Mindful Subjects: The Disciplinary Power of Mindfulness in Schools

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Introduction

Mindfulness has been woven through American popular culture for decades: named and unnamed, formally and informally, as an enduring concept aimed at reforming individuals and organizations in both public and private spaces. In 2014, CBS aired an episode of *60 Minutes* with Anderson Cooper that explicated to Americans how to *achieve* mindfulness as part of a growing public wellness trend and movement (Cetta, 2014). Concurrently, mainstream media has also critiqued the whitewashing and appropriation of cultural concepts and secular principles from which mindful practice originates. In this more cursory conceptualization, mindfulness functions as a form of market capitalism and as a form of capitalizing spirituality (Heffernan, 2015; Purser, 2019). As it has been celebrated and critiqued, mindfulness has incurred various definitions, depending on the set of beliefs through which it is contextualized. Though the social practices associated with mindfulness may have stemmed from deep-rooted spiritual traditions in contemplative cultures, such as Buddhism and Hinduism, as well as the prayerful rituals of structured religion, a contemporary and more secular notion of mindfulness has emerged in the United States. Kabbat-Zinn (2003), one of the field's leading scholars, defines mindfulness in human behavior as "[an] awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally…It's about knowing what is on your mind" (2017, p. 1). As such, these popularized notions of mindfulness frame what is and is not mindful -- subsequently who is and who is not mindful -- all the while urging each of us to be more mindful professionals, family and community members, and consumers (Langer, 1989).

In education, mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) in particular have been historically intertwined with students who have been problematically labeled "at-risk" (Purser, 2019, p. 183) which alludes to a legacy of disciplinary and over-corrective action concerning marginalized students and students of color in American schools (Love, 2019). Though the "at-risk" label is often considered a trope or stereotype when describing racialized or low-income students and has been dangerously employed in policy and curricula, it does focus attention on " how education might better address schooling for all students, particularly those positioned as potentially underachieving" (Brown, 2016, p. 1). The biases associated with "risk discourse, [alludes to] the practice of identifying students presumed more likely than their peers to experience low academic achievement" (Brown, 2016, p. 16).

Yet, the prevalent pairing of mindfulness and youth who are labeled "at-risk" has generated an abundance of literature substantiating the use of mindfulness as a means for improving student wellness and achievement outcomes throughout the field of education. Critical discussions of this work and its commitment to the goals of diversity, equity, and inclusion are part of a more recent and vital critical movement. In building a rationale for the critique presented here, this paper considers how MBIs in education originated and how the popular, mainstream notions described above have shaped a rationale in support of cognitive interventions designed to manage the social behaviors of youth who have been problematically labeled "at-risk" or academically low-performing (Brown, 2016).

Mindfulness as Biopower

This article uses a Foucauldian perspective to introduce an inquiry of how the discourses found in education policy and curriculum shape the mindful subject. Michel Foucault argued that "power is constituted through acceptable forms of knowledge, scientific understanding and 'truth'" (Gaventa, 2003, p. 1). He argues that the technology or instrumentation of power "cannot be exercised unless a certain economy of discourses of truth functions in, on the basis of, thanks to, that power" (Foucault, 2003, p. 24). When it comes to the subjectification of both teachers and students as part of this relational dyad, "what is [rarely] in question is the nature of power relations themselves as a form of

delimitation" (Cisney & Morar, 2015, p. 2). Drawing upon Foucault's concept of biopower helps to problematize and inquire about the ways that mindfulness practices in schools, and their resulting truths about emotion, operate to construct the student as a mindful subject and the teacher as manager of social emotion (Cisney & Morar, 2015). For the purpose of this paper, mindfulness is conceptualized as an example of biopower, something that both impacts subjects of power and also instantiates powerful subjects (Ball, 2012). In focusing in on part of a growing debate in mindfulness studies (Purser, 2019), this discussion also considers some of the ways that mindfulness discourse is reanimated from non-secular sources to empower subjects and societies, and how those discourses are also employed as part of disciplinary discourses in traditional schooling and institutional relationships.

