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Publication Date

2017

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

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the Search for Student Well-Being

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Education

by

Sará King

2017

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

A Case Study of a Yoga and Meditation Intervention in an Urban School:

A Complex Web of Relationships and Resilience in

the Search for Student Well-Being

by

Sará King

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2017

Professor Thomas M. Philip, Co-Chair

Professor Mary Helen Immordino-Yang, Co-Chair

This dissertation is a case study of nine urban low-SES students of color who participated in a biopsychosocial classroom-based intervention called For Youth (FY). The rising prevalence of educational institutions in the U.S. utilizing interventions that combine yoga, meditation and/or mindfulness similar to FY, signals that these interventions need to be more closely evaluated and researched to determine their effectiveness. This study represents a compelling opportunity to take a closer look at what may be beneficial and/or problematic about yoga and meditation interventions for marginalized students, given the state of infancy of the research with regard to the effects of yoga and meditation practices on differentiated populations. Special attention is paid in this dissertation to discussing why researchers cannot disentangle the impact of the

relationships that students have with the adult stakeholders who implement these interventions, from the effect of the practices of yoga, meditation and/or mindfulness themselves. The findings of this dissertation demonstrate that researchers and educators need to put a significant effort towards learning more about the complexities of how student well-being should be defined in the literature, especially for marginalized students, what students need to support their emotional resilience, whether yoga and meditation practices are suitable for students K-12, and if so, the best ways to implement these interventions in different school contexts.

The dissertation of Sará King is approved.

Megan Loef Franke

Howard S. Adelman

Tyrone C. Howard

Thomas M. Philip, Committee Co-Chair

Mary Helen Immordino-Yang, Committee Co-Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2017

Dedicated to my wonderful husband Garrett King, and to my brilliant daughter Dahlia, whose love, patience, and sense of humor are the greatest source of my health and well-being.

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Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank my daughter Dahlia, the sunshine who came into my life almost a decade ago, who has brought everyone in our tribe an unlimited source of joy, laughter, love, an exquisite sense of creativity, and a passion for social justice that parallels no one I have ever met. One day, Dahlia, you are going to change the whole world for the better, without a single doubt! I would also like to thank my dear husband Garrett King for being the most exceptionally loving and supportive person I could ever wish to spend my life with, and for being the most inspiring father, philosopher, thinker, and clinician/scientist I have ever met. You are both my motivation and my sanctuary each and every day.

I would like to thank my dear friends Melissa, Scott and family, Dorothy and Boris, Saira and Ryan, Cat, Patrice, Lauren and Kevin, Malieka, May, Socorro, Melo and Tai, Kelly and Bennett, Carly and Dante and family, Trevor and Nikki, and Jazzy for being the very best *framily* members in the world. You all complete me/us. A *very* special thanks from the bottom of my heart goes to Natalie, who went to extraordinary lengths throughout her own Ph.D. program to be by my side every single step of the way. If it weren't for her endless compassion and extraordinary ability to listen with an open heart, and to empathize with me from start to finish, the Ph.D. program would have been a very different experience. I would also like to thank her husband Bo for being such an incredible person and loving support to Natalie; they both have so much to offer the world as scientists and human beings.

I would like to thank my committee members Megan Franke, Tyrone Howard, Howard Adelman, Thomas Philip and Mary Helen Immordino-Yang for believing in me and supporting me to do this work for the past 6 years, in spite of knowing that the subject of this research had never been conducted in the department before, and thus, the path of conducting the research would be very challenging for me. Without your constant direction, care, and guidance, this work would not exist. I appreciate all of the effort you have put into training me to be a scholar, and I will always feel immense gratitude for this. I also extend my thanks to Patricia Gandara for being very supportive to me during this research project.

All my love goes out to Paul and Ruth Von Blum for being my academic mentors from the beginning of my graduate school journey, but also for being like a family to us. The way in which you both live your lives as an expression of total dedication to social justice and the arts will always serve as a template for my own efforts in this life.

I would also like to acknowledge the support and love of my academic mentors Mark Sawyer and Victor Wolfenstein. Though they are no longer with us, their spirit of fierce and unwavering courage lives on in my work and the efforts of the many whose lives I am sure they positively affected. Additionally, I thank Laura Harris, Phyllis Jackson, Sidney Lemelle, and Carmen Fought, my undergraduate advisors at the Claremont Colleges without whom I never would have been inspired or supported to apply to U.C.L.A. in the first place. They were my first introduction to critical pedagogy, socio-linguistics, media studies, and black philosophical thought, for which I will always be indebted to them, as my exposure to these ideologies and disciplines forged the foundation of my thinking as a budding education philosopher during this Ph.D. program.

Vita

Sará King has worked as a researcher in the fields of social and biological sciences for over 16 years. She also has extensive experience as an educator, facilitator, and public speaker in university and K-12 classroom settings. She received a B.A. in Linguistics, and a B.A. in Black Studies from Pitzer College in 2005, with a minor in Spanish. Afterwards, she received a joint Masters in Afro-American Studies and Political Science from U.C.L.A., where she concentrated in Education. During her M.A. program, she studied the politics of the post-racial phenomenon and it's implications for pervasive educational inequalities.

She is particularly honored to have received mentorship from her co-advisors Dr. Thomas Philip (U.C.L.A.) and Dr. Mary Helen Immordino-Yang (U.S.C.) during her Ph.D. program in Education. Her dissertation is the very first (that she is aware of) in U.C.L.A.'s department of education to explore the impact of yoga and meditation interventions in urban schools. While at U.C.L.A., she has had the privilege to conduct qualitative mindfulness research for the David Geffen School of Medicine in their Cardiology Division on the doctor-patient relationship in heart transplant patients, as well as with the Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior on the impact of yoga and meditation school-based interventions on student stress and relationships.

She has been a graduate student researcher for the Teacher Education Program through U.C.L.A.'s department of Education on issues of student and teacher racial identity and classroom engagement, as well as a graduate teaching fellow for U.C.L.A.'s department of Communication Studies. She has also been the recipient of funding from the U.C. Regents to conduct her own research on student empathy, culturally relevant pedagogical practices, and the relationship between yoga, meditation and student emotional health. She is also interested in the capacity of mindfulness practices to affect creativity, learning, artistic processes, critical thinking, and the stress/coping response in marginalized and vulnerable populations.

As a former college athlete on the Pomona-Pitzer diving team, and life-long lover of movement and dance, Sará has always been fascinated with the relationship between wellness and embodied healing practices, and has been an avid practitioner of yoga and meditation for 12+ years. Her passion for studying contemplative practices and yoga led her to complete the 200 hr. Awakened Heart, Embodied Mind yoga teacher training at Exhale Yoga with Julian Walker and Hala Khouri. In this program she was trained to teach yoga in a trauma-sensitive way that incorporates an understanding of somatic therapy and neuroscience.

Following her 200 hr. yoga teacher training, Sará completed a 6-week training in mindfulness meditation at U.C.L.A. through their Mindful Awareness Research Center. Afterwards, she completed a 5-day Yoga, Purpose and Action Leadership Intensive with Off The Mat Into the World, where she deepened her understanding about the relationship between social justice practices and yoga. She has also completed a year long 500 hr. Advanced Mindfulness, Yoga, and Meditation Teacher training at Spirit Rock in Marin, CA. In total, she has completed 48 days of vipassana/silent meditation. She is dedicated to both maintaining a daily meditation and yoga

practice, as well as to going on regular silent meditation retreats and trainings as an integral part of deepening her personal practice and ability to live and love what she teaches.

Chapter 1:

Tensions, Debates, and Gaps in the Field of Yoga and Meditation Intervention Research in Urban Schools:

> *Just like emotionally traumatic events can tear apart the fabric of individual psyches and families, emotions can also act as powerful catalysts for healing. Like emotion, healing too is also gaining scientific respectability. We are starting to understand that healing is a process with its own characteristic phenomena and mechanisms, one that needs to be elucidated in its own right- and that emotions are at the core of it. (Fosha, Siegel, & Solomon, 2009, p. viii)*

Exploring Issues of Intergroup Empathy and Prejudice in Education:

When I first began the process of researching self-awareness, emotions and learning in the classroom, I utilized a conceptual framework that was heavily focused upon an analysis of empathy. I mention this because I would like to delineate for the reader how it is that I came to be interested in the study of mindfulness, for mindfulness was the last of several conceptual stepping stones that I took during the process of my research. Initially, I was broadly interested in relational, inter- and intrapersonal dynamics in the classroom and how schools could be agents in helping students of different backgrounds to develop relationships which would be supportive of their learning process. I was also aware that significant impediments exist at times to the generation of positive relational dynamics in and out of the classroom; interracial and multicultural dynamics in the U.S. have long reflected the embattled history of prejudice and institutionalized racism that continues to affect the health disparities and educational outcomes of communities of color negatively to this day (Baratz & Baratz, 1970; Jones, 2002).

Since Brown v. Board of education in 1954, court ordered busing of students of color from urban to suburban areas during the desegregation of schools had created a situation in which students were being increasingly challenged to forge connections with those from different racial, ethnic and class-based peer groups than they were previously historically

exposed to (Crain, 1977, p. 142). Research on interracial interactions and friendships shows that the context of the organizational practices of schools such as curriculum assignment, tracking, and extracurricular activities has an immense influence upon the quality of these relational dynamics and whether or not interracial tensions are experienced (Khmelkov & Hallinan, 1999).

Tellingly, in Banks et al. (2001) longitudinal study on the importance of implementing multicultural education in schools in the U.S., the authors designed a list of "essential principles" by which diversity in education could be improved on the level of policy and practice. Part of their expert recommendation suggested that curriculums need to make the space to teach about stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination so that the pain and suffering these create can be shared, in order to generate empathy and a sense of shared experience. I reasoned that surely the creation of spaces of empathy and introspection could be part of furthering a positive path in healing these complex relational dynamics, though by no means did I think of these concepts as a panacea for the current ills of education. I wanted to begin by formulating a theory around empathy and self-awareness that I could utilize in the future design of a classroom study.

I started by looking into the research on inter-group empathy and prejudice. Researchers have suggested that prejudice or negative attitudes towards social groups is a means of desensitizing oneself and keeping emotional and psychological distance between one's own racial/ethnic group and those considered to be others (Stephan & Finlay, 1999; Allport, 1954). Furthermore, prejudice has been linked to dehumanization. Zembylas (2007) has spoken of dehumanization as "the process by which people are viewed as less than human…accompanied by a wide range of negative emotions towards them…The major function of empathy is imagining the particular perspective of the Other…finding commonality through identification with the 'enemy' is perhaps the most difficult and yet profound step in the rehumanization of the

Other" (p. 208). Zembylas' (2007) description of the potentiality of empathy in realigning the perspectives of seemingly disparate groups of people seemed to hold great promise in the realm of education. Empathy is clearly key in creating positive intergroup relations, especially in education where students from different cultural backgrounds can benefit from learning about one another, not just in terms of their commonalities, but also in terms of how to be truly accepting of the value of difference (Batson & Ahmad, 2009; Bekerman, 2007). I began to conceive of empathy as a bridge between self and other, an aspect of intelligence that has been sadly overlooked as a prospective means of engaging the student in a critical thought process intended to develop connections, and a sense agency in the self and the community.

The connection I made regarding empathy as a form of intelligence was made clear by research conducted by Rosalyn Arnold (2012), who has spoken of, "'Empathic Intelligence'…[as] a theoretical concept underpinned by an argument that effective pedagogy happens when an educator is able to create a dynamic between thinking and feeling, in a context which is perceived as caring" (p. 12). She continues by stating that,"[It] is a complex concept which attempts to articulate those aspects of intersubjective (dynamics between subjects) and intrasubjective (dynamics experienced within subjects) engagements which influence learning" (Arnold, 2012, p. 12). Years ago, I thought that my contribution to education literature would be an elaboration of Arnold's (2012) idea of empathic intelligence that called for pedagogies based in this conceptual framework. I claimed that what Arnold's (2012) concept was pointing towards was actually the definition of the pedagogy of empathy, or, the primary focus of the praxis of an educator whose goal is to foster empathic intelligence. In my research at that time, I theorized that the pedagogy of empathy could be thought of as the teachers' ability to demonstrate compassion when connecting the students' critical thinking process to the emotional aspect of

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thought conception. I proposed that this process might occur in conjunction with the teachers'

own use of his/her empathic intelligence to help the student relate to the curriculum.

I further conceptualized the pedagogy of empathy as a daily act of teaching that

emphasizes the connection between the personal internal-cognitive domain of the individual and

the collective external-social domain of the classroom and its participants. As such, I theorized

that the pedagogy of empathy might help educators formulate how the students' perception of

their emotional connection to the teacher, or how the teacher cares for and relates to them, affects

the process of learning. Additionally, I proposed that the interplay between self-perception and

interpersonal relationships, ascribed status, or, the position in a social hierarchy that one is

placed in according to what they have inherited (Linton, 1945) and external other-based

perceptions affect the development of ideas of self and performance in the classroom. I

elaborated by suggesting that the pedagogy of empathy allows for the creation of a linkage

between both the imaginative and literal dimensions of the mind, or understanding the difference

between what we think we see and feel (the subjective) and comparing/contrasting this viewpoint

with the objective reality of circumstances. Arnold (2012) confirms the reflexivity of this form

of learning when she posits that, "It is not just *what* is learned, but how experience is shaped by

feelings and reflective thought which determines the nature of learning" (p. 54). Therefore, I

envisioned that learning empathically is to see how what we feel affects what we think and how

we see the world, while envisioning the ways in which others feel/see/think about the world.

