Black, Indigenous, People of Colour (BIPOC) teachers. One such barrier relates to *Recognition* and cultural relevance; essentially that many teachers lack knowledge about students' lived experience and cultural backgrounds and secondly that in many cases SoE lack faculty role models of Colour. Another barrier identified by the deans relates to *redistribution* in that they see financial barriers as a real issue for recruiting more teacher candidates from diverse racialised backgrounds. Research demonstrates that countries with high quality teacher education systems (Singapore, Finland, Australia, Canada), offer support to compensate students as they learn the craft of teaching (Darling-Hammond 2017). The deans spoke directly to the lack of systemic support in the U.S. and to how these financial barriers for many students relate to affordability, the aversion to taking on debt, and the need for students to work while attempting to complete the requirements to become a teacher. To address these barriers, the deans described a wide variety of interventions. Some represent the cutting edge of innovative leadership, while others appear to be attempts to keep pace with a rapidly changing and highly unequal world.

Below we address program level interventions described by the deans that speak to the barriers highlighted above: recruiting faculty of colour; addressing financial obstacles; infusing equity and justice into the curriculum; redesigning and building new programmes; and faculty development. We apply the 4 Rs and the development of teacher agency in our analysis.

Program level change

Our data indicated that the most common areas where institutional change occurs involves structural changes to curriculum, course sequences, and program offerings. Therefore, efforts to reframe teacher education through the lenses of justice and agency can most easily be observed in activities like revising curriculum, creating new degree and residency programs, and launching new institutes. These activities are common within SoE and do not necessarily speak to major shifts in perspectives and actions. However, our interviews provided examples of leadership change that occurred through dialogue, *reframing*, and ultimately through agency, creating fundamental changes to the culture and structures of programs. Dean Sharon noted,

We had Nolan Cabrera come and talk to us about whiteness and how whiteness influences us because unlike a HBCU, which is built from the bottom up to serve African American students, HSIs tend to take shape over time depending on the particular student demographics. So, it's

really a shift in thinking about institutions that were built to support white society, a sustained white society in the way that it always has been, to instead become centres that support and uplift BIPOC students.

Not only did this dean demonstrate a commitment to shifting practices in *recognition* of her schools' changing demographics, but she was also strategic in challenging and *reframing* what Cochran-Smith and Stringer Keefe (2022) argue are the widespread educational constructs related to equity and justice that position minoritized students in relation to dominant ideologies.

Cultural relevance

Another dean (Melanie), a self-identified woman of colour in a major urban city in the U.S. reflected specifically on her role in addressing programmatic shifts dealing with cultural relevance within her SoE after the murder of George Floyd. This dean's work reflected *recognition* in thinking through differences across communities.

I reached out to some of my faculty leaders. And what we started to talk about is- we need to shine a light on our own program. So, what are we doing well, and what do we need to change? We're still in the middle of a pandemic, I get it. But we can't say that we can sit in the status quo anymore. So, we created an equity audit based off of some questions that Ladson-Billings has asked over the years for people to think about culturally relevant pedagogy.

Aside from curricular and pedagogical challenges, another well documented issue related to *representation* is the lack of role models of Colour in the teaching profession and in faculties of SoE. Dean Chelsea remarked, 'I've got students of Colour coming to campus as freshmen who look around and they don't see a lot of people who look like them unless they're working at the cafeteria kind of thing and they're uncomfortable'. The shortage of potential candidates of Colour for these positions poses other challenges, as Dean Michael stated, 'So, if you wanted to hire an African American professor today then you're going to be competing against other institutions who are trying to do the same thing because there's a pool of people that isn't big enough to meet the demand'. Again, the surface level of the problem has its roots in deeper, more systemic issues, reflecting both the need for *reframing* and the understanding that even for deans to achieve agency in improving their faculty representation requires more than the will of one individual. Despite this, some change, certainly at individual universities is possible, as Dean Sherilyn noted, 'I'm very proud that we finally got our faculty demographic up to 53%, under-represented minority, Asian, Asian American with the turnover of people retiring, a wonderful diversity effort on the campus'. As this anecdote suggests, making progress is difficult but sustained efforts (at least at the individual scale of one SoE) can bring results.

In one final example that deals with culture, Dean Anthony described their efforts to better understand student experience and to use that insight to inform programmatic redesign.

This Monday, at our departmental meeting, we're going to unpack as a whole, our ability to reflect as a unit on our own implicit bias, et cetera. Then, we'll do some other things. Later this fall, we're implementing a cultural survey with our students to better see their experiences in terms of diversity, and what that looks like on their part.

Involving faculty in implicit bias training and asking students to reflect on ways their experiences are reflected in the program highlight efforts of *recognition*, which seek to draw on students' assets in the form of knowledge, culture, language, etc (Cochran-Smith and Stringer Keefe 2022).