As Ball (1990) asserts, "The application of Foucauldian analysis to education will unmask the politics that underlie some of the apparent neutrality of education reform" (p. 7). Like the critical research of Ball (2012), as well as Popkewitz and Brennan (1997), the theoretical framework of this discussion engages with Foucauldian discourse analysis to illuminate how various understandings of mindfulness across socio-political contexts entangle with educational notions of discipline and freedom. With this larger context of policy and standardized social-emotional learning (SEL) curricula in mind, this inquiry considers teachers' views of mindfulness for students who are described as "at-risk" and recognizes "the variable way the category and label 'at-risk' are used in policy and practice" to negotiate students' needs and identities (Brown, 2016, p. 21).

In doing so, this article asks, *how do school-based discourses construct the mindful subject?* Through a discussion of some of our nation's public desires for social correction and rehabilitation as part of discursive formations of citizenship (Foucault, 1972), this article raises a discussion of how those desires influence the direction of educational policy, and their related SEL schooling programs where MBIs are purposed for the development of student self-regulation skills. The discussion concludes with an emergence of the mindful subject that appears in *reaction to power*, and as *an enactment of power*.

SEL's Predominant Paradigm and Debates

In exploring the social and historical context of the "at-risk" label, Brown (2016) explains, "While many believe this is necessary in order to meet these students' needs, an outcome of this categorizing process is that these students by virtue of their often non-normative race, social class, language, and/or ability identification get positioned as deficient and in need of specialized treatment" (p. 5). Consequently, the discourse of contemporary school reform has revolved around supporting students in transcending a morally and intellectually impoverished home life (Popkewitz, 1997). Correspondingly, America's schools have been recently rebranded under the banner of A Nation At Hope (ASPEN, 2019), attempting to dismantle the issues of risk through SEL progress that is shouldered by expectations for individual student change. For that reason, as an ever-changing, influential concept and global movement, mindfulness has been theorized in several ways, many of which have shaped the rationale for social-emotional learning standards and educational interventions designed to attend to social and behavioral concerns for youth (CASEL, 2017). Thus, the research and curricular networks leading this work produce the dominant discourse(s) of SEL's growing field, deeply shaping how children's socio-cultural knowledge and emotional development are legitimated, and how these mindfulness discourses influence the construction of the mindful subject throughout the education field.

In their work on the historical development of social and moral curricula of the past to the SEL industry of the present, Weissberg, Durlak, Domitrovich, and Gullotta (2015) demonstrate how social efficiency has played a significant role in the purposing of curriculum focused on the development of students' skills for the needs of the dominant society (Kliebard, 1995). The demand for competent social skills is canopied beneath the neoliberal notion of students' individual success as it relates to educational outcomes that prepare them for the 21st century workforce. Today's predominant SEL curricular regime spells out five competencies, which are ascribed to the development of the socially successful "subject." Among these SEL competencies are self-management, self-awareness, social-awareness, relationships skills, and responsible decision-making (Weissberg et al., 2015).

As an SEL-related approach, mindfulness helps to "support student development and often creates opportunities for students to practice [social emotional learning] competencies" (CASEL, 2017). Over the past six years, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) Collaborating States Initiative (CSI) has led to all 50 states adapting the SEL core competencies in State Learning Frameworks, strategic plans, and policies (CASEL, 2017). These SEL core competencies are also reflected in the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), and subsequent SEL related bills, H.R. 1864 and H.R. 2544, authored by Congress. Joining CASEL in 2016, The National Commission on Social Emotional and Academic Development (NCSEAD) "unites leaders from multiple sectors, including education, research, business, health, and the military to advance a broader vision of education

success" (National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, 2018).

As the major organizers and funders for SEL curriculum in the United States, groups like CASEL and NCSEAD have also joined a global network of expertise and governance (Ball, 2012) around SEL that is composed of research, district partnerships, policy leaders, and leading scientists. Alongside the United States, the SEL movement in education has become increasingly more popular among industrialized nations worldwide. For example, an American-based SEL educational non-profit, Committee for Children (2018), centers its work on a 2015 report from the international policy forum, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). OECD's more familiar "PISA-based Test for Schools [was formulated] to help schools compare themselves to international standards," but they have also worked to expand their tests "to include factors like problem-solving and well-being" (Williamson, 2018, p.2).

