Chapter 4
Empowering Preservice Teachers Through Advocacy and Activism

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ABSTRACT

This chapter seeks to address how to retain teachers by empowering preservice teachers within their teacher preparation program through advocacy and activism. Drawing from a longitudinal study on preservice teachers, among other studies, this chapter applies Freire's critical pedagogy as a framework to outline these main ideas and explain ways to implement them in a teacher education program: (1) Preservice teachers must recognize that they are functioning within a neoliberal system; (2) Preservice teachers must recognize that they have the power and voice to change and disrupt the system through advocacy and activism; (3) Preservice teachers must recognize that they can use their voice to change education and education-related policies that affect their students and their teaching; (4) Preservice teachers must recognize that they can use their voice to change social policies that affect their well-being and day-to-day life as teachers.

INTRODUCTION

A pressing issue in education, specifically teacher preparation, is the urgent need to retain teachers in the classroom. According to Gray and Taie (2015), about 10% of all beginning teachers in public schools in the US leave the field after their first year of teaching. Furthermore, about 50% leave teaching with the first five years

(Ingersoll et al., 2018). Teachers have reported that they leave the profession for various reasons, such as uneven work/life balance (Perryman & Calvert, 2020) and high levels of burnout and emotional exhaustion (Chang, 2009; Hakanen et al., 2006; Saloviita & Pakarinen, 2021). Teacher burnout can also lead to health issues, such as depression (Bloom 2013; Einav et al., 2024), higher risk of cardiovascular disease, and musculoskeletal disorders (Honkonen et al., 2006; Madigan et al., 2023). Given these issues, teacher preparation programs should reevaluate their current programs to find ways to prevent teacher turnover.

Research (e.g., Athanases & Martin, 2006; Chang & Cochran-Smith, 2022) and my own research (e.g., Brown et al., 2023) have provided insight into addressing this issue of teacher turnover by addressing what is being taught in teacher education programs. My colleagues and I conducted a longitudinal, instrumental case study (Stake, 1995) following preservice teachers during their teacher preparation program in a large, urban, state midwestern university to a year as a teacher of their own classroom (e.g., Brown et al., 2020; Brown et al., 2021; Brown et al., 2023). The data collected were a series of semi-structured, qualitative interviews throughout the preservice teachers' time in their teacher preparation program and a year into teaching their own classroom, course syllabi, and memos. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed using traditional qualitative analytic methods, such as deductively using a set of external codes and developing an internal set of codes (Graue & Walsh, 1998; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The constant-comparative method was implemented to develop themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

One of the findings was that some of the first-year teachers were unsure whether they were addressing the needs and expectations of the neoliberal classroom effectively (Brown et al., 2020). For example, one of the teachers, Pierce mentioned that "there were times I was told that I had to teach certain standards on certain days because the school administration wanted to assess our students' learning of them, which freaked me out." Another finding was the clear disconnect between what students experienced as preservice teachers and what they faced in their classrooms as current teachers (Brown et al., 2020).

The findings from this study illuminated what was missing in the teacher preparation program that could better prepare these preservice teachers as they became teachers of their own classrooms. Drawing from this longitudinal study on preservice teachers and other studies (e.g., Barnes, 2018; Wiggan et al., 2021), this chapter will implement Freire (1970/1993)'s critical pedagogy work as a framework to outline these main ideas:

(1) Preservice teachers must recognize that they are functioning within a neoliberal system.

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