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Humanizing Teacher Education: Integrating Critical Approaches to Inner Child Healing into Teacher Development

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Abstract

Many teacher education and professional development efforts in the U.S. remain problematic when the content and nature of learning are ahistorical, apolitical, and color-evasive. Black, Indigenous, and People of Color who become educators have already had to navigate systemic harm in schools since childhood and continue to experience such harm in adulthood as they teach youth of color (Pour-Khorshid, 2018). Teacher education cannot normalize, desensitize, or become apathetic to the harm caused by colonial schooling; rather, it must acknowledge its roots, address its impact, and support and empower educators to break cycles of harm in and out of schools. The relationship between inner-child healing and racial healing as approaches to humanizing teacher development is underexplored yet worthy of inquiry. The ways in which schooling, from PreK-12 to university studies, prioritizes cognitive and intellectual pursuits of learning over spiritual and embodied ways of knowing are rooted in a colonial project that dehumanizes teachers and learners alike. In this paper, I argue for the need to humanize teacher education pedagogies and professional development efforts by building on an under-researched, evolving pedagogical approach I refer to as critical inner child healing. Rooted in a decolonial women of color feminist lens, I expand on traditional understandings of Internal Family Systems (Schwartz, 1999) and inner child healing approaches in teacher education (Johnson et al., 2025), to assert that as long as systems of domination, including schools, continue to cause harm, teacher education and development must move toward critical healing-centered modalities to support justice-centered education.

Keywords: Teacher Education; Teacher Development; Humanizing Education; Inner Child Healing; Racial Healing