

Book Review

Mindfulness in multicultural education: Critical race feminist perspectives

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The book 'Mindfulness in Multicultural Education: Empowering Learners Through Critical Race Feminist Perspectives' by Kathryn Esther McIntosh explores the intersection of mindfulness, social justice, and multicultural education. The author draws on various sources, from Eastern spiritual teachings to critical race feminism, to develop a pedagogical approach to mindfulness in multicultural education. In doing so, the author highlights key themes crucial to this approach. The book is structured around these themes, developed through findings from relevant literature, the author's experiences, and evidence from undergraduate students. There are many definitions for 'mindfulness' according to disciplines and contexts. However, McIntosh resonates with mindfulness as "keeping one's consciousness alive to the present reality" without judgment (p. 6).

According to McIntosh, mindfulness is central to engaging with the world and focusing on justice (p. 5). It involves putting compassion at the center while letting go of delusions, fears, and distractions to be clear and focused. McIntosh raises an example of Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Buddhist monk, who emphasizes integrating awareness through contemplation and engagement in the world, leading to deep learning called praxis (pp. 5-6). Mindfulness involves being present in the current embodied reality and experiencing authenticity, stability, liberation, and healing. It is not limited to the individual level but should also enliven and invigorate oneself in positive relationships

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with other human beings. Throughout the book, McIntosh argues that mindfulness can be a powerful tool for promoting social justice and equity, but only if it is approached in a way that considers the systemic and historical inequalities within society.

This book is divided into three parts and contains a total of fifteen chapters. Part I has one chapter that provides an overview of the book and discusses the intersection of mindfulness, multicultural education, and critical race feminism. Part II explores mindfulness's theoretical and epistemological foundations in multicultural education and includes four chapters. Chapter 2 focuses on mindfulness in context, Chapter 3 discusses critical race feminism, and Chapter 4 covers critical multicultural education, spirituality, and liberating pedagogy. The last chapter of this part, Chapter 5, presents empirical research findings based on the Social Justice and Mindfulness in Multicultural Education (SAMME) project over two years, detailing students' experiences practicing mindfulness in multicultural education. Surprisingly, Part III contains ten modules, not chapters, for instructing mindfulness in multicultural education, covering topics such as tapping into the breath, sitting with discomfort, grounding in the body, self-compassion practices, and mindful resilience and creativity. These 10 modules offer practical guidance for educators to incorporate mindfulness into their teaching practice to promote social justice and empower their students.

The intended audience for this book is likely scholars and educators in the field of social justice education. The book covers topics such as critical race theory, intersectionality, and multicultural education, typically studied in advanced courses at the university level. Using academic language and references to scholarly works further supports this assumption. The book can also be of interest to activists and practitioners working in social justice education, as it provides a framework for mindfulness and collective action. This book is not intended for the general public but rather for those with a background or interest in social justice education.

While reading the book, I find Chapter 1 to be a valuable resource for understanding the book's theoretical underpinnings and central themes. The chapter provides a clear definition and critical evaluation of mindfulness, critical race theory, critical race feminisms, and critical multicultural education.

This helps readers to comprehend the concepts explored throughout the book and their relevance to social justice education. The discussion on wholeness approaches to higher education is critical, as it highlights the significance of spirituality in social justice education, a component that is often overlooked. In addition, the chapter's focus on counter stories emphasizes the need to amplify marginalized students' voices, which is essential in promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education. Overall, Chapter 1 serves as an excellent introduction to the book and sets a strong foundation for the rest of the chapters.

In my assessment, the author of this book offers a unique perspective on academic writing that incorporates storytelling and emotion in the theoretical chapters (Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5). Chapter 2 of the book titled “Wholeness and the Implicate Order: Reimagining Education, Mindfulness, and Spirituality” explores mindfulness in different contexts, including its approaches, critiques, and ideologies. The author emphasizes the need for culturally responsive (Hutchison & McAlister-Shields, 2020) and trauma-sensitive practices when using mindfulness in education, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, where people of color have been disproportionately affected by the virus and systemic inequalities have been amplified. I found the author's mindfulness approaches to be thought-provoking as it raises questions about the effectiveness of mindfulness practices in addressing the mental health challenges caused by the pandemic. It invites educators and mental health practitioners to be cautious and thoughtful in their use of mindfulness practices during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

This book recognizes race as an ongoing concern. Chapter 3 of the book presents critical race feminisms and their potential for a reimagined pedagogy. The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section provides an overview of critical race feminism as a basis for reimagining pedagogy, highlighting how these perspectives can resist educational normative forces. The second section of the chapter is particularly noteworthy as it discusses 12 themes that intersect with mindfulness literature. These themes can be used to move towards a reimagined pedagogy based on critical race feminist perspectives. The themes discussed in the second section include breath, body, strength and resilience, emotions, self-inquiry, spirituality, creativity, nature, belonging and ancestors, compassion, joy, and storytelling. These themes can provide a useful

framework for educators and scholars to integrate critical race feminist perspectives into their pedagogical practices. However, it is important to note that the book's approach may not be universally accepted, and there may be differing opinions on the effectiveness of critical race feminist perspectives in education. Additionally, implementing these themes into pedagogical practices may require significant effort and resources, which may pose a challenge for some educators and institutions.