OECD's (2015) report, *The Power of Social and Emotional Skills,* "highlights a nine-country analysis that found there is a common set of skills that seems to matter across cultures—including self-esteem, self-efficacy, and sociability" (SEL In Action, 2021). The OECD study produces a global discourse of 21st century readiness skills at an international scale as part of a larger policy context (Williamson, 2018). This bolsters the claims for social emotional development among curriculum designers and policy authors at a national scale, such as the Committee for Children, who forward the idea that "these skills consistently affect outcomes like college completion, job attainment, health, and civic engagement" (SEL In Action, 2021).

Mindfulness-based, social-emotional learning initiatives have emerged as one of the most popular behavioral competencies and learning approaches within this growing curricular movement as part of this global expansion. For example, mindfulness trainings for educators are available online, worldwide through organizations such as Mindful Education.teachable.com (2019), which features mentorship from across the OECD and CASEL network as part of the training process. Williams and Kabat-Zinn (2011), two prominent figures in mindfulness studies, note, "Integrating mindfulness-based approaches into medicine, psychology, neuroscience, healthcare, education, business leadership, and other major societal institutions has become a burgeoning field" (p. 1).

However, the outcomes of such integration have become the subject of critique within the curriculum studies field in more recent years, as in a 2016 internationally authored colloquium contesting its effects in early childhood education (Moss, Dahlberg, Grieshaber, Mantovani, May, Pence, ... & Vandenbroeck, 2016). The authors push back against the "comparative testing regimes" from powerful organizations such as OECD, which generate "the ever-increasing governing of children and the adults who live and work with them" (Moss et al., 2016, p. 11). In this case, the authors consider how the technocratic approach to social-emotional learning made by organizations like OECD imply that "what it concludes and recommends is self-evident, objective and uncontestable" (Moss et al., 2016, p. 6). Their study regards OECD's approach, and the omission of concerns over discrimination and marginalization, as counter-intuitive to the concepts of self-awareness and mindfulness, which the OECD network attempts to promote.

Despite such critiques, the enveloping of mindfulness within the larger SEL movement continues to grow rapidly. In OECD's (2018) report, *Social and emotional skills, well-being, connectedness and success*, mindfulness is centered in this movement as an adaptive skill essential to navigating a rapidly changing global workforce:

> We know that preparing students with technical or academic skills alone will not be enough for them to achieve success, connectedness and well-being whatever endeavours they wish to pursue. Social and emotional skills, such as perseverance, empathy, mindfulness, courage or leadership are central to this. We are born with what political scientist Robert Putnam calls bonding social capital, a sense of belonging to our family or other people with shared experiences, cultural norms, common purposes or pursuits. But it requires deliberate and continuous effort to create the kind of binding social capital through which we can share experiences, ideas and innovation and build a shared understanding among groups with diverse experiences and interests, thus increasing our radius of trust to strangers and institutions. (Schleicher, 2018, p. 3)

Subsequently, mindfulness has taken stock in American education as an alluring concept to stakeholders in the pursuit of reforming teachers, students, and schools, and serves as an alternative to the traditional disciplinary models, which remains a contested and controversial part of our current schooling system. Noting Schleicher's (2018) focus on cultivating students' institutional trust, the disciplinary discourses regulating the mindful subject in this instantiation also signal a new view of student management. The increase in SEL practices and programs seemingly eliminates the discipline practices that were once used to control student behaviors. Likewise, desires for a more mindful teaching and more mindful students clearly imprint agendas for policy and curriculum, with standardized mindfulness curricula and mindfulness dispositions as the emphasis. With this in mind, school context is not a

center point, but rather generalized as able to adapt these curricular interventions across various contexts as a form of social management.

As discussed, CASEL (2017) has been instrumental in providing SEL standards for all 50 states through their Collaborative States Initiative (CSI). Correspondingly, CASEL and NCSEAD have lobbied policymakers for federal efforts to increase the funding, research, and assessments that accurately and constructively measure SEL (CASEL, 2018a). To debate this effort, Williamson (2018) argues that the social-emotional skills programs written to address these standards "emphasize the psychometric science of 'personality' measurement" (p. 2). He contends that "the core idea behind many [programs] is that the 'non-cognitive' aspects of learning are fundamentally linked to academic progress and to a range of social and economic outcomes, such as productivity, labour market behaviours and overall well-being" (p. 2). Though earlier cognitive models of mindfulness focused on material problem solving external to the participants (Baer, 2003), Langer's (1989) formulation of mindfulness, the predominant concept advanced by CASEL and affiliated organizations, is frequently "directed toward the inner experiences of the individual" (Baer, 2003, p. 126). Since mindfulness has been precariously placed within the category of "non-cognitive" skills, this grouping marks curricula that are non-academic as social and emotionally centered. The mastery of stipulated SEL skills are said to make wellbeing and academic success more likely. As such, the level to which students, teachers, and schools can be assessed and measured as mindful are now linked to accountability measures in U.S. schools (CASEL, 2018b).