Being able to understand two differing viewpoints simultaneously can ultimately motivate

altruistic behavior (Cheon et al., 2011).

When envisioning the eradication of prejudice and racism, for instance, I considered

studies in biology on the subject of intergroup empathy that have suggested that those in racial

majority groups tend to have a neurological empathic response when presented with those who share their same features, and a greater fear based response (amygdala) when presented with faces of the racial minority group, which seems to demonstrate a physiological response to a particular form of socialization (Chiao & Mathur, 2010; Cosmides, Tooby, & Kurzban, 2003). These findings are complicated by studies that confirm that though empathic response to pain is decreased in majority racial groups towards minorities, (Avenanti, Sirigu, & Aglioti, 2010) the creation of space within school curriculums to teach majority racial groups with regularity about the experience of prejudice and its impact on the lives of minority groups increases empathic response (Finlay & Stephan, 2000). These findings seemed to point to the potential necessity of anti-racist education or other social justice-based pedagogical practices as complimentary components of a possible pedagogy of empathy, in that training and education that targets the discovery of implicit bias within groups and individuals through anti-racist education can make people more mindful of how they treat the other as a potential threat (Thompson, 1997), while a pedagogy of empathy could support the development of relationships between groups by establishing our mutual need for interconnectedness, compassion, and feelings of belonging which are so crucial for healthy social bonding in that they can, for instance, act as buffers for the daily experience of stress and bring about greater social cohesion (Choenarom et al., 2005; Cosley et al., 2010).

I further posited that the crux of the pedagogy of empathy lies in the teachers' desire to foster a sense of urgency in the student with regard to their introspective abilities. For without introspection, there can be no real knowledge of self; philosophers have long valued the skill of introspection as observation of the self in the combined form of perceptual awareness, bodily sensations, and attendant thought awareness as comprising a unified awareness of self (Myers,

1986). To demonstrate this point, Mair et al. (2012) have made these observations about low-SES neighborhoods, *though admittedly their analysis is limited to the view of that of an outsider and does not engage the fullness of the complexities of living in poverty*, when they state, " The opportunities literature posits that concentrated poverty, segregation and joblessness change individuals' attitudes and behaviors. Specifically, the concentration of economic and social problems in an area can lower hope about future opportunities for those who live in the area" (p. 155). Though I would agree that the experience of poverty can challenge any students' ability to feel hopeful about their economic viability, I have written a section in this dissertation entitled *"Deficit Framing and the Well-Being Needs of Students of Color" that draws on literature from assets-oriented frameworks, in order to demonstrate how the perspective of outsider scholars researching in low-SES communities tends to frame the experience of students purely from the standpoint of what they are lacking, rather than emphasizing the kinds of community-level supports that show the manner in which many of these students are able to be emotionally and resource resilient, and persevere nonetheless.*

However, as researchers in urban schools, we must ask ourselves how feelings of hopelessness and social disconnection can possibly arise and factor negatively into scholastic performance, and thus, it is important to know how students are coping with these situations and if they are being provided with support by their school to do so. Claude Steele (1998) continues to iterate a similar point with regard to the experience of the marginalized and their *disidentification* from schooling which he defines as a, "reconceptualization of the self and of one's values so as to remove the domain [performance] as a self identity, as a basis of self evaluation" (p. 55). According to the aforementioned author's analysis, I posited that if the urban public school environment can engender feelings of emotional disassociation from the domain of

performance and hence, is inhibiting to the academic success of socioeconomically, gendered or racially marginalized students, then it may be that many of these students are being presented with great and unjust challenges in their ability to feel empowered and motivated to think critically about their positionality in the world within the climate of the current academic system. This lack of agency could in turn promote a cognitive dissonance between themselves and those in society who they perceive as having a chance to become democratic agents for positive change.

Emotions, Self-Awareness, and Mindfulness-Based Practices: Implications for Education

Assertions made in the literature on intergroup empathy that the emotional component to empathy was integral to the creation of positive relational dynamics, led me to question what sorts of interventions had already been designed to help foster positive emotional dynamics in schools. The main point that I took away from that phase of my research was that emotions are central to the process of learning. Research in social and affective neuroscience conducted by Immordino-Yang and Faeth (2010) has indicated that, "emotional thought is the platform for learning, memory, decision making, and creativity, both in social and nonsocial contexts…" (p. 72) and that, "If [students] feel no connection to the knowledge they learn in school, then the academic content will seem emotionally meaningless to them. Even if they manage to regurgitate factual information, it will not influence their decisions and behavior" (p. 76). Educators and researchers alike are interested in finding ways of motivating students to want to learn, but in ways that go beyond rote memorization; it is important that the information learned has an impact on students' ability to engage thoughtfully and critically in the world beyond the classroom context. This is one of the ways in which schooling can support the development of

egalitarian minded, democratic citizens as a result of a curriculum that supports critical thinking skills (Banks et al., 2001).

The study of the relationship between cognition and emotion and how they support one another in the classroom clearly has a lot to offer educators who want to make a lasting impact on their students. The ability to get students to emotionally engage with the teacher is primarily a means of generating critical thinking skills by getting students to be attentive and invested in the curriculum; students must also be able to emotionally cope when faced with failure (Klem & Connell, 2004). However, a curriculum grounded in critical thinking is still apt to be lost on some students if they are too stressed out emotionally to be able to pull upon the cognitive resources they need to harness and focus their attention. One of the greatest impediments to students' performance in the classroom is stress (Beilock, 2011) which is experienced in emotional and embodied ways. Students in K-12 schools, and particular those in high school find themselves under immense pressure to perform in the personal, academic and family domains, which are some of their main sources of stress (Anda et al., 2000). The ability to adapt to stressful situations and utilize a variety of coping mechanisms to get through times of stress are skills that are not distributed equally amongst youth; age, socioeconomic status, and cultural background all factor into the levels of stress experienced and the types of coping mechanism employed (Oláh, 1995; Williams & McGillicuddy-De Lisi, 1999). In addition, it must be noted that for students of color, personal identification with being a person of color, and the experience of racism or race-related stress decreases subjective well-being and increases the experience of stress above and beyond that of everyday stressors not linked to racism; this assessment of race-related stress is particularly advanced for those who identify as African-American, but remains

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salient for the experience of Asian-American and Latino students (Sellers et al., 2003; Utsey et al., 2002).

If the research community in psychology, neuroscience and education has begun to emphasize the importance of the role of emotions in learning, and we know from a common sense standpoint that avoiding stressors in life altogether is practically impossible, then it makes sense that coping mechanisms for stress would also be of interest to researchers in education and health care (Cano et al., 2006). By coping, I am referring to those strategies that people use to protect themselves from the psychological harm associated with different social experiences, by eliminating, controlling, or distancing themselves from a problematic situation (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). In particular, given the previously stated evidence that race, cultural background, socio-economic status and age factor into the severity of the experience of stress, stress becomes an issue of social justice, where some groups are being unjustly subjected to exacerbated levels of stress due to their social status. In my opinion, we cannot begin to properly address the achievement and opportunity gaps in education (Ladson-Billings, 2006) if students' stress levels are inequitably distributed, in addition to the stratified social and economic resources such as class size, teacher education and curriculum that the disadvantaged find themselves having to manage (Betts, Reuben, & Danenberg, 2000).

Academic stress, as a corollary to life stress, and emotion regulation in urban, low-SES schools is then also an issue of social justice in education and should be studied as such. The ability to emotionally regulate one's emotions is directly related to the action of coping with stress (Gross, 1998). It is the primary means by which we are able to still function cognitively when we are presented with challenges whose emotional context might make us too reactive to respond without excessive rumination (Leen-Feldner et al., 2004) or a potential lack of creativity

(Hoffmann & Russ, 2012) which is important in finding innovative means of dealing with difficult life situations. As such, the research literature on emotion regulation eventually led me to look into which interventions are available that directly stated that teaching emotion regulation and coping skills were their aim; towards that end, I chose to work with the FY. Studying the students who participated in this intervention provided me with a way of studying the transformation of interpersonal relationships, rather than strictly empathy, as had been the original locus of my research. In the following section, I will describe the biopsychosocial intervention that I chose to focus on in this study, and how this dissertation research fits into current policy trends in supporting school-based interventions and socio-emotional learning initiatives.

Research Question:

In the case of For Youth, an education non-profit partnering with a school with the aim of impacting student well-being and stress, how was the intervention implemented at the school, and how did students experience the intervention on an individual/subjective and interpersonal/intersubjective basis?

The Significance of the Research:

The significance of my study lies in part in the novelty of the qualitative approach to the study of biopsychosocial interventions, which to my knowledge has not been conducted before. The results of the data analysis will be my contribution to the education literature for researchers and educators who are interested in the benefits, complexities and challenges of implementing biopsychosocial, mindfulness-based, and/or YMP based programs that can potentially increase self-awareness, decrease stress, and teach coping mechanisms in urban schools; the literature on

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yoga and meditation interventions being in it's infancy and in great need of being expanded upon. My approach to the research will seek to understand the psychosocial aspects of students' biopsychosocial experience of self in relation to their well-being, in order to give educators a sense for what aspects of yoga and meditation interventions could be helpful for their specific student populations, and in order to discover what could be improved or tailored to fit the needs of diverse school populations.

The interview data gathered will be used to assess whether the educational experience being offered by the FY intervention changed students' subjective experience of self and/or their relationships, and will delineate how these changes occurred. This will be useful for generating new theory for educators and researchers interested in the importance of interpersonal relationships for students and their conception of self, as they relate to both academic performance and the quality of their lived experience. Additionally, the manner in which student's experience well-being and/or stress, and how these are navigated with the skills and strategies taught by FY, will be useful for teachers and researchers who want new ways to empower their students to find resilience through building creativity and self awareness, which will ultimately support their learning processes. My data will also demonstrate the limits of yoga and meditation interventions to mitigate stress and to holistically address the very structural inequalities that give rise to stress, and will speak to the importance of not standardizing YMP-based intervention practices for all schools and all students in a manner that may harm more vulnerable student populations. I will provide suggestions for changes in both pedagogy and implementation for yoga and meditation interventions that will provide a theoretical contribution towards how to create both more student-centered and social justice oriented critical yoga and meditation interventions.

Purpose Statement:

This research project is a case study that deals with a set of 9 semi-structured interviews, all of 7th grade students involved in FY. FY employs the biopsychosocial techniques of yoga, meditation, and pranayama (breath work) in their intervention model. These biopsychosocial techniques are then combined with socio-emotional learning (or SEL) curricular techniques with the goal of positively shifting school climate. Other goals of the FY intervention include improving student well-being by strengthening coping skills, promoting academic achievement, and ameliorating the effects of stress. The term biopsychosocial is used deliberately to refer to the interconnected, embodied relationship between the biological, psychological and social functions of the human experience; each one has an affect upon the other and especially upon how we learn. For the purposes of this study, I shall focus upon the individual and interpersonal relationships and experiences that were at least partially mediated by the practices of yoga and mediation, and how these psychosocial aspects of student experience shifted within the context of the FY intervention. Though there are multitudinous other aspects of the biopsychosocial human experience that could be focused upon, for the sake of time and room constraints within this dissertation, these have been selected at the components of the FY intervention which students' had the most to reflect about. This study is not intended to be comprehensive in nature; I cannot draw any conclusions about how yoga, meditation or pranayama work in general, or whether or not the FY intervention would be beneficial for all school contexts and student populations, but, it is intended to be a part of a growing conversation about the importance of student subjective experience as being both embodied and cognitive; well-being as it relates to emotions and learning; stress as it relates to coping; and the effectiveness of biopsychosocial

school based interventions that currently exist which could potentially have an affect on student performance and health and thus, are worthy of examination.

This qualitative study focuses mainly on an analysis of how students experienced FY as a biopsychosocial intervention and how or whether their experience was reflective of FY's stated goal of improving well-being. *The underlying assumption here is that student well-being represents a shift away from the experience of stress.* Ultimately, the goals of FY are related to recent school reform efforts that seek to get away from school practices that were, coming out of the era of NCLB, overly focused on academic performance and accountability and neglected to address the emotional and psychological health needs of students that are integral to a holistic education. Academic achievement, in this study, is a corollary of student well-being in that well-being is a crucial component of student health and success, as has been demonstrated through national and global research based and educational efforts to "teach the whole child", as first championed by the preeminent educational researcher Nell Noddings, and led by the Whole Child Initiative and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD). Though quantitative data on academic achievement were not gathered in the context of this particular study, student self report on their perception of their own academic progress will be factored into the analysis of the effectiveness of FY in bringing about well-being.