However, these themes are essential for developing a pedagogy that centers on the experiences and needs of marginalized groups. They provide a framework for educators to incorporate critical race-feminist perspectives into their teaching practices, promoting inclusivity and equity. With the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health and education, a pedagogy that centers on the experiences and needs of marginalized groups is crucial. Incorporating creativity, resilience, and storytelling into teaching practices can allow students to express their emotions and connect with others, promoting inclusivity and intercultural competency (Sandell & Tupy, 2015).

Chapter 4 of the book discusses critical multicultural education, spirituality in higher education, and key themes of liberating pedagogy to be elaborated in Part 3 of the book. The chapter emphasizes the importance of critical self-inquiry and studying systems of oppression in society and how traditional approaches to multicultural education can be decolonized by focusing on wholeness that includes spirituality in education. This can lead to a sense of belonging and holistic learning. The mindfulness in multicultural education modules offers a set of themes and questions that focus on integrating the body with content, interdisciplinary teachers and sources, humanizing practices, guided practice, and applications to professions and communities. These themes can benefit students by providing a more holistic and inclusive approach to learning that considers their individual and community needs. Additionally, incorporating spirituality in education can help students develop a sense of purpose and meaning, which may enhance their mental health and well-being.

However, there may be potential issues regarding spirituality in education, as it may clash with some students' and their families' beliefs and values. Additionally, the mindfulness modules may only be practical for some

students, as individual differences in learning styles and preferences may influence their engagement and outcomes. Therefore, it is vital for educators to be mindful of these potential issues and provide alternative approaches that are inclusive and respectful of diverse beliefs and backgrounds. There is a need for teachers to be aware of and responsive to the cultural backgrounds of their students and to create a learning environment that is inclusive, respectful, and supportive (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Chapter 5 discusses the results of the SAMME project over two years. The chapter details the experiences of five women of color who took the course and consented to participate in the study, using counter-story methodologies and critical race-gender theoretical perspectives. The chapter also discusses the perceptions of students who experienced mindfulness in multicultural education in its initial iterations and how the research-instructor team used this data to redesign and implement a new critical multicultural/social justice education course that wove mindfulness into its official curriculum. Below is the extract concerning gender or sexuality.

I have been able to be viewed as part of the dominant racial group but not dominant gender or sexuality, so where I align in terms of society's dominance has affected me. Personally, I have always been white-passing and haven't faced serious oppression because of my Asian heritage. However, like many women have mentioned in this discussion, gender expectations in classrooms are very common, and women are forced to deal with microaggressions from teachers and classmates. When I become a teacher, I hope to encourage my students to stray from expectations and prove that there are no "boy subjects. (p. 125)

Part III of this book consists of ten mindfulness modules used in multicultural education, developed based on the intersection of critical race feminist perspectives, mindfulness approaches, and critical multiculturalism.

- Module One: Introduction to Mindfulness: Tapping into the Breath with Inhales and Exhales
- Module Two: Sitting with Discomfort: Scanning the Body and Noticing
- Module Three: Integration and Trauma/Racial Trauma: Grounding in the Body

- Module Four: Strength and Resilience: Centering Practices
- Module Five: Belonging and Connecting to Spirit: Offering to Self and Ancestors
- Module Six: Interconnectedness: Connecting to Nature and the Body
- Module Seven: Stabilizing Attention and Directing Energy
- Module Eight: Teaching from the Heart: Self-Compassion Practices
- Module Nine: Empowerment and Agency: Mindful Joy and Freedom
- Module Ten: Liberatory Practices: Mindful Resilience and Creativity

In particular, the 10 modules offer teachers, schools, and policymakers a roadmap to support students' learning by integrating mindfulness into multicultural education. The modules aim to help students develop inner awareness, self-regulation, and compassion toward themselves and others. Each module describes mindfulness concepts, narratives, pause for mindfulness, mindfulness practice, and further resources. Module One introduces mindfulness practices to students, fostering focus and self-awareness as well as enhancing learning and well-being. Module Two helps students develop emotional resilience by acknowledging discomfort and observing bodily sensations, promoting self-regulation and emotional intelligence. Module Three prioritizes the body's grounding for students who have experienced trauma, aiding healing and creating a safe learning environment. Module Four strengthens students' resilience and inner stability through centering practices, enabling them to overcome challenges. Module Five cultivates a sense of belonging and compassion, fostering empathy and building a supportive classroom community. Module Six highlights the connection between nature and the body, promoting environmental consciousness and holistic well-being. Module Seven enhances attention and energy management skills, boosting focus and productivity. Module Eight encourages self-compassion, nurturing the emotional well-being of both students and educators. Module Nine empowers students by promoting joyful and mindful practices, fostering agency and a positive mindset. Finally, Module Ten emphasizes mindful resilience and creativity, empowering students to overcome obstacles and think innovatively.