As Abramowski (2018) explains, "We are talking about policies that focus on the cultivation of a centered, relaxed and positive interiority without touching the material working conditions" (p. 1). Rather than teachers, families and communities, network leaders such as CASEL and NCSEAD have framed and defined the competencies, approaches, and goals for students' social emotional learning in primary and secondary classrooms over the past two decades. Such dispositions are deeply established in (re)framing student's inner worlds without regard for the structural oppression and systematic exclusion framing their outer worlds. For example, one of the core competencies in CASEL's (2017) framework has been termed as self-awareness (a term also discussed Moss et al.'s (2016) critique).

Following forthcoming self-awareness discourses through policy and practice helps to outline some of the ways self-awareness maps on to concepts of mindfulness (and vice versa) through MBIs and curricula. Self-awareness is defined by CASEL as, "the ability to accurately recognize one's own emotions, thoughts, and values, and how they influence behavior. The ability to accurately assess one's strengths and limitations, with a well-grounded sense of confidence, optimism, and a 'growth mindset'" (CASEL, 2018c). In reflecting upon Kabat-Zinn's (2003) definition of mindfulness next to CASEL's definition of self-awareness, it may be noticeable how the embedded concept of being mindful, or being purposefully self-aware of one's thoughts, is inscribed with similar or perhaps synonymous meaning. The norms of mindful and self-aware behaviors and practices are legitimated in these larger frameworks and standards (Ball, 2012). For this reason, Abramowski (2018) argues, "In the emotional educational policies that are currently being implemented, the teaching profession is desacralized" (p. 1). Ergo, the teacher-student relationship is regulated by the predominant discourse of the social field, and continues to entangle institutional power with youth identities, needs, and desires in various ways. The norms created by such policies are then legitimated by the predominant social emotional discourses, which delineate "those with the right human capacities" (Schleicher, 2018, p. 3), and "those who are insufficiently prepared" (Schleicher, 2018, p. 3) to experience wellness, connectedness, and success.

Mindfulness, Risk, and Achievement

From 2002 to present, numerous school-based studies, articles, and books pairing MBIs with youth labeled "at-risk" or categorized as "urban", copiously populate search engines pertaining to education and schooling. SEL veteran researchers Greenberg & Harris (2012) explain, "it is not surprising that such practices are rapidly growing in application for children and youth. One merely needs to enter such search terms as 'children and yoga' or 'children and mindfulness' to find thousands of sites extolling their benefits" (p.1). Among them are studies authorizing commonly used curriculum packages such as Learning to Breathe (Broderick, 2013), RULER (Brackett & Rivers, 2014), and MindUP (Schonert-Reichel, et al., 2015), written and endorsed by well-known mindfulness researchers, teachers, and advocates connected to institutions of higher education, and state and federal networks who standardize the educational policies discussed previously. Markedly, such policy and curricular networks produce the dominant discourse of the field (Ball, 2012) shaping how developmental and socio-cultural knowledge is regulated (Popkewitz, 1997), and how mindfulness and youth are imagined (Lesko & Talburt, 2012). In accord with Greenberg and Harris (2012), the dominant discourse mobilizes around the concept of mindfulness and yoga interventions as beneficial for students, yet it is unclear what *beneficial* means.

In their own research, Grant & Millar (2005) problematize similar claims made for the benefit of historically marginalized youth. They argue that "research since the 1960s has had a significant impact on policy related to race, class, gender, language and disability…most of the research that was and is considered 'equity' research erroneously assumes that the concept of 'equity' is synonymous with the concept of 'equal opportunity" (p. 8). Vasudevan and Campano (2009) also argue "the moral panic about adolescents remains distanced from any real analysis of social inequality" (p. 316). More so, Brown (2016) argues, "Over time, the sociocultural markers of race, social class, language, and ability have been inextricably linked to 'at-risk' status" (p. 5). In connecting critiques of youth discourse to those of mindfulness, the rationale supporting standardized MBIs persists by making the "at-risk" subject problematic (Popkewitz, 1997). The literature on mindfulness interventions in education, and particularly those designed to support groups who have been labeled as under-resourced, high-need student populations, also reflect these assumptions.