Students' experience of the FY intervention, as spoken in their own words, have a lot to tell researchers and educators about the potential impact of bringing biopsychosocial interventions into urban schools with regard to well-being, as well as which aspects of FY program implementation could possibly be replicated for other schools, and what, if anything, needs to be changed to suit the incredibly diverse, well-being centered needs of the U.S. student population. The term biopsychosocial is used by FY to describe their particular type of

intervention because of their integrated approach to improving student well-being by simultaneously targeting aspects of the biological, psychological and social domains of student experience. The only empirical study conducted on the FY program to date, which studied the impact of the program on student impulsivity, was conducted by Ghahremani et al. (2013) and described FY in similar terminology; the intervention was languaged by the author as biopsychosocial in scope and nature. However, since these domains are incredibly broad in the scope of the human experiences which they encompass, this study narrowed down its focus to documenting the following shifts in student experience with regard to well-being and stress: the way that student's conceptualized their individual and subjective perception of the FY intervention, and how their interpersonal or intersubjective relationships were impacted by their participation in the intervention. This analysis will benefit researchers and educators in the two following ways: by giving a sense for the psychosocial scope of the impact of FY on students; and by indicating how, in future interdisciplinary studies in education and neuroscience, emotions, feelings, and relationships with self are seminal to understanding how stress impacts learning

To further substantiate this argument, Burkitt (2002) conducted research where he made an interesting connection between complex emotions, and relationships when he stated that:

> when Anglo-Saxons think of the emotions they tend to think in terms of quantity or substance rather than about *patterns of relationship.* We tend to believe that our anger, envy, or grief is like an object contained inside us that we can reflect upon and work with. And yet when one thinks about it more analytically, emotions only have sense and meaning in the context of relations to other bodies, both human and non-human…our emotions are an active response to a relational context: to other bodies with which we are related and that respond to our actions in particular ways. (pp. 151-152)

In addition, Richard Lazarus (2006), a prominent psychologist, when putting forth his own theory of emotion described them as:

> cognitive, motivational, and relational because, as I see it, these processes lie at the heart of all our lives. The term relational means that emotions always depend on what transpires between a person and the environment, which most importantly consists of other persons. Another essential premise is that we are constantly appraising—that is, imputing relational meaning to our ongoing and changing relationships with others and the physical environment, and it is this meaning that shapes and defines our emotions. (pp. 9-10)

`   Both of the aforementioned authors made explicit connections between the fundamentally relational aspect of the experience of emotions. This is not to say that emotions cannot be experienced when one is by oneself, but it does suggest that the feeling narratives that arise in the mind, whether by oneself or with others, are socially mediated and contextualized. As such, we can see how the biopsychosocial self (Immordino-Yang and Goetlib, 2016) further demonstrates the salience of research on feelings; students' shifting feeling construction and their interpersonal relationships have great potential to inform future research on emotions and learning and add to the growing literature in Mind, Brain and Education Science. Lastly, the analysis of the psychosocial aspect of the biopsychosocial student experience in this study will be partly phenomenological in scope and nature. Meaning, it will speak to the ways in which students *perceived* their experience, or, their subjective experience, rather than describing the experience itself. This research will contribute to educators and researchers understanding of how biological events such as emotions and stress are related to the psychological underpinnings of individual identity, motivation, and prosocial skill building/problem solving, all of which in turn affect social, relational events in multi-layered, reciprocal feedback loops of learning about the self.

Problem Statement:

To speak in generalized terms; one of the problems facing schools today is that teachers and administrators want students to flourish academically, but they also know that academic success must be supported by paying attention to other crucial aspects of student experience, such as their physical and emotional health and well-being, both of which are crucial for academic success. It simply does not make sense to prioritize student academic success at the expense of their well-being. Therefore, I argue that successful school reform efforts must pay equal attention to the embodied reality of the student, which is involved in very complex social and emotional navigation on a given school day, and whose physical health reflects the impact of the schooling environment upon their emotional and mental health, as well as they must attend to the mind of the student, the tool that students use to cognitively connect to the curriculum.

Navigating the complexity of urban school reform places researchers in education in an interesting position; they as well as educators must be sensitive to multiple embodied modalities of the learning and education process (Evans, Davies, & Rich, 2009); such as how students emotionally engage with curricula, or how they feel about their relationships with peers and teachers, because we now know that learning is both a cognitive *and* emotional process (Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007a). Researchers have only recently begun to explore how emotions and their physiological (Sylwester, 1994; Pekrun et al., 2002) and cultural manifestations (Immordino-Yang, 2013) have an enormous impact on how information is processed and retained in the classroom (Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2003). They must also be aware that the intentions, involvement and desires of parents and students (Fan, 2001; Finn, 1972; Hill & Taylor, 2004), teachers and administrators can vary greatly in terms of educational outcomes (Briggs & Wohlstetter, 2003), and thus, those who have the power to determine what

is taught and how have a certain degree of power and control over those who are the recipients of education (Burbules, 1986).

Researchers must also attempt to unravel the myriad theoretical and pedagogical complexities that inform the ways in which educators create classroom atmospheres that promote and sustain student flourishing. The act of flourishing, in this dissertation, is an integral part of establishing a social and emotional climate that promotes well-being. Ultimately, both researchers in education and teachers have the end goal of contributing to student success, socially, cognitively, and emotionally. If students are not flourishing on any of these levels, then it is the schooling system that has failed them, not the other way around. Student flourishing has recently been defined through a social justice lens as including opportunities for self-assessment, critical questioning, practicing democracy, social action and criteria for adjudication (Grant, 2012), which situates the dialogue on student flourishing in a place that goes beyond the requirements of high stakes testing.

Whether or not students are universally being offered the opportunity to flourish in this manner is highly questionable. I argue that the addition of yoga and mindfulness-based programs (hereafter referred to as YMP) and interventions that are designed to bring out about student well-being could represent genuine efforts within the schooling system to attend to students' ability to flourish, but since the research on these interventions is in their infancy, there is a lot that remains to be explored in terms of whether these practices are appropriate for the incredibly diverse population of students in the U.S. There are several issues that researchers and educators need to contend with. The disproportionate distribution of these programs (as in, most schools in the U.S. do not have access to YMP programs) and the wide variety of styles of implementation of YMP within schools where these programs have been established, means that

practitioners of yoga and meditation and school leadership have not been able to reach a consensus together on what the best YMP practices are for students. Additionally, this consensus on best practices needs to be centered upon the specific needs of each schooling environment. This means that we as researchers cannot say conclusively that the programs that exist are of equal value to all schools and have equal positive impact for students.

In addition, the current high stakes testing atmosphere in education has been shown to have limiting effects on curricular content such that, "[it] is narrowed to tested subjects, subject area knowledge is fragmented into test-related pieces, and teachers increase the use of teacher-centered practices" (Au, 2007, p. 258) which could have the effect of disconnecting students from other aspects of schooling such as the enhancement of their overall self-knowledge and their opportunities to exercise civic engagement. If classrooms are beginning to move away from student-centered pedagogical approaches, which have been shown to increase students active engagement with curriculum and enhance their critical thinking skills (Brush & Saye, 2000), then interventions who purport to be student centered and enhancing of student flourishing such as those that use YMP might be able to address a particular need in education, once the research has been able to move forward further in determining what aspect of YMP are beneficial to differentiated student populations. I want to stress, however that student centered, or active learning practices, when combined with YMP interventions are not, however, representative of a solution to issues in education.

The question in this dissertation research remained whether or not FY significantly transforms classroom culture to one that is more student-centered; though as an intervention it has been added to a pre-existing classroom context, we do not know the extent to which students' needs and voices possibly drive the implementation of the intervention. In other words,

we need to bridge the gap between what we know about existing school reform efforts that are student-centered that have been successful, and what we know about YMP-based interventions that have been successful, and combine this information together so that there is a conversation being had between these two camps.

Clearly, no social psychological intervention is a magic bullet (Yeager & Walton, 2011), and therefore they too will come up against issues in implementation much the same as teachers do in the classroom. This is where the researchers' role can be helpful in terms of the investigation of potential difficulties interventionists may run into, in order to recommend how best to move forward in ways that are aligned with what we have come to know are some of the best classroom practices. As such, researchers' enter into a level of analytic complexity that is very challenging when considering how traditionally clinical interventions designed to affect psychological and physiological processes like emotion regulation, are also potentially mediated by the structures and social dynamics of power which may or may not be beneficial towards student flourishing in a non-clinical setting. There are two additional issues that present themselves here. One issue is that these studies have all to my knowledge been quantitative in their methodological approach, which gives us valuable, yet limited dimensions of information. No matter the rigor or validity of a particular survey instrument, when considering how important the quality of student experience is in these interventions, especially given how little agency students have in the intervention's selection and implementation, qualitative interview data may be one means of gaining access to a more authentic representation of student experience. With regard to school-based interventions that are more similar to FY, currently, there are no studies which have been conducted on school-based interventions that utilize both yoga *and* pranayama as a part of their intervention model; furthermore, the fact that FY

incorporates SEL curriculum as a part of their intervention structure makes the stories of the

students who participated all the more unique to study. Serwacki and Cook-Cottone (2012)

conducted a systematic review of the literature on yoga-based interventions in schools and found

that only 12 articles currently exist. Out of these articles, all of them were quantitative in their

methodological approach; the author's found that statistical ambiguity, a lack of randomization,

small sample sizes and limited detail regarding the intervention left them without the ability to

provide definitive recommendations other than that methodological rigor and increased

understanding of the mechanisms for success are greatly needed in order to further develop the

literature.

Since Serwacki and Cook-Cottone's (2012) meta-analysis, one additional meta-analysis

of mindfulness-based interventions (whose programs incorporate meditation and yoga) in

schools has been conducted by (C. Zenner, Herrnleben-Kurz, & Walach, 2014); they found that

13 studies had been published in peer reviewed journals out of 24 studies which had been

conducted in total, and that whereas these studies indicated promise for mindfulness programs

increasing cognitive performance and decreasing stress, the heterogeneity of practices among the

interventions made it very difficult to draw out any sort of generalizations about effect. These

studies were also quantitative in their methodology. My study will add to the literature by deeply

exploring students' experience of one intervention, adding to the qualitative literature on

biopsychosocial interventions in education and contributing to the broader literature in the field

of the philosophy of education that speaks to the role of relationships, the body, and emotional

engagement in education and their relevance to the educative process therein. Beyond this, the

emphasis on analyzing students' subjective and intersubjective relational experiences as evidence

will explore whether or not these type of interventions are what students really need to flourish,

or whether other interventions that provide positive relationships with adult mentors could possibly be just as effective. The following section will explore the issue of student well-being by discussing its importance in the scope of education reform efforts, as well as I will map out the trajectory of the increasing availability of these programs and how they are differentiated in their approach to decreasing student stress.

Student Well-Being and Stress: Trends in School-Based Interventions

Well-Being: At The Heart Of Our Students' Greatest Needs

The literature describing the concept of well-being, for the most part, can be found in the disciplinary traditions of medicine and positive psychology. The fundamental difference between these two traditions would be that medicine focuses their description and analysis of well-being in relation to well-being, and psychologists focus their description of well-being as a phenomenon that is primarily subjective in its nature and experience. In medicine, well-being is defined in relation to an individual's overall physical health, with a lack of well-being linked to the manifestation of physical diseases, chronic illnesses, morbidity and mortality rates, and the health behaviors which either contribute to, or are preventative of these (Courtenay, 2000). The biological and psychological experience of well-being has already been established as being inextricably linked, with most studies of physical well-being including measures of psychological (subjective) well-being, being that one always influences the other (Emmons, 1991; McAuley & Rudolph, 1995; Scully et al., 1998; Fox, 1999a, 1999a, 1999b; Biddle et al., 2003; Netz et al., 2005; Biddle & Mutrie, 2007).

In other words, according to both the medical and psychological bodies of literature, being physically and mentally healthy is synonymous with having well-being, whereas

exhibiting illnesses or pathologies that have a physical or mental manifestation, are indicative of a lack of well-being. The psychology literature has had little agreement on how exactly to operationalize or define psychological, or, subjective well-being (SWB), but notable initial studies have measured indicators of well-being such as self acceptance; positive relations with others; autonomy; environmental mastery; purpose in life; and personal growth (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995); notably, the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS), incorporates measurements of happiness, joy and contentment in their assessment of mental-well-being along with the previously mentioned elements of subjective-well-being (Maheswaran et al., 2012; Taggart et al., 2013). Recent literature of (SWB) placed a lot of emphasis on pleasant and/or lack of pleasant affect, and life satisfaction as indicators of overall quality of life (Diener, 2000), and included the concept of Homeostatically Protected Mood (HPMood) which combined measurements of contentment, happiness, and arousal to define the parameters of subjective well-being, linking the consistent experience of stress or adversity to diminished HPMood and the resultant experience of clinical depression. To further complicate this picture, research in social psychology has indicated that negative social interactions can have a particularly profound influence on both physical and mental health (Keyes, 1998; Dovidio et al., 2006); and more importantly for this study, the experience of poverty and racial discrimination, for people of color, are highlighted in the literature as being linked to significant decreases in over-all well-being, physical and psychological (Branscombe et al., 1999; Schmitt et al., 2014) for adults as well as for adolescents (Seaton & Yip, 2009; Huynh & Fuligni, 2010).

Towards that point, recently, in 2016, the American Psychological Association produced a report called "Stress in America: The Impact of Discrimination"[i], in which the experience of discrimination in America for people of color was studied in terms of its connection to extreme

health disparities between this population and that of whites. The stress that is endemic to living in poverty, or, 'stressful environments" was connected to overall lack of access to the resources that support well-being. The authors also linked the impact of discrimination to poor eating habits in particular, one of many responses to the experience of living with stress. Rather than pathologizing people of color for their responses to living with and surviving discrimination, this report calls for a need for all levels of society to support the well-being of its most vulnerable and historically oppressed citizens, concluding that *emotional* support might be one of the best means of mitigating the impact of stress.

The previously presented literature on well-being begs the question, what institutional supports are low-SES communities supposed to turn in order to get the supplementary social, emotional and environmental support they need in order to foster their well-being? Research from the fields of psychology and social work has shown that information support systems for low-SES youth and their families is effective in countering the impact of the distress than can accompany the experience of poverty. These include, for example, membership to a local church (Walls & Zarit, 1991); having membership in community support groups (Thompson & Peebles-Wilkins, 1992; Minnes, Perry, & Weiss, 2015); and having the support of family and friends (Levine et al., 2015). However, clearly the prevalence of stress in populations of low-SES youth indicates that they could benefit from greater institutional support.