Addressing financial obstacles

In addition to program-level changes relating to cultural relevance and recognition, multiple deans spoke of *redistribution* efforts to address financial barriers to becoming a successful teacher. These efforts include fundraising for scholarships, reducing tuition for teachers who work in high needs districts (e.g. urban areas, high poverty schools), and rebranding existing scholarships to support candidates of Colour. Dean Sharon highlights:

... we're an institution that supports and welcomes more diverse students, in particular, Black, Latinx and men to the profession. And so, we came up with this idea of crafting language around an Overcomers scholarship and an Invictus scholarship. These scholarships support students who are first generation Latinx and African American or BIPOC, people who aim to become teachers and to work in their own communities.

Our data indicated that many of the deans were striving to address issues of affordability through a variety of approaches, some programmatic and some in more policy-driven and systemic ways.

Infusing equity and justice into the curriculum

The curriculum in teacher education programs (including clinical experiences) provide the foundation for teacher candidates' work in classrooms: their knowledge of pedagogy, student development, and subject matter. Thus, the curriculum provides a powerful location for supporting the development of teacher agency and ensuring a socially-just education. Our interviews identified a number of programmatic efforts working to transform different elements of the curriculum by encouraging conceptualisations of equity and justice in teachers' practice. This includes Dean Eric who stated his SoE was working with their existing population of 'largely middle class white women' to help them 'learn more about the communities in which we're hoping they're going to be teaching, which would be Flint, Grand Rapids, Detroit and so on, and not have that be in a separate course, but have that infused through the curriculum as they're going along'. Another dean, Laura, described a similar effort not to create a separate course where diversity and equity issues are taught but instead to ensure that students encounter this knowledge all throughout their experience:

We just revised all of our foundation courses based on all the changes that have been happening and have embedded equity and SEL into every single course; it is not something separate, but definitely weaved through. It's not a separate assignment. It's weaved into every single assignment. It's transparent in every rubric. It's transparent in every choice of resource that we've chosen ... It's the inside out approach. We talk about assumptions, biases, and stereotypes. We're asking them to reflect on their personal and professional profile of themselves and to dig deep and be uncomfortable.

This quote exemplifies the efforts of this dean and her SoE to *redistribute* educational equity resources throughout the program, for all teacher candidates. It also demonstrates a vision for *reframing* that which is under her control as leader of the College. An additional dimension of curricular *reframing* we heard from various deans involves weaving principles of justice into the curriculum created by teacher candidates for K12 students. Dean Jeanne elaborated,

It's not just English and history and the humanities courses, it's also our science classes. There are still things that we hear in a lot of classrooms of the 'why does this matter question' not being able to be answered in a substantive way. And, so really making sure that we're tying the work not just to professions and to jobs, but to challenges that really matter to our students in our communities today. And we see that here with things like access to transportation and environmentally safe communities.

For teacher candidates to succeed in being able to describe the 'why' behind their decisions as teachers and for teachers to think about educational responses to community-specific issues undoubtedly requires agency. Although not specifically stated, Dean Jeanne envisions the development of teachers capable of achieving this agency.

Systems level change

Many of the deans described their efforts to lead *systemic level change* in ways that extend beyond the confines of the SoE towards broader trends within the society, and in ways that are congruent with changing mindsets and policies related to equity, access, and agency. These efforts aimed at addressing inequities in several key areas including reducing bias in the testing regimes related to teacher education, working in collaboration to change state education policy, and changing the experience of schooling for Black and brown students as well as for individuals who are differently abled.

While tough competition for entrance into teacher education programs exists in some countries like Finland who have more students interested in teaching than spots available (Gilroy, 2014), other places, including the United States are dealing with persistent shortages of interested applicants, particularly applicants who represent communities of Colour in the U.S. context. Many of the deans pointed out that existing testing regimes present one of the greatest barriers to increasing the diversity of the teaching profession, especially for Black males. Dean Alexandra described:

We're having some opportunities to look at test scores for BIPOC students . . . The data is really very clear that students from diverse language and ethnic groups are not passing, are not even meeting the minimum to be petition-able to continue in the program. And so, what do we do? There's an opportunity to provide some kind of multiple measures that assess their skills as teachers and to get them in the classrooms as soon as possible.

There was considerable attention to this idea of broadening out the kinds and amounts of measures used, particularly in relation to advancing diversity within the profession.

We're doing that right now [addressing systemic concerns]. In fact, we've proposed a diversity and equity in recruitment and retention policy that would consider the matter of diversity linguistically and ethnically, to everyone who is in the pipeline to become a teacher, in order to open the doors, give them support, and to provide multiple measures of effective teaching and instruction.

