POSSIBILITIES FOR AN INCLUSIVE PRAXIS: A FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF DISCOURSES OF MINDFULNESS AND INCLUSION

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Amidst the growing trend toward the use of yoga and mindfulness in K-12 classrooms, there has been an emphasis in research on the use of mindfulness as a tool for supporting the learning and behavioral needs of children. Educators, school leaders, school counselors and mental health workers are implementing mindfulness and yoga as activities and strategies to support their classroom teaching practices, and in turn, there is a growing body of classroom curriculum, children’s literature, and school-based activities that focus on the implementation of mindfulness and yoga in schools. This rise in pedagogical practice is accompanied by an increase in research that focuses on the effectiveness of mindfulness and yoga as interventions for learning and behavior; however, there has been little to no critical analysis of these practices.

In this dissertation, I take the position that the incorporation of mindfulness and yoga in learning environments can greatly benefit from an understanding of Feminist Pedagogy that emphasizes the embodiment of learning and the empowerment of learners in order to create and sustain inclusive learning communities. Thus, a critical discourse analysis of mindfulness and yoga curriculum in this study illuminate possibilities, and potential pitfalls, for an Inclusive Praxis. This research explores the potential for Feminist Pedagogies, mindfulness, and yoga to contribute to what constitutes what is introduced as an Inclusive Praxis—the process of creating and sustaining inclusive learning spaces through the intentional practice of embodiment and empowerment, and the active recognition and rejection of exclusion. Centering the question: “How can mindfulness and yoga curriculum support an Inclusive Praxis in schools and diverse learning communities?”

Major findings included how overarching themes in the curriculum materials analyzed consisted of: Supporting ‘Mind · Body · Emotion; Cautioning of Oppressive Forms of Empowerment; and Possibilities for an Inclusive Praxis. The study offers possibilities for teachers, school leaders, and policy makers; and identifies entry points for disrupting dominant discourses of exclusion in learning environments providing a unique and much needed contribution to the overall research on mindfulness and yoga for youth.

This study of identity was significant through offering important implications of a writing curriculum connected to forming a genuine understanding of experiences, focusing on the lives of our students, ourselves, and the significance of intersections.