The institution of public schooling has, unfortunately, traditionally had to attempt to shoulder many of the needs of low-SES children when other federally supported institutions and programs have fallen short; take for example, title 1 schools adoption of free breakfast and lunch programs in order to help offset issues with malnourished and underfed children (Bartfeld & Ahn, 2011), and the burden school psychologists and counselors face in their attempts to support

the mental health crisis in schools (Adelman & Taylor, 1998, 1999; Lambros et al., 2016). The latest trend in policy reform with regard to supporting student well-being has been that schools have been asked to go beyond meeting accountability standards that stipulate that certain cognitive demands be met, to offering non-cognitive services to students as a part of their overall curriculum. This has been mandated within the language of the Every Student Succeeds Act. Towards this effort, CASEL, or, the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning, has been a staunch advocate for the implementation of evidence-based socio-emotional learning based interventions and curriculums nationwide. The emotion-based component of socio-emotional learning represents and echoes the recognition of the Stress In America report referenced above, in which the importance of emotional support is acknowledged as being an integral facet of overall well-being.

I want to point out that students' emotions and well-being are at the heart of the positive relationships, communication skills, and behaviors that both ESSA and CASEL hope to foster through the dissemination of evidence-based school interventions, the auspices under which YMP interventions fall. In the following section, I will briefly explore current research on how emotions themselves are described by affective neuroscientists, in order to connect them to the realities that low-SES students face as they navigate poverty in the course of their schooling, and then make clear that not all stress is the same. I will also introduce a discourse that examines why well-being, stress, and emotions are highly relevant domains within the study of urban education, and make suggestions for how YMP interventions might be uniquely poised to help bring about school climates that are supportive of emotional health for students in this particular population.

The Importance of Emotional Integration:

> *How do we regulate emotion in a healthy way? How do we foster environments conducive to its flourishing and reciprocity, the stuff of communication and resonance, of optimal health and effectiveness of action, of resilience, and of caring relationships? How do we do so without becoming flooded and overwhelmed? How can we use emotion to repair and heal, to grow and learn? How do we use emotion to mend ruptures caused by emotion? (Fosha, Siegel, & Solomon, 2009, pp. viii)*

As I previously stated in the section of this dissertation titled "How I Came To This Work", I have always been fascinated with the social and emotional interactions that produce a feeling of connection and belonging within us as individuals; as in, how we are able feel connected to a simultaneously firm yet ever evolving sense of self and place within the world, and what makes us feel connected with others in the context of relationships. Earlier on in my graduate career, I began studying empathy because it is a form of emotional connection that is necessary to developing complex understandings of the emotional states of others, but eventually, I came to the conclusion that emotions in and of themselves were a fundamental place to begin an exploration of what kinds of conditions give rise to a state of belonging and well-being. I was also fascinated with learning about how well-being, in spite of the stress which is constant in our lives, can be continually renewed through the conscious engagement with bodily processes (like breathe-control, or, pranayama meditation) that have the potential to manifest in psychological states and social interactions that reflect a state of well-being, or, physical and emotional health. It was not, I began to find, as easy as I thought it would be to find a clear-cut definition of what exactly emotions are. On one hand, this makes sense; emotions can be incredibly ephemeral or long in their duration, varying greatly in their intensity, and as we now know due to the latest advances in affective neuroscience research, are culturally meditated in their manifestation (Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007b; Chiao & Immordino-Yang, 2013; Immordino-Yang, 2013); the sheer complexity of the ways in which emotion can be described,

and what psychological and biological processes emotion is related to defies both the scope of this dissertation and my knowledge as an educator.

I have, however, found a number of descriptions of emotion that currently undergird my understanding of emotion from the point of view of an educator, from the field of affective neuroscience. Immordino-Yang (2016) has stated that, "Emotions, and the more biologically primitive drives that undergird them, such as hunger and sex, are action programs that have evolved as extensions of survival mechanisms. Put simply, emotions have evolved to keep us alive" (pp. 18). This definition fits in well with my discussion of the social and psychological motivations behind our attempts at survival in the introduction of this dissertation, and illustrates the embodied nature of the ways we feel and how this extends into the ways we behave.

Importantly, it should be pointed out that emotions are individual *and* shared experiences which, in terms of their relevance to education, have a reflexive effect upon the development of critical thinking skills (Halpern, 1998; Jensen, 1998), self-awareness (Denton, 2006; Lewis, 2000; Reeves, 2005), agency, and empowerment (Shor, 1992).The ability to emotionally regulate one's emotions is also directly related to the action of coping with stress (Gross, 1998). It is the primary means by which we are able to still function cognitively when we are presented with challenges whose emotional context might make us too reactive to respond without excessive rumination (Leen-Feldner et al., 2004) or a potential lack of creativity (Hoffmann & Russ, 2012) which is important in finding innovative means of dealing with difficult life situations. One could say that in fact, the ability to regulate one's emotions is an essential aspect of the ability to produce an experience of self that is integrated, in that all of the parts of the whole self are expressive of a state of well-being. In other words, the environment, social relationships, psychology, and the biological experience of the individual can all contribute to a state of well-

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being in that these experiences can either communicate and express well-being through their collective support of one another, or they can signal varying degrees of challenge, stress and/or pathology as a reflection of the disintegration of the individual and the society which produced and supported his/her development.

Dan Siegel (2016), the neurobiologist who pioneered the field of interpersonal neurobiology, has recently defined emotion in terms of its relationship to the concept of integration. He states,

> The linguistic term we use for the linkage of differentiated parts into a functional whole is the word integration… What I am suggesting isn't even that emotion leads to integration. What I am suggesting is that emotion *is* integration. In this way, for example, an emotional experience is one that shifts our state of integration. Emotional development promotes integration. Emotional well-being reveals an integrated individual. We can increase integration in cases of emotionally meaningful events and when we feel emotionally well. Similarly, we can decrease integration when we are emotionally distraught or emotionally unwell. (pp. 149-50)

Why would the idea of integration be important to create for students? Integration as emotion reflects a state of overall health and homeostasis on all levels of an individual. Having access to our emotions represents a mind and body that is ready and equipped to use its available skills and strategies to successfully and creatively navigate a very complex, ever changing world filled with an astonishing variety of others, all of whom have something to be learned from. A person with emotional health is someone whose thoughts, feelings, memories, sensations, and actions reflect well-being into the world and so creates spaces optimal for safe emotional engagement around them. The ability to maintain emotional homeostasis is fundamental to the make up of a person who is able to learn from past experiences, relationships, and environments, whether adverse or pleasant, and brings elements of these lessons into the present moment, to forge a future in which the fullness of their potentiality as a human being has the possibility of arriving.

I would also argue that describing individuals with stress as experiencing decreases in integration, as (Siegel, 2016) worded it above, is another way of characterizing the felt experience of depression, anxiety, and trauma that millions of adults and children find themselves navigating every day. This argument is not placing blame on the individual, but it is taking a critical stance of a society and its social institutions in low-SES communities which suffer under the toll of poverty and do not have the formal institutional resources they need to support the emotional well-being of families. This places a lot of the responsibility of creating spaces for healing and well-being on informal community-level support systems. To elaborate on this point, the following section will explore the relationship between emotions, stress, and learning, and demonstrate the manner in which a students' socio-economic status can have an impact on their ability to experience an integrated self, and indeed, learn to move continually towards a state of well-being.

Why are Well-Being, Stress, and Emotion Relevant Issues in Education?:

Educators and administrators in K-12 schools are increasingly more aware of the negative impact of stress, as well as the importance of supporting the well-being of their students, as integral aspects of supporting student learning. This is in part because of the recent emphasis in educational policy on supporting the social and emotional learning processes behind student learning, in combination with more traditional, cognitively-based learning approaches. For instance, on a federal level, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), a national policy that was established in 2015, contained new provisions specifically in support of socio-emotional learning SEL. According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning CASEL, the

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nation's leader in the development, integration, and dissemination of evidence-based SEL

practices in schools nationwide, (ESSA) now allows school districts to include one non-

academic indicator of school success into their system of measuring accountability, which

includes any programs or interventions that successfully tackle issues such as student

engagement and/or climate. In addition, in 2016, the Aspen Institute launched the National

Commission on Social, Emotional and Academic Development in collaboration with CASEL.

Together, they have the goal of "…fully integrat[ing] social, emotional, and academic

development in school design and culture as well as teaching and learning."[1] This current trend

in education reform suggests that the issue of student well-being, as an aspect of the overall

social and emotional health of our nation's students, is of top priority to our nation's educators,

administrators, and parents, as well as it also indicates that sources of stress for students, and

their ability to *cope* with the inevitable stresses of schooling, are of equal relevance to the current

goals of education given the relationship between stress and well-being.

Catherine Cook-Cottone (2016), in her seminal book *Mindfulness and Yoga in Schools: A*

Guide for Teacher and Practitioners states that "Together, the ASCD (the Association for

Supervision and Curriculum Development) and the CDC created the Whole School, Whole

Community, and Whole Child (WSCC) model, calling for a greater alignment, integration, and

collaboration between education and health, to improve each child's cognitive, physical, social

and emotional development (ASCD, 2014, p. 6; quote in author's text) The WSCC model is an

ecological approach directed at the whole school, acknowledging that the school draws it

resources from the community in efforts to service the whole child" (p. 26). Schools have begun

to enhance and support the development of well-being in students not only because of how these

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[1]   Quote cited from: http://www.casel.org/national-commission-on-social-emotional-and-academic-

efforts can positively affect their academic performance, but also because of the improvement of their overall quality of life (Bond et al., 2004; Reynolds et al., 2007; Ruini et al., 2009).

Because of their consistently positively reported impact on student well-being, the utilization of *biopsychosocia*l interventions, meaning interventions that have an impact on the biological, psychological and social dimensions of student experience, are on the rise, such as contemplative education (Jennings, 2008; Shapiro et al., 2011), mindfulness, and yoga-based education programs (K. A. Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010). These interventions utilize physiological coping mechanisms such as yoga, meditation and pranayama, hereafter termed YMP, to enhance student well-being. The intervention For Youth, who utilized both YMP and SEL curriculum techniques, was the subject of this study due to the unique opportunity it presented to study a school-based biopsychosocial intervention. Due to the fact that research on these kinds of interventions is relatively new, there is much more to be learned about what kinds of biopsychosocial interventions work better for low-SES students than their more privileged peers.

One of my primary concerns in this area of research, however, that I think needs to be addressed, is the existence of a pattern of deficit framing of urban students that pertains to how some researchers in the academic community define why these students need well-being, or rather, what threatens their well-being. Meaning, the behaviors and health issues that stem from a lack of well-being are often times located within the students themselves as the source of what is problematic, without acknowledging the systemic inequalities and structural realities that have historically impeded the sustained efforts of low-SES communities to leverage their resources towards greater well-being. The following section will explore this issue as it relates to students of color in particular, in an effort to reframe deficit narratives and demonstrate the complexities

of how low-SES student demonstrate their empowerment and agency in spite of their marginalization.

Deficit Framing, Student Empowerment, and the Well-Being Needs of Marginalized Youth:

There also exists brilliant counter-narratives to the story of "at-risk" students in this nation; stories of resilience and creativity (Garmezy, 1993; Rouse, 1998; Seccombe, 2002) in the face of extraordinary adversity, which is another nuanced facet of the experience of the students whom I interviewed that I wish to highlight later on in my analysis of the data. The fact remains however that the situation that low-SES youth find themselves in is one where the possibility of suffering and the consequences of their behavior, if perceived as being in opposition to the unjust institutions in which their lives are embedded, are far worse than their more privileged peers. Thus, I am of the opinion that the term "at-risk", or at the very least, being "put-at-risk" is actually at least partly descriptive of their inequitable social position due to the impediment that structural violence can impose on their lives, and points to the suffering that poses a very real threat to their ability to have a decent quality of life and well-being.

I also propose that the perception of being empowered, of having some sort of control over oneself despite one's environment being totally out of one's control, is an important part of discovering what it means to be an agent capable of transforming one's life world. This quality of being agentive is important for student's today not only because of the increasing complexity of living in a globalized world, but also due to the heavily problematic nature of the challenges of solving today's social, environmental and economic crises. Our global society needs students who feel equipped with the creativity and critical thinking skills needed to improve the lives of

their community members and to be able to imagine new ways of living that are more compatible with a safe and sustainable world. I also take the stance that part of the problems currently being faced in urban, low-SES schools in the U.S. is that their environments are not always supportive of the development of agency and empowerment. Take for instance this nuanced statement by Alice McIntyre (2000), from her dissertation which dealt with the relationship between violence, school and community as pertains to the low-SES students she studied within a YPAR (Youth Participatory Action Research) framework:

> The world that the young people described in this dissertation inhabit is a world of despair and hope, chaos and silence, violence and peace, struggle and possibility – a world in which they spend a good deal of time surviving violence while negotiating the psychosocial, economic, raced, gendered, classed and sociocultural boundaries that inform and influence their lives. (p. 72)

McIntyre's (2000) sensitivity to the realities that low-SES students have to negotiate, which is multi-dimensional in its intersectionality, and are physiological, social and emotional in nature, demonstrates with piercing clarity the paradoxical nature of the experience of adversity. As the counternarratives mentioned above suggest, the experience of adversity is intertwined with positivity and opportunity; and due to the multi-dimensional nature of the experience of living in poverty, a biopsychosocial intervention approach may be a very positive step forward in the creation of spaces and contexts in which student may begin to thrive and experience well-being despite their inequitable situation. In continuation, Mari Ruti (2006) uses a philosophical analysis to relate the suffering that is experienced by those who have been marginalized to the universal human desire for empowerment, and the toll that is taken when poverty presents structural and social impediments to the ability to self actualize:

> The factors that cause disorientation and despair in the lives of all of us are greatly exacerbated by economic or sociocultural marginalization. As a result, the existential poise that represents a largely

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inaccessible ideal for even the most privileged may seem even more unsustainable for those compelled to expend their psychic energies in devising and enacting strategems of social survival. Oppression attacks the subjects' confidence in its ability to navigate the pressures of everyday existence.