The predominant paradigm of mindfulness curricula, and its supporting empirical research, focus on the factors contributing to student success with regard to cultivating resilience and/or self-awareness, in addition to stress reduction and self-management skills, which are said to decrease risk in individual students (Jennings, Frank, Snowberg, Coccia & Greenberg, 2013). For instance, one Baltimore-based mindfulness program for "at-risk" youth notes that:

> The risk of academic failure, school-dropout, internalizing as well as externalizing psychological problems, school bullying, and aggression in response to the exposure of traumatizing events is significantly higher to youth growing up in low-income neighborhoods. Even though urban youth has an increased risk of suffering from psychological problems, they are less likely to receive help. To be able to deal with such stressful events, self-regulation skills, coping mechanisms are required…The field of research on contemplative practices, such as mindfulness and yoga is growing rapidly. Interventions targeting several domains suggest many positive promising effects. (HLF, 2016).

As in the example above, the deficit and risk discourses framed here have been coupled with mindfulness ideology and schooling discourses in an aim to ameliorate perceived social crises, and more specifically youth crises that have challenged school rankings and success. However, as Popkewitz (1987) notes, "What is socially constructed are made to seem natural and inevitable elements" (p. 2). "In using the language of schooling" the seeming neutral and well-meaning intentions of mindfulness practices often overlook "that learning, teaching, and the school subjects have particular social histories" (p. 2).

Brown (2016) notes how "At-risk as an education construct, has global appeal," and highlights its emergence in educational policy as far back as the 1980s, linking to broader historical critiques of deficit discourse found throughout the development of education policy in the United States. She explains that despite its racialized implications and subtexts, many movements and individuals committed to social justice have adapted the "at-risk" term in various ways (Brown, 2016). In taking up the ideas that Popkewitz and Brown forward here, the formation of the "at-risk" subject overlooks systemic oppressions such as poverty, over-policing, disproportionate incarceration, and disenfranchising conditions that our students face. Rather, the idea of schooling and the discourses of mindfulness are presented as a means to avoid risk. The mindful subject is constituted out of the crises of youth, which are politically positioned toward incarceration, poverty, and academic failure without historical consciousness (Popkewitz, 1987).

Rest, Resilience, and Liberation

As the Black liberation and anti-racist movement gain strength and influence across the United States, the demands and tenets of these movements stand counter to the dominant discourses of social emotional curricula. But the influences and intentions of social development and social freedom on behalf of such liberation movements cannot be reduced to a binary. Here, conceptualizations of mindfulness may appear quite differently, work in different ways, and potentially open the power of mindfulness toward different purposes with presumably different notions of embodiment (Foucault, 1977). Rather than a job-ready subject possessing 21st century skills, the mindful subject of the liberation movement may appear as a contemplative, non-violent radical (Owens & Syedullah, 2016), an active community builder and land steward (Holistic Life Foundation, 2017), a joyful symbol of Black excellence (Love, 2019), or engaging in the work of resistance and reparations through forms of rest and pleasure (Nap Ministry, 2020). Though these notions seem to differ in expectations and outcomes as those found in neoliberal conceptions of mindfulness, mindfulness in different social movements and cultural contexts draws some of its cultural origins from Buddhist and Hindu traditions (Owens & Syedullah, 2016), while the motivations for practice differ as they are historically rooted in Black and queer political and social resistance movements. Mindfulness, as part of socially just change, builds upon an understanding of personal liberation and self-care as part of political liberation (Lorde & Rich, 1981; Owens

& Syedullah, 2016). In this orientation, there is a shift in power relations when communities of color and historically marginalized subjects purpose mindfulness and its practices toward the reclamation of self, historical and generational reconciliation, and social transformations that move away from and in response to impositions of power that have been oppressive and dominating.