These 10 modules help readers understand key concepts and engage in mindfulness practices. The author encourages learners to practice the modules repeatedly and to use the resources provided to further their learning.

Educators can use the modules as a starting point to develop their own mindfulness teaching practices in social justice education, adapting them to fit their context. The author urges educators to consider the questions and concepts presented in the modules and explore pedagogy that fits their students and themselves. The modules inspire inquiry into self, community, and society, leading to lifelong learning and pursuing a better and more equitable world. These modules' pedagogical implications include using mindfulness to develop critical consciousness, promote self-reflection, and support students' well-being in culturally responsive classrooms.

In terms of the implications for the future, integrating mindfulness practices in multicultural education can help students develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of diverse perspectives and experiences. By promoting self-awareness and compassion toward oneself and others, students can develop the skills to navigate complex social issues and work toward a more equitable society. Teachers, schools, and policymakers can support this by providing resources and training on mindfulness practices and integrating them into curricula and pedagogical practices.

Since the purpose of this book is to provide a unique approach to social justice education that incorporates spirituality, storytelling, and emotion, it contributes to the field by highlighting the importance of incorporating experiential narratives often dismissed in academia due to their emotive nature. It also emphasizes the need for a reimagined pedagogy based on critical race feminist perspectives that center on the experiences and needs of marginalized groups. The treatment of the subject matter is objective, but the author's perspective is clear throughout the book. No facts or evidence have been omitted, and the author uses a variety of data, including personal narratives, scholarly research, and critical analysis, to support their thesis statement. The same data could be interpreted differently, but the author's argument is well-supported. The writing style is clear and effective, and the book raises important issues and topics for discussion.

As a university teacher and teacher trainer, I would consider the implications of the SAMME project for my own teaching practices. The project highlights the potential benefits of incorporating mindfulness into a critical multicultural/social justice education course, particularly in enhancing

students' perceptions of their own learning and promoting a sense of belonging, a central theme in culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2002). I want to integrate mindfulness practices into my courses to create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. I also note the importance of using counter-story methodologies and critical race-gender theoretical perspectives in analyzing the experiences of students of color in mindfulness and multicultural education. By centering the voices and perspectives of marginalized students, we might better understand how mindfulness practices intersect with issues of race and gender in the classroom. However, I think it is also crucial to acknowledge the potential cultural appropriation of mindfulness practices and the need to approach the integration of mindfulness into multicultural education with sensitivity and caution, particularly in ensuring that mindfulness practices do not perpetuate power imbalances or reinforce dominant cultural norms in the classroom.

The implication for current and future education is that there is a need for a more inclusive, engaging, and equitable approach to learning. Incorporating storytelling, emotion, critical race feminism, and critical multicultural education can help promote resilience, belonging, and holistic learning. Mindfulness practices need to be trauma-sensitive and mindful of the intersectionality of race and trauma to provide a safe and supportive space for all students and individuals. Educators need to be cautious and thoughtful in using mindfulness practices during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. A reimaged pedagogy based on critical race feminist perspectives can help address the trauma and stress experienced by students during the pandemic by centering on the experiences of marginalized groups, promoting resilience, and fostering a sense of belonging (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Additionally, the emphasis on storytelling and creativity can provide a space for students to express their emotions and connect with others, which is particularly important in social isolation. The traditional approaches to multicultural education can be decolonized by focusing on wholeness that includes spirituality in education.

While McIntosh presents a generally positive perspective, some potential points can be considered. Firstly, the text may be seen as overly optimistic in its assessment of mindfulness pedagogy. It presents the content in a favorable light without offering much-nuanced analysis to provide a more balanced perspective by highlighting strengths and limitations. Secondly, the text could

be critiqued for its language, which may need to be more academic and jargon-heavy, making it difficult for readers from diverse backgrounds to engage with the material. The use of language that is inaccessible to some readers can limit the book's reach and impact, particularly for those who may need a background in the specific academic disciplines discussed. Thirdly, the book's focus on critical race theory, critical race feminisms, and critical multicultural education may limit its scope and applicability, as it may not address other important perspectives on social justice and education. Also, the book's focus on these theoretical frameworks may be seen as privileging certain perspectives and marginalizing others. Fourthly, the book may be critiqued for its emphasis on spirituality, which could be controversial or exclusionary for some readers.

While the book's exploration of spirituality in education may be valuable for some readers, it may not resonate with all. It could be seen as promoting a particular religious or spiritual agenda. This could be critiqued for its lack of attention to the intersectionality of identities, particularly in relation to race and gender (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). While the book does explore critical race feminisms, it may not fully address the complexity of intersecting identities and how they shape experiences of oppression and privilege. I think a more intersectional analysis could provide a more nuanced understanding of the issues addressed in the book.

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Conflict of interest

None.

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