Perhaps even more fundamentally, it implies that a socially devalued subject could not possibly ever live a meaningful life. It in fact tells such a subject that the very definition of a meaningful life is something that resides outside of it, in the dominant external world. As a result, paying closer attention to questions of potentiality and self-actualization does not displace our commitment to social justice, but merely modifies our definition of social justice by highlighting the ways in which existential empowerment is accessible to some groups but consistently eludes the grasp of others. (p. 40)

To continue to illustrate part of the problem this study confronts, I will cite the preeminent educational philosopher Paulo Freire who wrote eloquently in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1993, 2000) about the consequences of a scholastic system that emphasizes the 'banking' or depositing of knowledge in the supposedly passive minds of students. According to Freire (1993), this pedagogical technique is fundamentally teacher centered, and thus, problematic. Student centered teaching instead facilitates the students' active, agentive discovery of knowledge, as could organically unfold if the student and teacher recognize freedom as a distinctly attainable possibility. He states, "Freedom is not an ideal located outside of man; nor is it an idea which becomes myth. It is rather the indispensible condition for the quest for human completion" (p. 47). I take from this statement that freedom is a feeling, a state of mind which arises from within one's being when one feels truly unfettered and simultaneously wholly supported in the endeavor of self-expression. This feeling can then be translated into actions that are a potential embodied expression of freedom.

There are, of course, structural elements in the U.S. such as poverty, institutionalized racism, and the criminalization of people of color which could preclude the development of this

spark of a feeling in a schooling environment and obstruct access to knowledge (Darling-Hammond, 1995; Jencks, 1980; Lopez, Gurin, & Nagda, 1998; Lucas, 2001), hence preventing the germination of freedom as the fruit of one's actions. Several questions of a philosophical nature arise from this current line of thinking with regard to the potentialities of education and it's relationship with human development, and I raise them to bring the reader further into contact with the reflexive thought process that undergirds the open process of discovery that this research project represents. Is there some universally felt state that defines freedom for us as humans? What is the feeling of completion for a human being that Freire speaks of? Is the quest for knowledge that authentically represents the self in it's inextricable connection to others central to feeling *free*, as in the agentive creation and participation in and of community, and if so, how can this type of knowledge be brought about in our current schooling environment unless there are supportive pedagogies that bring this feeling about *within the body*? I pose these questions not because I believe I have the answers to them, but because they are important for the reader to consider as part of the scaffolds of the evolution of my conceptualization of empowerment and how it relates to education. Freire's (1970) prescient recognition that most schools present to students an environment which fosters the opposite of that which gives rise to freedom and agency, led him to conceptualize the nature of the teacher-student relationship in a Hegelian educational philosophical framework; the Teacher-Subject is more often than not the *owner* of knowledge and the student-object is the one upon whom knowledge is passively bestowed.

The uneven power dynamic which this aforementioned student-teacher relationship conveys can also connect Freire's educational philosophy to what I have identified as one of the current issues in the implementation of socio-emotional (hereafter referred to as SEL) and

mindfulness-based education in schools. Freire (1970) identified the interests of the oppressor as wanting to fundamentally shift "...the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppresses them...the truth is that the oppressed are not "marginals," are not people living "outside" society. They have always been "inside"- inside the structure that made them "beings for others" (pg. 74). The reason why I selected the previous quote is because part of what the aforementioned programs are designed to do is to shift the consciousness of students; to become more self aware, responsible, self-regulated, conscientious, and so on as I have previously mentioned. On the surface, these are all admirable qualities to be attained by students, and, beyond that, in human beings without question. As such, I do not mean to imply that educators and administrators who are interested in bringing SEL and/or mindfulness-based education programs into their schools, in the hopes of bringing about some of the remarkably positive outcomes which have been demonstrated in the research in education and psychology into their student population are simply oppressors – this type of reductionism of an entire population is both unnecessary and flippant. However, the criticism which arises from the previous Freirian analysis stems from the idea that whereas students engaged in the aforementioned interventions are being asked to engage in activities which transform their individual, inner consciousness, and perhaps the collective school climate, there still remains for them the reality of the communities in which their schools are ensconced, which may or may not receive the benefits of the intervention, which is problematic.

To reiterate, in the case of low-SES students in particular, urban students continue to face situations of social injustice and inequality (Diamond & Spillane, 2004; Entwisle & others, 1997; Lipman, 2004), and it remains unclear that SEL and mindfulness based programs are equipped to help solve these. The question also remains whether or not all of these outcomes could represent

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on the other hand attempts by those with power to shift the consciousness of students to one which is more docile, and malleable towards the end goal of being more receptive to the passive reception of knowledge which the banking system of education still presents (Frankenstein, 1983; Freire, 1970), especially given the ubiquitous high-stakes testing atmosphere that currently dominates in U.S. learning environments, which is the opposite of empowerment. As hegemonic as this may sound, I would like to introduce the assertions made by the critical educators Ira Shor (1992) who stated that, "No curriculum can be neutral. All forms of education are political because they can enable or inhibit the questioning habits of students, thus developing or disabling their critical relation to knowledge, schooling, and society" (pp. 12-13). Shor (1992) also says that, "Many students do not like the knowledge, process, or roles set out for them in class. In reaction, they drop out or withdraw into passivity or silence in the classroom. Some become self-educated; some sabotage the curriculum by misbehaving" (p. 14). My research also represents an opportunity to examine whether or not SEL and mindfulness-based interventions aid in the development of the critical thinking skills, which agency as the scaffolding of empowerment supports.

On one hand, there is a way of framing students' abilities to apply the cognitive skills needed to critically assess their lived experience in the world that insists that the stress levels they experience impair their cognitive and thus, learning abilities (de Kloet, Oitzl, & Joëls, 1999). On other hand, scholars such as bell hooks have put forth new pedagogical frameworks such as engaged pedagogy (hooks, 2014), which reframes the chronic boredom and disinterest, or, lack of emotional engagement with classroom materials as resultant of discriminatory practices and policies in education practice, and wider society. Her transgressive vision of education as a practice of freedom maintains that students, despite the stressors that systemic

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inequality disproportionately places on students of color and from low-SES backgrounds, can develop a critical, reflective stance that is nuanced precisely *because of* the disparities they face (Florence, 1998). FY, however, is not an intervention designed with a vision of a critical approach to pedagogy that impacts students' emotional engagement in the classroom.

According to FY, students need to be taught coping skills that are necessary to know how to regulate their emotions in stressful situations, which are unfortunately plentiful. According to what I have learned about their intervention philosophy, they view emotion regulation as: a) being able to properly identify what emotions are being had and b) being able to understand how certain emotions affect decision making in positive or negative ways which can have an impact on one's future and c) having the tools and self control to be empowered to be able to process emotions honestly in the moment such that they can be understood in their complexity and contribute to a corpus of *knowledge of self and others,* an activity which I posit is both epistemological and can be grounded in the critical thinking process.

Despite the potential benefits of teaching students coping and emotion regulation skills, it remains that one of my biggest criticisms of biopsychosocial interventions that there are a multitude of other intervention strategies, as well as more community-based strategies that use the resources that schools and communities already have in spite of their lower socio-economic status. Intervention approaches that utilize the combination of school and community-based resources will be framed in the discussion section of this dissertation in terms of how they might be complimentary to biopsychosocial intervention efforts, particularly in urban communities.

Research Methodology and Design

Interview Protocol:

The interviews were conducted at the school site with 9 students in a room that was selected for the most privacy possible. Each student who participated signed a consent form, along with their parent or guardian releasing the information to me, the interviewer, so long as any personal identifying information is omitted from the dissertation. Each interview was approximately between 45 and 60 minutes per student. (The interview protocol can be found in the appendix of this dissertation in section 2.) The interview questions were designed in order to cover as many aspects of students' biopsychosocial experience of the FY program as possible, including these categories (in order of type of questions asked):

General questions about student experience:
- What students perceive the FY program to be about (in general)
- Descriptions of the FY teaching/intervention staff
- Memorable experiences in the FY program
- How students recall learning the different kinds of pranayama/yoga/meditation practices including which practices were the most helpful

Coping with stress:
- What their understanding of emotion regulation is
- What the yoga and meditation practices felt like in their bodies
- How students normally react to stress (prior to being in the FY program)
- How they perceive themselves as coping with stress since being in the FY program

FY program and student participation:
- How often they practiced
- Whether there were times when they didn't want to practice
- Peer participation and what affect this had on the interviewee's own participation

FY effect on student civic life:
- Whether YMP practices inspired community engagement

Closing general questions:
  -Whether FY helped students' with goal setting
  -Whether FY helped students' to better relate to their friends
  -Whether FY helped students' better relate to their parents
  -Whether FY helped students' better relate to their teachers
  -Student recommendations for changes to the FY program (implementation)

Researcher Position:

None of the students whom I interviewed had been introduced to me prior to the interviews, but they were all aware of my presence at the school site (they had all seen me observing in their classrooms before). My personal experience over the past decade with YMP (including having taken a yoga and meditation teacher training over the course of nearly 500 hours) gives me a philosophical and practice-based understanding of YMP that contextualizes students' responses about how they experienced the YMP aspects of FY program implementation.

Description of the Research Site:

Ramses Middle School[2] is located in a small, urban town in New Jersey. The student body is composed of just over 1,000 students, grades 7-8; Ramses serves all of the 7th and 8th grade students in the county. 62% of the students come from immigrant families from the Caribbean and various countries in Central America, thus, many of them are first generation in the United States and ESL learners; 29.5% are African-American; 6% are white. 95% of the students who attend are at or below the poverty line, and thus qualify for free and reduced price lunch, which is partially indicative of their SES. It is also important to note that there is a

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[2]   The name of the school, its location and all individuals involved in the research have been changed for the protection of their identities.

significant population of homeless students due to hurricane Sandy, which hit the East Coast in 2012, although I have not been provided with exact numbers. FY was carefully selected by the principal out of all of the available SEL-based programs in New York because of the principal's belief in the comprehensiveness of the program. The FY intervention was chosen by the principal of Ramses Middle School, who shall be called Jackie, without school stakeholder consent, because she had the financial support of the superintendent who allocated district funds for FY to operate at the school; they were both members of FY's parent spiritual organization, which feels like a potential conflict of interest. Ramses was experiencing high rates of behavioral issues, infractions, and poor academic performance, especially on standardized tests in the past three years. In terms of behavioral issues, teachers had to navigate increasing student defiance/opposition and a lack of attentiveness in the classroom. There is also an issue with the violence that student at Ramses face, both within the school and in their community. According to the teachers I spoke with at Ramses, there is very active gang population in the area, and mostly male students are heavily recruited into these gangs starting in the 6th grade. Thus, student safety is an issue that has been identified by the administration as needing to be addressed with immediacy.

Jackie had been very clear in articulating the kind of school climate the staff and administration want to develop. She and I had a conversation at the beginning of the school year where I marked in my field notes that she indicated that they are determined to offer intellectually stimulating curriculum that is in alignment with newly introduced Common Core standards, but they are also concerned about developing students in the arena of socio-emotional learning. Though the majority of the students attending Ramses come from a low-SES background, Jackie did not believe that this is the main deterrent of student academic success.

She believed that in order to address both the opportunity and achievement gaps, that socio-emotional learning, which includes being taught self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making (as defined by CASEL) is a necessity in order to give students the skills they need to be present with one another, forge positive relationships, and be driven to succeed in the classroom.

In other words, emotional health is being placed as a priority in the overall mission of the school. In addition to the skills that CASEL has defined as being seminal to a socio-emotional curriculum, Jackie, herself a daily meditator, believed that FY takes their SEL program a step further than others that are available nationally to schools, in that they do not just impose their SEL curriculum upon students by only relating the curricular information to them on a cognitive level, and expecting to see change in behavior and academic performance. FY also incorporated teaching daily breathing exercises in each homeroom classroom first thing in the morning, teaches mindfulness practices of yoga, meditation and breath work which has been integrated into the health curriculum (physiological tools that allow students to directly experience change within themselves), and provided one-on-one counseling services with students who are particularly struggling so that they can receive individual attention to help with all areas of performance and with social issues.

Type of Data Collected:

Qualitative data were gathered from semi-structured interviews with three groups of students who had been selected by the FY staff according to their perceived level of buy-in; in addition, a small but significant amount of field notes were taken while on school site. These groups of students who were interviewed were selected by FY staff because they perceived them

as having 100% buy-in, or, students who participated and showed improvement; students with neutral buy-in, or, students who participated but didn't show improvement; and oppositional students, or, students who regularly refused to participate on a regular basis, and therefore had no buy-in. The issue of buy-in was selected as an indicator of willing participation and motivation to apply the techniques and lessons learned in the intervention by the students. The issue of buy-in was important to the FY staff, as they wished to understand how to get those students who had not bought in, or who had only partially bought in, to become more actively engaged with the program, and also to be able to understand how to better tailor the program to the needs of this specific student population in future iterations of the program. The qualitative interview data will provide a basis upon which to examine how students' embodied psychosocial experience changed for them throughout the course of the intervention. This is admittedly a very limited sample of students and these interviews will be treated as case studies, in that they cannot be said to be descriptive of the entire student population who participated in FY.