The need to shift policy extends beyond testing to other elements. The example below, highlights the importance of leadership in bringing about change, as well as the malleability of state policy.

We're trying to revise a lot of our standards in the state of Minnesota, as the general teacher preparation standards are up for revision . . . I hosted a workgroup over the summer. And, I worked with faculty, whether they were deans or faculty members from all three areas, our private colleges, our state colleges, and our university system. There were about twenty-one of us that were racially and geographically diverse across our state. And we were able to put together a plan for the state of our recommendations on how to change the standards. Since then, they have accepted most of our revisions.

The journey to becoming an effective teacher who achieves agency, a professional who can fulfil their obligation to students and effectively work with the wide range of stakeholders that are part and parcel of being a classroom teacher, begins long before an individual enters a teacher education program. Many of the deans with whom we spoke frame their work within the entire operation of schooling, from K12 through the college experience and into the dynamics of the teacher education program and clinical experience, which they most directly influence. This makes sense given the scope and breadth of the activities taking place in SoE. It is no wonder then that so many of the deans remain deeply focused on changing the nature of the school experience itself. Dean Paul explains:

School works really well for a certain group of students, and they're the ones who become teachers because face it, if I'm terrible at basketball, I don't play basketball very much. If I hate school, I can't wait to get out. And so, the thought of becoming a teacher is ridiculous to me. But it's that population that actually, if we can pull them into schooling, they'll begin to change the system. Right. So that it begins to work not just for the kids it works for, but for everybody, for different groups. And so, I think that narrative starts in kindergarten. We have to be intentional about it.

As Cochran-Smith and Stringer Keefe (2022) highlight there is plenty of equity-based work happening in SoE and this is reflected in the copious amounts of social-justice, teacher-education literature. However, if schooling is to be transformed in ways that yield a more socially-just education for all, programmatic changes within SoE are not sufficient. To challenge and reframe educational constructs related to equity and justice requires deans who are not only willing to challenge dominant ideologies within their own colleges, but who also understand the need to contribute to societal shifts, policy debates, and *reframing*. While many deans are working diligently within their colleges and with their various stakeholders to improve their programs and prepare their teacher candidates for working in diverse schools, it was less common to hear deans speak about how they might contribute to systems-level change or to a new narrative about education and the work of teachers.

Implications

Cochran-Smith and Stringer-Keefe's vision for teacher education grounded in the 4 Rs of strong equity is ambitious to say the least. Deans and faculty would need to consider economic, cultural, political, and discursive dimensions of equity. Our data demonstrated

that deans are in fact, taking up these dimensions in various ways, but that barriers remain. While it is important to acknowledge that teachers and teacher educators are not going to fix society's structural issues and 'cannot bring about equity' (Cochran-Smith and Stringer Keefe 2022, 22), deans from SoE are uniquely positioned to address barriers of access, improve programs within their colleges, and act as powerful voices for the types of systems and structural interrogation needed for a more socially just education.

One area that deserves more focus is the role of leaders/deans in building structures and systems that assist teachers and teacher educators in achieving teacher agency (Biesta, Priestley, and Robinson 2015). This involves reframing our teacher education systems, but it no doubt would go a long way in addressing the type of genuine change needed for strong equity:

from the perspective of strong equity, it is assumed that genuine change requires that teacher educators work with fellow educators, policymakers, community members, activists, and others to undo the racialized, structural, and systemic aspects of schools and society that maintain inequality. This includes interrogating and unlearning deep-seated frames about merit and individualism as well as learning to recognize and build on the knowledge and values of historically marginalised groups through a wide representation of stakeholders. (Cochran-Smith and Stringer Keefe 2022, 22)

Clearly, this type of teacher education must include more opportunities for teachers to think through their role as professional educators and interrogate more fully the purpose(s) of education and ways in which they might resist some of what our society seems to be demanding of their labour (Biesta 2019). With this end in mind, we would welcome more research on the ways in which deans and SoE work to address the view of schooling in society and who are able to design and lead programs with a focus on developing agentic teachers, grounded in a theory of education and conceptualizations of strong equity.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Appendix A

Interview questions asked of participants

Leading through the Crisis

- (1) Based on your experience, what elements of coping with the COVID-19 pandemic have been [AND ARE CURRENTLY] THE most challenging for you and your many stakeholders?
- (2) What have been your top 2 or 3 greatest learnings [DURING THIS PANDEMIC]? from? And, in what ways did these learnings impact the activities of the college?
- (3) What 2 or 3 lasting changes and opportunities have emerged from this time of difficulty and disruption? How is your college acting on those insights?

Leadership and Innovation

- (4) As you know, a lot of people are extremely stressed and anxious in these times. What is the college of education doing to support individual and community wellbeing?