Along those lines, the predominant adaptation of being mindful conflicts with an understanding held by some scholars and practitioners that "mindfulness is more about process than it is about product" (Berila, 2016). Scholars like Shirley and MacDonald (2016) frame a counter-movement to the standards and assessment imperatives of accountability discourse, as well as pressing issues of school inequity and student inequality, by way of a "quiet revolution" (p. 2). They have termed this revolution Mindful Teaching. The authors' note, "We are witnessing the gradual, iterative, painstaking emergence of new ideas and practices. These emphasize balance, well-being, sustainability and integrity are distilled into one overarching term: mindfulness" (p. 2). In this example, mindfulness takes shape as a "slowly emerging cultural evolution to a deeper form of educational inquiry" (p.2). Though Shirley & MacDonald (2016) say that "teachers perform when they feel they must comply with external conditions that they have not chosen" (p. 3), being a mindful teacher is not categorized as a performative identity in the way that alienated teaching or non-mindful teachers have been described. In their example, working against the larger global and national structures that regulate teaching and learning require the engagement into a contemplative and inquisitive process. Here, social learning is dependent on the overall cultivation strong relationships with self and community.

Across fields, many social justice scholars, contemplative activists, and progressive educators have also taken up the principles and practices of mindfulness toward the social transformation of local neighborhoods, youth communities, and public spaces (Holistic Life Foundation, 2017; Owens & Syedullah, 2016). This shift toward socially just, student-centered models of social emotional learning and student wellness has created a growing conscientization of SEL as "the life skills" students need "to navigate unjust realities" (Simmons, 2019, para 1). Though race is a central category in the framing of students within social transformation movements, mindful practice is drawn upon as part of a lineage and a process of "transcend[ing] dominant social norms and "deliver[ance] into collective freedom" (Owens & Syedullah, 2016, p. xi). In exploring this dynamic through a Foucauldian lens, the mindful subject can be seen as constituted out of a historical consciousness of oppression, and politically positioned toward resistance, resilience, and transcendence as a counter-movement.

In her book, *Mindful About Race*, King (2018) writes, "whether subtle or openly cruel, whether out of innocence or ignorance, the generational and often unconscious conditioning that has bread social and systemic norms of racial dominance, subordination, and separation, nuanced into every aspect of our day-to-day lives, is tightly sewn into the fabric of our society" (p. 2). A critical conversation around mindfulness, and the social constructs it shapes, brings King's notion of unconscious conditioning and Foucault's inquiry of power and subjectivity, to a broader discussion of social emotional learning and curricular implications for youth. Even amidst a growing movement of pedagogical shifts toward more just practices, SEL, like other subject areas such as history and literature where curricular critique has been more frequently applied, is an influential field requiring investigations from the perspective of the racial constructs, systemic failures, social ills, and injustices it relies upon to be legitimated as an expanding area of scholarship (Ball, 2012). Rather than refining the course toward more racially aware student-centered, and contextually driven pathways for student wellness, the work around mindfulness in education has further complicated how educators think and respond to issues of reform, and school change.

Power Relations in Mindfulness and SEL

> "Between the latest institution of rehabilitation, where one is taken to avoid prison, and the prison where one is sent after a definable offence, the difference is (and must be) scarcely perceptible." (Foucault, 1977, p. 302)

The theoretical discussions above raise questions about how mindfulness instruction and practices in the classroom shape the complex relationship between teachers and students within the authoritative structures of schooling. How do teachers navigate and make sense of the different economies of discourses that move in different directions around mindfulness and its purposes for students? How are these notions about students reconciled when several iterations of the mindful subject are seemingly *true* (Foucault, 2003)? Further, how are teachers who are committed to liberatory pedagogies such as anti-racist, culturally responsive, or abolitionist teaching responding to such multiple truths? These questions are complex and require research that seeks to understand what mindfulness means in schooling contexts, and what teachers desire it will do for ,or by way of, the teacher-student relationship.