Chapter Two: The Story of the *For Youth* Program

FY or For Youth is a school-based intervention that is being conducted through a larger non-profit organization called the International Association for Healing Practices[3] in elementary, middle and high schools across the U.S. They state that they have two main goals in support of education: to teach low-SES youth how to be empowered through a curriculum that emphasizes personal responsibility, leadership and good decision making, and to teach emotion-regulation techniques and/or coping mechanisms that help deal with stress via a curriculum based in SEL, or socio-emotional learning, and the techniques of yoga, meditation, and breath work (pranayama in Sanskrit) or YMP which have their roots in both the Buddhist tradition of mindfulness and meditation and the Hindu yogic tradition (which also includes it's own forms of meditation). Mindfulness, though it is not taught explicitly by FY, is an integral trait of what is cultivated through the experience of yoga and meditation, and should therefore be considered to be a part of what students are being taught.

Much has been written on the effect of SEL programs in schools (Denham & Brown, 2010; Elias, 2003; Elias et al., 2003; Hromek & Roffey, 2009; Roeser et al., 2000; Zins, 2004; Zins et al., 2007) (with a notable lack of consensus on which pedagogical methods are most suitable); a program combining SEL and mindfulness-based practices together makes for a whole new set of research challenges. Though SEL in schools has a rich history of research behind it in education (Elias, 2003; Jarvelä et al., 2000; Walberg & Anderson, 1968), and mindfulness-based programs, though a relatively new transplant to education have a decade long history of rigorous research from clinical psychology (Baer, 2003; Brown & Ryan, 2003a; Childs, 2011; Kabat-

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[3] Name changed for the purposes of anonymity

Zinn, 2003) and medicine (Connelly, 1999; Santorelli, 2010), there has been no research done to date on a school-based intervention that utilizes the breadth of techniques that FY incorporates, including pranayama, meditation, yoga, and SEL, which makes it a unique opportunity for the study of biopsychosocial interventions in schools.

Researchers have put an operational definition of mindfulness forward in clinical psychology. It includes self-regulation of attention to immediate experience, the ability to bring oneself back to present moment-experiences after a period of mind-wandering, and focused attention and awareness of thoughts, feelings and sensation; secondly, mindfulness is said to involve an attitude of curiosity and acceptance towards one's present moment experience, despite it's apparent desirability or lack thereof (Hayes & Feldman, 2004) all of which can be cultivated through yoga and meditation. It has been correlated with increases in well- being (Brown & Ryan, 2003b) increased positive affect and immune response, (Davidson et al., 2003) as well as decreases in anxiety (Hofmann, Sawyer, Witt, & Oh, 2010) and increases patients' abilities to attenuate the experience of depression via the mediation of emotion regulation skills (Desrosiers, Vine, Klemanski, & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2013). The pranayama practices that were taught by FY, it must be noted, were developed by the spiritual leader and founder of the non-profit International Association for Healing Practices, and are thus unique to his particular teachings, though they do not diverge from traditional YMP practices taught around the world. How FY conceptualizes empowerment (as it is central to their name) has been articulated to me by FY staff as giving students the ability to develop greater self awareness of their emotions through the use of the breathe in meditation and movement (yoga) during, in particular, situations of stress, which effects their decision making processes, behavior, and ability to communicate effectively.

Theoretically, the ability to pause in a stressful moment and use the skills and socio-emotional strategies they have been taught will lead to better choices on their part due to the self control they are being taught. Critics of this view might interpret this intervention's emphasis on self control in schooling as an attempt to stymy students' self expression, or as not providing a context within which students have the freedom to examine and articulate the injustice of poverty around them. Furthermore, some might argue that these practices, though they may for a certain population of students calm the mind and body, might be acting as a means of creating docility and conformity in a low-SES environment that has been shaped by structural violence and deserves to be questioned and opposed by students. To these hypothetical criticisms, I would add that the picture of self control and it's usefulness in education is far more complex than to simply claim it could cause the stifling of students' critical consciousness.

The reality of low-SES students of color in particular is that they find themselves living in communities that have been socially and politically stratified by historical structures of violence, set in place by centuries of institutionalized racism and exacerbated by racial profiling and militarized policing practices, which means that they will be far less protected from danger than students in more affluent communities. However, these are not harsh realities which urban students are the passive recipients of. Many of these students are actively and vigorously protesting and standing up against their unfair treatment in society, which, unfortunately places them in even greater danger of physical and psychological harm at the hands of the police officers who have been put in charge of aggressively controlling acts of social protest, a reality which dramatically threatens their well-being. Shawn Ginwright (2010) both exemplified the situation that marginalized youth in the U.S. face, as well he clearly stipulated the necessity of radical healing practices for their empowerment when he stated,

Dramatic educational, economic, political and cultural transformations in urban America, coupled with decades of unmitigated violence, have shaped both the constraints and opportunities for activism among black youth and the communities in which they live. The central argument throughout this article is that intensified oppression in urban communities (job loss, unmitigated violence and substance abuse) has threatened the type of community spaces that foster revolutionary hope and radical imaginations for African American youth. Restoring hope requires a radical healing, which is a dramatic departure from radical identity politics of the 1960s and 1970s. Radical healing involves building the capacity of young people to create this type of communities in which they want to live. (pp. 77)

I support the claim that yoga and meditation might offer marginalized youth skills and practices for supporting their well-being and for bringing about the radical healing that Ginwright (2010) so eloquently speaks of, but these practices cannot be separated from an active and critical interrogation of the oppressive realities that they face, less they perpetuate the idea that the locus of change must fall upon these youth without broader society, including our schooling institutions taking accountability and shifting away from socially degrading ideologies and practices themselves. Low-SES youth of color are punished at far higher rates than their more privileged counterparts for the same infractions, which can lead to their penalization or expulsion in schooling (Achilles et al., 2007; Gregory et al., 2010), dropping out of school entirely (Cairns et al., 1989; Rumberger, 1995; Battin-Pearson et al., 2000), and their criminalization and imprisonment (Giroux, 2003; Rios, 2006; Hirschfield, 2008; Fine & Ruglis, 2009; Henning, 2013).

Because marginalized youth are very socially aware, and must navigate incredible adversity in the course of acquiring their education as a means of uplifting themselves and their communities, they could use the practices of yoga, meditation and breath work to develop a new awareness and recognition in their own bodies and minds of when they find themselves in a

situation where reactivity will not contribute to their safety or positive interpersonal development. In addition, since social justice educators want to support the development of critical thinking skills and the kind of creative thinking that is utterly necessary to support the kinds of innovative problem solving and radical healing that can propel forth positive social change, from a neurobiological standpoint, learning self control, as it related to the attentional, self regulatory, and inhibitory processes that comprise executive functioning (Barkley, 1997; Muraven & Baumeister, 2000; Baumeister, 2002), can be seen in a critical light as a tool that can allow students to recruit their emotional and prefrontal cognitive resources in order to find new ways of approaching community transformation.

According to FY, they felt that students at Ramses needed to be taught coping skills that are necessary to know how to regulate their emotions in stressful situations, one of the reasons being that their health teachers had reported to administrators that individual students were experiencing emotional trauma at home, in addition to the physical and emotional trauma of witnessing (and in some small cases partaking in) fights on and off of campus. This is only a surface explanation, however. I was also informed during my first site visit at Ramses that there had been an incident of school-wide trauma the year before involving one of the administrators, who had been fired and removed from his position. Being as this individual was a central to students' perception of being able to trust in the adult stakeholders at Ramses, the current principal relayed to me that she felt that the previous year's violation had done great damage to the overall school culture. This is a detail of incredible importance because this dissertation provides educators and researchers with a detailed description of what happens when a schooling institution undergoes a situation of collective trauma, and decides to place the responsibility of change and healing upon students rather than seeking to make institutional reform.

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In an effort to bring about the aforementioned outcomes, Ramses Middle School administrators selected FY to come into their school and integrate their intervention model into the school's daily structure with the intention of attenuating the negative academic and behavioral outcomes they had been experiencing with students such as low test-scores, and student oppositional behavior; in my conversations with the principal and superintendent, they characterized the school as having suffered from incidents of aggression and violence and high suspension rates among other issues. Again, this portrayal of the cause of student misbehavior is coming from a top-down perspective, and does not reflect the issues that students are facing at the school from their point of view. Another more critical perspective on Ramses choice bringing in the FY intervention for student behavioral management is that there already exist school-wide policies that have been successful at ameliorating these issues (Goldstein et al., 1994; Conoley & Goldstein, 2004; Riordan, 2006; Balfanz et al., 2007). Ramses' administrators could be abdicating their own responsibility by focusing on the individual behaviors of students rather than the institutional contexts that produce them. Though inequitable community level and institutional contexts are not the overarching focus of this study, I must reiterate that I will make recommendations in the discussion section that are data driven from the findings, for how future biopsychosocial school intervention implementation and programming can begin to integrate a more social justice based approach into their overall design.

In continuation, the FY staff used the term biopsychosocial to describe their intervention approach because they aimed to promote positive changes in students' biological, psychological, and social spheres of life. The triadic approach espoused by the biopsychosocial model of medicine and clinical care asserts that the treatment of suffering and disease must attend to people's inherently subjective experience, as well as the interconnectedness of these three

modalities in order to render effective and healing care (M. A. Hoffman & Driscoll, 2000; Borrell-Carrió, Suchman, & Epstein, 2004; Suls & Rothman, 2004). FY can still be described as a biopsychosocial school-based intervention even though they are not a medical or clinical intervention; their interventions are located within schools and classrooms, but they target biopsychosocial processes within students. Their methodology is also based in combining both socio-emotional learning (hereafter referred to as SEL) and ancient Eastern Indian and South Asian contemplative traditions and religious philosophies stemming from Buddhism and Hinduism. It must be noted that their program, however, utilizes a secularized form of yoga, meditation and pranayama practice.

Again, FY is unique from other non-profits and educational interventions that only use yoga or meditation individually as a part of their pedagogical practices, in that they also use pranayama, or, breath control to teach students techniques for coping with stress, as well as they incorporate SEL strategies into their overall program delivery. The staff of FY wanted to make this distinction clear to me in order to highlight the distinction between themselves and other mindfulness interventions that are available such as Mindful Schools™ or Quiet Time™. In this way they are also differentiated from school-based that only focus on SEL curricular content. The SEL component of their intervention curriculum teaches the five core constructs of socio-emotional learning according to CASEL: self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making.

Though it is impractical to expect that I will be able to differentiate between whether any changes evinced in student behavior can be attributed to either the YMP practices or the SEL component of the intervention, what I can attempt to discern from a qualitative research framework is exactly what students' *experiences* were with the program. Since this study deals

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with the issue of stress and well-being, I would go so far as to say that any experiences which students report that reflect perceptual shifts in their lived experience towards a state of well-being and emotional homeostasis, could also be considered experiences which are educative in that they have brought about a transformation within the student which supports their growth.

Chapter 3: Findings
Students' Individual/Subjective Experiences of FY

Chapter 3 consists of students' responses from the semi-structured interviews that pertained to their individual experience of the FY intervention. The sub-sections below include student responses in the following categories: the embodied impact or general experience of the practices; students using the practices to self-regulate or cope with stress; student participation or resistance to FY practices; and issues with FY implementation. Chapter 4 will cover students' response that pertained to how they perceived themselves to shift with regard to the relationships that were relevant to the FY intervention (FY staff, peers, teachers, parents).

The Embodied Impact/General Experience of the Practices:

This first sub-section of findings covers students' interview responses as they reflected upon how they perceived the practices of yoga and meditation to have an embodied impact; their description of an emotional or physical experience after engaging in the practices. Instances in which students articulate shifts in mental processing are included in this section as well, as these are connected to the embodied practices of yoga, breath work and meditation. The interview questions which received the most responses related to "embodiment" were: "In your own words, can you tell me what the FY program is all about?"; "Which of the breathing and meditation practices were most helpful to you?"; "What did the breathing and meditation practices feel like to you in your body?".

Five out of nine students; Ricky, Jazzy, Nathan, Paulina and Joe all used the word "calm" or "calming", and four of the nine students used the words "loose" or "relaxed" to describe how their bodies felt after the breath work and meditation practices. Their descriptions are in

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alignment with recent research on meditation interventions that assert calm as one of the primary benefits of a meditation practices (Koopmann-Holm et al., 2013), and that have found mindfulness meditation to be more effective at decreasing the kinds of ruminative thoughts associated with distress than relaxation interventions (Jain et al., 2007), although further research would have been needed assess whether or not their description could have been impacted by the way in which interventionists described how the practices would feel. Two of out nine students said that the practices allowed them to "think more clearly," described their minds as "blank" or said that they felt while focusing that there was "nothing in their heads" For more information on the impact of meditation practices on time perception see Sears and Kraus (2009); Robins et al. (2012). Nathan described the embodied impact of the practices as: "it made me feel loose"; "it made me feel good"; "it made me control like my whole body"; "I don't feel any tightness, right? I just feel loose. Like if I'm like, like, like the water flowing on me." Jazzy described herself as feeling "happy," as juxtaposed to her statement about "never being happy" before the FY program, and also describes herself as having more "self control," being able to "keep herself in a good mood," and says her heart is "more chill".

Nathan interestingly described an experience in which he engaged in the "bunny" breath work practice, and experienced feeling like he was asleep for a lengthy period of time: "I thought I was asleep for two periods" as opposed to the ten minutes that he was actually asleep. Paulina referred to the ability of the practices to bring about a "peaceful mood" and is the only one to specifically describe using the practices to "focus" and "not get distracted" before a test. She also used the phrase "…inside I feel like everything is going smoothly," and states that she is able to "breathe normally" to refer to her experience after engaging in the breath work practices.

When we take a close look at what Paulina had to say about her experience with the breath work practices, we can see that there is an additional layer of complexity to be addressed in terms of how students who are currently experiencing different forms of trauma might have a different kind of response to the breath work practices. Paulina stated that sometimes, there were days when she did not use the practices because they brought on "anxiety" and "panic attacks" where she recalled memories of previous situations of sexual abuse uncontrollably. There is an embodied impact embedded in her description; she said that when these memories come back to her, she "starts shaking violently" and "[starts] crying" and feels like "freaking out". Though the interview question and Paulina's response were on the topic of participation, *this particular response of hers seems to bridge data from this section of findings on the embodied impact of the practices with data that examines students' ability to cope with stress*, because of Paulina's identification that there are days when she participated in the breath work and meditation practices, when rather than helping her to cope, the data showed a break down of her coping response. When I asked her if she had her own way of coping with these memories when they come up (other than that FY taught her), she stated that she "sucks in a big breath" and "sometimes I squeeze like my eyes shut". This is Paulina's description of a coping mechanism that she employed before FY arrived, though I don't know how effective it was for her.

Students Using the Practices to Cope with Stress/Self-Regulation:

The interview questions which received the most responses related to coping with stress and self regulation were: "Do you have any stories about how you cope with stress since being in the program?"; "Was there a particular breathing or meditation practice that was most helpful to you?"; "How much better would you say you cope with stress since being in the FY course?; and

"A big part of the FY course is teaching emotion regulation. Can you describe that to me in your own words?"

Ricky described a situation in which he was "mad" while having an argument at home with his little brother, and used sun-salutations, which is a series of yoga asanas, or poses that are commonly used in hatha yoga, and was taught to students throughout the FY intervention. It is worth noting here that Ricky's description of using sun-salutations is the only instance in this findings section where a student mentions the use of yoga at all, whether during or outside of the FY intervention. He also reported using "power breath", one of the breath work techniques taught by FY in order to be able to "release" his emotions. Jazzy volunteered a story to me of a time when she used the "straw breath" in the middle of an emotionally intense and aggressive situation, wherein her neighbors, while playing in her backyard, were shouting at her and inciting her to get in a fight with one of their siblings; she used this breath work practice order to back away from reacting in kind with aggression. Nathan, Paulina, and Waheeda all also mentioned pausing during their day to use "straw breath" to calm down when they are feeling "mad; stressed or angry; or to calm down". Please see Walton and Levitsky (2003); Yusainy and Lawrence (2015) for recent research on meditation practices and their effect in reducing anger and aggression in adolescent populations. Joe is the only student who reported using the "victory" and "expansion" breath work techniques when asked how he copes with stress since participating in FY; it is unclear whether that is because other students did not find these breath work practices to be useful at all, or if they forgot how to use them given the time between the intervention and the interviews.

Waheeda in particular described combining the "straw breath" with a mental technique called taking a "meta-moment". A meta-moment is a technique that was originally developed by

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Yale's Center for Emotional Intelligence, and is defined as pausing in an emotionally challenging situation to identify one's emotions, to think about the consequences of ones actions before reacting in a situation of anger in order to deescalate from conflict, and to imagine how one's best self would respond. This is an SEL technique that FY borrowed in their curriculum.[4] Tellingly, Beto also spoke to me about having used the "meta-moment" technique; when asked to describe what emotion-regulation is all about, he responded by describing a stress-provoking situation in which his little brother was arguing with him persistently over which video game they should play together, wherein he used breath work as a strategy to calm down, and had a "meta-moment" to give himself the time and space to "think about what to do and not to do", after which he feels "calm" and "happy".

Very notably, one of the students I interviewed, Aliyah, stated that the FY program has not helped her for the worse or the better, and that she just feels "normal". It is worth it to mention that during my interviews with Aliyah and Waheeda, I got the impression that they both seemed to feel as though they had normal levels of stress in their lives; both of them had no difficulties socially with their peers, family members or teachers; there was no reported history or trauma, and they both described themselves as motivated, academically successful students prior to the FY intervention. Aliyah and Waheeda both spoke of the FY practices as helpful, but neither of them indicated that participating in FY had a particularly transformative impact.

Student Participation or Resistance to FY Practices:

The interview questions which received the most responses related to instances of students discussing their participation in the FY intervention were: "When you were first told

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[4]   https://www.greatschools.org/gk/yale-tools-for-families/

you would have to do the breathing practices in home room every day, do you remember how you reacted?"; "Were there times when you did not want to participate in the daily breathing?"; Did any of your peers chose not to participate in the breathing in homeroom?"; "What parts of the FY intervention motivated you to participate, or to not participate?"; "If your peers chose not to participated in the FY course, what did they do instead?" (any additional questions that are included are follow-ups to these questions in a semi-structured format). These interview questions were formulated to get a sense of students' perception about the following sub-themes: lack of participation; or perception of their peers participating or not participating; confusion around why they should participate. Also, I have included students' statement that reflect their perception of either passive or active resistance to the FY intervention. There are additionally student statements that reflect confusion about the purpose of the practices and how this impacted their willingness to participate.

There are three mentions of students initially perceiving the breath work practices as being a "waste" of their time; for instance, when the breath work practices were first introduced to their home room time, Jazzy stated that she thought "what a waste, what a waste"; she personally felt she could have used that time to read. Aliyah stated that she reacted "very negatively" when the practices were introduced, and that she too thought it was a waste of time; she also perceived that of her peers "didn't, like, feel a difference" when they engaged in the breathing practices, and this was what caused them to feel like they were a waste of their time.

Jazzy also mentioned that she felt it was very hard to focus on the practices when her peers were "throwing stuff around". Within this sub-theme of student disruption, or, lack of participation, Paulina and Aliyah stated that some of their peers thought it was not "cool" to participate; for Paulina, this made her question whether or not she should have participated as

well. She also mentioned that some of her peers laughed at students who *did* participate. Aliyah described some of her peers as secretly talking or being on their phones instead of participating. Nathan and Joe both stated that when the practices were introduced "in the beginning" they did not understand how the breathing practices were supposed to help them *at all*. Nathan even goes so far as to suggest that what FY should have done was to ask students *if* they wanted to do it first, rather than simply *telling them* that they had to do it. He also reflected that more of his peers began to participate as the school year went on, not because they *had* to, but because they *wanted* to, ostensibly because of the positive impact they began to see the practices have on other students.

Jazzy, Waheeda and Aliyah described how punitive measures were applied to students who did not participate; Jazzy mentions that one of her teachers gave detention to students who disrupted the practices. Waheeda stated that part of her motivation for participating during the FY course was that her grade (in Health) would go down if she didn't; and perhaps most dramatically, Aliyah recalled that her peers who literally protested the presence of FY at Ramses were told by administrators that engaging in the practices was "for their own good" and that their protest was "shut down" by them. I must mention again that the health teachers and FY staff recommended my interviewees to me, and none of the actual protestors were a part of the group of students that I interviewed. What this means is that my sample is skewed, as it does not represent the breadth of student responses to FY and leaves out the voices of those students who were actively discontent.

The protest I am referring to is found in Aliyah's description in the interview of the "no student breathing" movement that her friends are in. This protest movement was led by a girl who was running for student president at Ramses, who "platformed" (in Aliyah's words) on the

basis of having the breathing practices stopped in homeroom throughout the school. Students in this movement to resist against FY even went so far as to circulate a petition around the school to gather student consensus. Again, this section of the data is linked to the manner in which my data is skewed because of its lack of inclusion of student protestors. According to Aliyah, she perceived that a lot of her peers wanted to vote in favor of this movement, and that those who wanted to vote felt that the practices made no difference to them and that it was a waste of time (returning us reflexively to sub-themes previously presented in this section). This was the student protest that was shut down by administrators.

Issues of FY Intervention Implementation:

The interview question which received the most responses related to issues of FY implementation was: "Given everything you have told me, I am curious about whether or not you felt you had the choice to participate in the FY program?" (Note: there are other student responses to interview questions which could have been placed in the previous response categories, but I chose to include in this section any student responses which had to do with issues of FY implementation even if the questions themselves were not originally formulated around the issue of implementation).

Some students made direct suggestions about the way in which FY was implemented in terms of what they would change about FY, what caused them confusion about the practices, or what did not feel good to their bodies with regard to the practices. Jazzy suggested starting out the school day with 40 minutes of breathing and relaxing; extending the period of practice time from their 20 minutes of home room. She also stated that it was hard for her to know if she was doing the practices "right" or "wrong"; the breath work practices were taught by FY staff

through a series of combined movements and breathing patterns which students could perceive themselves as doing correctly or incorrectly, but the question remains whether the feeling of incorrectness refers to students not being able to follow along with the movements because of their complexity, or the way in which they were taught by FY staff, or, if students perceived their bodies as simply not responding with the kind of feelings (focus, relaxation, energy, etc.) that FY staff told them they would feel after engaging in particular breathing practices.

For instance, Nathan stated that at first, he did not like the "power breath" practice because "it was just too much", but that over time it became easier for him to practice; he also states that he perceived his teachers at Ramses having similar feelings as he did about the power breath practice, in that in the beginning of the school year they "were always talking about how they didn't like it", but that as the school year went on they increasingly liked it. We do not know if something changed about the way in which the power breath was instructed by FY staff, or if their bodies simply had time to get used to it. Nathan also states that he was told that the power breath was supposed to "make you think more clear" but that for him "it doesn't help"/"it doesn't work on me the power breath"; he also said that if there was one thing he could fix about the program, it would be the power breath.

A similar story about a disjuncture between how FY staff described the intended effect of the practices and how students actually experienced them arose in Aliyah's response; Aliyah stated that for her, the straw breath *did not help her*, but she felt it made her tired. She describes the power breath as making her feel more energized, and the focus breath as the practice that actually *did* helped her focus more (though she asserts that this effect took a long time to come about).

In continuation, the impact of the yoga and breath work practices on students could have also been impacted by how the FY intervention was introduced to them, as well as whether students were clear about whether or not they had a choice to participate in the intervention or not. Both of these are issues of implementation because they reflect choices that were made by FY staff about how and when to deliver their intervention content. For instance, Paulina and Aliyah stated that they were first informed about FY by an announcement made over the intercom in their homerooms; this does not indicate that an actual adult came in person to explain FY to them or obtain their consent. Beto clarified by saying that some students were unaware of the FY intervention because it was introduced in their health period, and so the students who did not have health in the first semester of the school year, but rather in the second semester, did not have a chance to be properly informed about it. What these examples show is that the decision to incorporate the intervention curriculum into the health curriculum staggered the school into students who were currently receiving the intervention, and those who had not yet, although the entirety of the school was expected to participate in the meditation and breath work practices in the morning during homeroom. This action created a disjuncture of information and important contextual information for students who had yet to receive the intervention and caused a great deal of confusion.

When I asked students about their perception of whether or not they had a choice to participate in the FY program, they responded with the following conflicting accounts: Nathan said, "in the beginning…it just seemed like you were being forced to do it"; "right now it is an option for you to do"; Paulina remembered feeling in the beginning as though she "had to"; Joe though he had the option to participate or "just sit there", Angel also perceived himself as having an option to participate, but did not seem certain. Interestingly, Aliyah is the only student that I

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interviewed whose response seemed to shed some light on why it is that other students felt forced to engage in the practices initially, but she also articulated that felt that is was more of an option as the school went on. She mentioned that in the beginning of the school year, teachers took the FY intervention more seriously: "…you had to do it and everything like that, but then as the year went on and more kids stopped doing it, then they weren't as serious about it." She even conjectured that perhaps those students who protested the presence of FY at the school were the ones who perceived that they had no choice.

Chapter 4: Findings
Students' Interpersonal/Intersubjective Experience of FY

Chapter 4 consists of students' responses from the semi-structured interviews that pertained to the interpersonal/intersubjective dimension of their experience of the FY intervention, or, whether they perceived their participation in FY as having had an impact on their relationships. The sub-sections below include student responses in the following categories: student relationships with FY staff; the FY program and student community engagement; the FY program and peer relationships; the FY program and parent relationships; lastly, the FY program and student relationships with teachers.

Student Relationships with FY Staff:

The interview questions that received the most responses related to students' relationships with FY staff (Mr. Finely and Ms. Gerrard) were: "There are two different FY teachers, and they have two different teaching styles. How would you describe their personalities?"; and "If you had any particularly memorable experiences with Mr. Finely or Ms. Gerrard what would those be?"

Nathan, Beto and Angel described both teachers as both as being generally "calm". This quality of calmness seems to be one of the most impressive aspects of their demeanor to these students. Tellingly, Nathan said that what convinced more kids to start participating in FY as the school year went on was the fact that they observed that Mr. Finely was "always calm" even though he was "dealing with 7th grade students" and that Ms. Gerrard is "always calm, its crazy".

Beto and Angel describe them as "cool" and people who "don't get angry". Other words students' used to describe them are "fun"; "happy"; "nice"; "funny"; "open-minded"; "honest"; "kind-hearted" and "always in a good mood". Paulina, Jazzy, and Beto described them as people who they know they can go to when they need advise, such as when Jazzy said "Oh, I love Ms G....yeah, I always go to Ms. Gerrard, because Ms. Gerrard helps me so much when I'm not feeling good or anything." Further below, Jazzy described going to Ms. Gerrard during an emergency situation; as I mentioned before, this might speak to both to the positive emotional engagement and support that Jazzy found in that relationship, but this finding could also speak to a lack of this kind of relationship thereof with teachers and other school staff; further research is needed in order to substantiate either of these claims.