As the formal curriculum is shaped by the economic needs of the national agenda, standardization has become a primary occupation of the predominant neoliberal paradigm of social emotional learning. With this focus, the enactment of curriculum (in institutional settings) positions the teacher and student within a cascade of institutional relations where there is a gaze of authority overlooking both teachers and students, thus evaluating and managing their interactions. An authority figure is implied yet not seen in the contours of these standards, reminding the curricular actors how systems of social control and discipline are enacted as hidden curriculum in schools. As students' self-regulation and self-awareness takes great emphasis in social-emotional learning discourse, the desire for socially competent subjects takes shape in the making of the mindful student as silent still, and compliant, more so than one who expresses their particular emotions or needs. This compliance is demanded of the mindful subject under threat of more oppressive forms of discipline. In kind, the teacher, as an institutional and curricular actor, is not directly punished or disciplined for their lack of control over the subject (Foucault, 1977). Rather, teachers are evaluated as successful and unsuccessful at their jobs based on the management of student behaviors through diffuse systems of accountability, which create increased surveillance around the teacher process. *Is this what mindfulness was intended to do?*

The Mindful Subject in the "I Can't Breathe" Era

The mindful subject takes multiple iterations depending on how or where you look. As noted, mindfulness can be considered an example of biopower that appears in the social field as something that both impacts subjects of power and also instantiates powerful subjects (Ball 2012). Iterations and images of the mindful subject in schools can be found throughout school websites, curricular materials, and social media with little effort today. In the images found in throughout such educational material, students are often seen practicing controlled *posture*, *breathing*, and *silence* as representative of the predominant disciplinary discourse ascribed from the social emotional learning industry (*Figure 1*). Yet, it is questionable if this iteration of mindfulness allows for political agency and power in the same ways that the emancipatory and liberatory pedagogues desire. In these differing discursive formations, mindfulness can be seen as one way that biopolitical power is exerted over students, while also functioning as a form of technology of the self (Foucault, 2003).

Therefore, our current political moment allows us to juxtapose images of the mindful subject as obedient with those of images of students in protest while donning the signs reading, "I Can't Breathe" (*Figure 2*). These protest signs reference some of the final words uttered by Eric Garner and George Floyd during the time of their executions at the hands of the police, and have taken on cultural and political significance as a rallying cry of the Black Lives Matter movement. With consideration for the power dynamics that confine the mindful subject to silence, stillness, and compliance, as well as mindfulness' connection to individuals who are labeled "at-risk," these images and their depictions of sanctioned and unsanctioned breathing illustrate problematic links that warrant further critical interpretations.

Figure 1, Kaiser Permanente, Thriving Schools, 2017

Figure 2, George Floyd Protest, 2020

As Foucault asserts:

> The body is also directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs. This political investment of the body is bound up, in accordance with complex reciprocal relations, with its economic use; it is largely a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination… (1977, p. 26).

Along these lines, mindfulness is continuously encircled by a larger politics of breath, body, and voice for today's students, particularly those whose bodies are impacted

by over-policing and mistreated through historical marginalization, and whose school sites function as extensions of carceral power and corrections complexes (Foucault, 1977, p. 302). Therefore, it becomes increasingly important to discern the varied interpretations and theories of mindfulness and the way that the mindful subject is discursively constructed, and to dismantle the ways in which the mindful subject operates as if oppression and marginalization is an unchangeable given.

Conclusion

Mindfulness connotes myriad meanings amongst educational discourse communities where it is (re)purposed and (re)employed. This article has followed mindfulness through varying iterations in the literature, while raising the need for more complex and qualitative investigations in educational research. In the spirit of Foucauldian analysis, one may arrive at the end of this inquiry with additional questions when considering how teachers stand in relational authority to students, yet in subservience to or under domination of larger political forces. It seems clearer that mindfulness, as a concept and as a form of disciplinary power, is a technology of power used to manage student bodies and futures under the guidance of scientific knowledge (Foucault, 2003). Mindfulness can also be conceptualized as a reaction to power, through a lean toward its cultural roots and attestations of non-secular knowledge. Yet it remains constituted as something codependent on power in order to manifest. Foucault reminds us how discourses generate, "A form of power that circulates in the social field and can attach to strategies of domination as well as those of resistance" (Diamond & Quinby, 1988, p. 185). In the discursive field of American schooling and beyond, we see examples of mindfulness that work in these differing ways and take stock of the ways that policy and curriculum work to shape the subject. In this manner, it can be argued that if "relations of power are dispersed and fragmented throughout the social field, so must resistance to power be" (p. 185). As disciplinary power remains diffuse according to Foucault, and scarcely detectable through the social technologies of mindfulness and social emotional learning, so appears the potential power of unattached or unfettered mindfulness. As such, the potential of mindfulness to potentially liberate remains controversial when linked to the complexities of the teacher-student relationship and movements for personal and social change, for whom and to what end.

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