Jazzy, Paulina, and Nathan described Mr. Finely and Ms. Gerrard as being people who they perceived as *wanting* to help students, or being 'helpful', or people who they felt they could go to if they need help with anything. Students' narratives about the kind of help that FY staff offered varied in terms of the severity of the situation in which students felt that they needed assistance, and shows that there were times when students preferred the advise or help of FY staff over school staff such as teachers and counselors. It was clear to me that they felt as though FY staff went above and beyond their duty to teach the FY curriculum by spending a lot of additional time with students on campus after the school day was over, and that this action showed a great deal of care towards students.

To this point, in a conversation I had with Mr. Finely during the beginning of the school year, he indicated to me that he noticed many of the male students were hanging out at local fast food restaurants where they would often times be reported as getting into fights, or using drugs the next day at school. In his observation, this behavior would lead to cycles of suspension, and,

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eventually, expulsion for many of the boys, beginning a cycle of transience between schools and exposing them to the school-to-prison pipeline. He decided to start an afterschool basketball club for the boys to participate in, so that they would have extra mentorship time with him, and they would have somewhere to be that was safe and productive until their parents got home from work. Nathan described the basketball club that Mr. Finely was running after school to me. According to him, this basketball club is an example of the ways in which FY staff go out of their way to connect with students, and he also said that he believed that "…if it wasn't for the basketball thing bad things would be going on". He elaborated by telling me about some boys who were expelled from Ramses for fighting nearby the school prior to FY's presence at Ramses; his insightful remark that these boys, who were removed from Ramses due to a punitive response by school administrators "if there was a basketball thing, they would have been to the basketball thing instead of going to a fight at McDonalds." It is clear that the positive relationships that students developed with FY staff were not built solely within the context of FY. Nathan also mentioned how the FY staff, (in their role as interventionists, not as basketball coaches) put notes with kind messages in everyone's lockers after school one day as a surprise, and he related this story to me as an example of why he felt that FY staff were exceptionally kind and caring towards students.

Two of the students who I interviewed, Paulina and Jazzy, told me stories about times when they went to FY staff for advise in emergency situations when I asked them to describe the FY interventionists personalities to me. When I asked Jazzy to describe the FY teachers' personalities to me, she framed Ms. Gerrard as her "adult best friend". When I asked her for a specific example of how, she immediately brought up the day two months prior when she attempted to commit suicide by taking pills, and came to school shortly after. She stated that

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when she got to school, she immediately went to the bathroom and asked a peer to go and get

Ms. Gerrard, who she described as doing a breath work exercise (victory breath) with her, after

which they went to the school nurse who called an ambulance and her father. When I replied that

it was a really good thing that Ms. Gerrard was a resource for her at that time in her life, she

recounted her distrust in school guidance counselors, which contextualizes 'why' she chose Ms.

Gerrard to help support her in that particular emergency. She said, "When I was in elementary

school my abusive stepmother was like freaking beat the crap out of me every day. And like I

had no one to talk to, because the guidance counseling they don't do anything." She stated that

she didn't trust the guidance counselor in elementary school, and also doesn't like the guidance

counselor at Ramses, and remarked that she prefers to go to Ms. Gerrard instead. Her statement,

though we cannot extrapolate from it to the rest of the student population at Ramses, strongly

exemplifies what can happen when students do not feel as though they have trusting relationships

with adult school stakeholders. It is extremely hard to stomach what might have happened if

Jazzy had not had a strong mentorship relationship with an adult at Ramses when she attempted

suicide. This issue of the importance of adult mentorship relationships as buffer for students with

trauma will be explored further in the beginning of the Discussion Section of Chapter 5, where I

will explore what the education literature says about what happens when positive relationships

aren't there in the schooling system and issues of trauma come up. In addition, I will make

suggestions in for how specifically trauma-sensitive yoga and meditation curriculums might be

beneficial for students with trauma in schools, although further research is needed before I can

make any claim as to how the appropriateness of these interventions.

Paulina described a similarly deep emotional connection to Ms. Gerrard, and says that

she spends more time with her than with any other teacher at Ramses. Her story of friendship

with Ms. Gerrard, however, becomes more complicated as she tells me about a time that she confided in Ms. Gerrard "…I told her that I did something that I wasn't really proud of, because I thought I was never going to do it again. But I did. And I talked to her about it and she said, she'll…she gave me advice and I thought that was that. Then the next day I got called down into guidance and they had to bring my Dad in. And I did not want him to find out because it was something really serious….Like really I didn't want to talk to him about it with him. And I knew he was not going to listen. He would just explode and get really mad. And I felt angry." She then went on to state that she felt her trust had been betrayed. However, Paulina also realized that if Ms. Gerrard wouldn't have told her Dad and school administrators about this instance, something bad would have happened to her, and she seemed to shift in her position about how she felt about Ms. Gerrard taking this action: "…so I realized that she did what she did for like, like it was the best."

FY Program and Student Community Engagement:

The interview question which received the most responses related to the FY program and how it may have impacted student community engagement is: "Some of the students found what the FY program teaches is something they can use in their community and other students don't feel that way. Are you involved in any projects in your community?" None of the students I interviewed felt that FY helped them with community projects in any way. I wonder if Ramses as a school community does not have adequate resources, economically or otherwise, to connect students to community-based projects designed to get them positively engaged and impacting their surrounding community.

Ricky and Paulina are the only two students who had a substantive answer to my interview question in this section. Ricky stated that there are no projects to improve his community, but that he regularly moves his neighbor's trash cans into their drive ways because he is concerned about them getting knocked, which might indicate that he is individually interested on some level in helping his neighbors and his community. Paulina mentioned giving money to the homeless in her neighborhood on a regular basis. She expressed an awareness of the relationship between community-level support as a buffer for the impact of impoverishment when she stated the following: "I think if people were like nice enough to do that [give money], maybe we wouldn't have as much as people around the streets as we do…" and that, "But if you were to help out, then maybe it will be a better like community."

FY Program and Student Relationships with Peers:

The interview question which received the most responses related to the FY program and how it may have impacted peer relationships is: "Did the FY program help you relate better to your friends?" Remarkably, for a school-based intervention whose purpose was promoted in part to school staff and administrators as being designed to shift how students behave in relationships with one another (hence the SEL component of the biopsychosocial intervention), none of the students that I interviewed felt as though the FY program had any impact on their peer relationships. In fact, tellingly, only two students had a reply to my question, Waheeda and Ricky. Ricky stated that he has always been kind to his friends "I always treat them like they want to be treated…I have always done that since the beginning". Waheeda stated that she has always been aware of the importance of treating people the way she would like to be treated, and that "…usually all my friends like I give them respect that I always do."

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The lack of student response with regard to the impact of the FY program on peer relationships seems to stand in stark contrast to the examples of student participation, or lack thereof, as well as student passive and active resistance that were covered in the previous findings section of Chapter 3. For instance, many of the students that I interviewed mentioned that some of their peers chose to disrupt the practices by either talking amongst themselves, not paying attention, or actively attempting to distract or dissuade their peers from participating in the breath work and meditation practices. Some students stated that they were made to feel as though it wasn't "cool" to participate and others still mentioned that some of their peers felt that the practices were either not beneficial for them or seemed to be pointless in the scope of a school day.

Additionally, none of the students that I interviewed were able to recall any of the SEL-based lessons that were included in the FY curriculum. The majority of them felt that their inability to recall these lessons was in part because of how much time had passed between the implementation of the intervention in the beginning of the school year and when the interviews were conducted at the end of the school year. However, it was somewhat surprising to me that none of them had *any* stories about being impacted by a single lesson that was geared towards deliberately shifting their relationships given the emphasis on SEL in the FY approach.

FY Program and Student Relationships with Teachers:

The interview question which received the most responses related to the FY program and how it may have impacted student's relationships with their teachers is: "I would like to know if the FY program helped you relate better to your teachers?" Student responses were a mixture of positive and negative perceptions of their relationships with their teachers. Two of the nine

students, Ricky and Joe, reported *never* having had a problem with a teacher before, with Joe even going so far as to call himself a "teacher's pet". Two students, Jazzy and Aliyah, had no response. Nathan, Beto and Paulina all reported perceiving themselves as having made a shift with regard to how they behave around their teachers, but it remains unclear what about their participation in the FY intervention contributed to this shift. Whereas we cannot draw any generalizations about all of the teaching staff at Ramses, it is clear from these few examples below that some of them could use more professional support in the arena of how they communicate with students with authentic care, or in how they navigate the emotional challenges of teaching without making students shoulder this burden as well.

For instance, when I asked Nathan whether being in the FY program helped him relate to his teachers better, he talks about his relationship with his science teacher and says "I always used to get on his nerves like crazy…But when the FY program came in I understood what he was going through and how many kids was being annoying to him." His statement tells me that participating in FY somehow made him more aware of why other people might feel or act a certain way; perhaps, it increased his perspective taking, or even his ability to empathize though I do not have enough data to make a claim about this. The data that I do have doesn't give me a sense for why this would be the case, but it would be worth exploring in future research in terms of how biopsychosocial interventions might inspire these kinds of psychological and emotional shifts in student populations.

Further corroborating the evidence of discord between some teachers at Ramses and the student population, Paulina stated that "Some people, some teachers are like they are constantly in a bad mood…and when…they like say stop talking like to me directly or that you are doing this wrong, or you are not paying attention…the consequences might not be so good." Angel,

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when asked how he related with teachers at Ramses, flat out stated that he doesn't like teachers at Ramses; and that he doesn't like teachers in general to the extent that he didn't want to talk about them. Obviously he does not perceive himself as having had a positive emotional engagement with teachers in his schooling experience. Waheeda was the only student who reported feeling comfortable leaning on her teachers for emotional support, having stated that, "I could talk with my teachers about anything I want to, like…stuff in school and stuff at home."

However, despite her positive relationship with teachers, she too reported being aware of how her teacher's perceived the burdens of teaching when she said "My teachers they say all the work is hard, like working with children and students is hard." Some student responses in Chapter 3 also indicated the presence of teachers at Ramses who used punitive measures against students for not participating in the FY intervention or for disrupting; some students even mentioned that many of the particularly disruptive students were no longer attending school at Ramses (I assume this means they were expelled).

Chapter 5 - Discussion Section

Intersecting Themes From Findings/Data Points:

Three generative themes arose from the interview data in the Findings sections of
Chapters 3 and 4 of this dissertation, which were interwoven across individual/subjective and
interpersonal/intersubjective student statements. As I gathered from students' responses, it seems
as though they consistently demonstrated a lot of *emotional resilience*, though significant
research efforts are needed to ascertain how yoga and meditation practices can either support or
detract from this factor of student well-being. Also, the ways in which teachers respond to
students when they do not have the support to cultivate their own emotional resilience was
central to the ways in which students perceived the quality of their relationships with them.
Students also spoke at length of the importance of the time, energy and resources that were spent
by FY staff to *build positive relationships* with them, and how this reflected upon the way they
were able to emotionally engage with the curriculum and intervention materials. Lastly,
intervention implementation was a very salient issue that repeatedly came up in the data; the
ramifications top-down decision making with regard to intervention selection, and the benefits of
employing a more student-centered approach will be further explored below.

In the following sections of this discussion, I will discuss the current prevalence of
biopsychosocial interventions in schools in the U.S., and then, I will summarize how the
aforementioned issues of emotional resilience, relationship building, and implementation-based
issues arose in order to frame the findings in Chapter's 3 and 4. I will then explain how the
findings in turn relate to current research in education reform. This will allow me to make
connections between how students' perceptions of their experience, individual and interpersonal

with the FY program, aligns with what researchers and educators know helps promote a school-wide environment of well-being, as well as it will illuminate areas of educational theory related to student well-being that need to be expanded upon with future research efforts, which I will discuss further in Chapter 6.

The Prevalence of Yoga and Meditation-Based Interventions in Schools:

The most recent studies to survey the prevalence of yoga and meditation-based interventions in schools were conducted in 2015. Butzer et al. (2015) conducted a study to identify a summary and comparison of yoga-based programs operating today in the U.S. They report 36 programs that are currently implementing yoga interventions in schools; they also cite more than 5400 yoga instructors reaching students in more than 940 schools. Zenner et al. (2015) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis of mindfulness-based programs in schools in the U.S., wherein they identified that a total of 1348 students in the programs they studied K-12 were receiving mindfulness-based meditation instruction of some form during their school day. It is important to note that the students who were the recipients of mindfulness-based instruction were not receiving yoga instruction, whereas we do not know whether the students who were the recipients of yoga instruction had a component of mindfulness-based instructions built into their yoga practice. Whereas the Butzer et al. (2015) study did not specify how many students total were receiving yoga-based instruction in the schools they identified, we can safely assume that 5400 yoga instructors in 940 schools means that tens, if not hundreds of thousands of students are being impacted by the presence of these programs.

Student Individual/Subjective Experience of the FY Program

The Embodied Impact/General Experience of the Practices:

In the findings of this dissertation, the interview data generated the theme of students demonstrating their incredible *emotional resilience,* although my data did not include those students who protested the use of these tools. I would argue that this theme was consistent throughout the data sets. Some students articulated the manner in which meditation and breath work practices facilitated their ability to a) create an internal feeling of relaxation, calm, and self-regulation that contributed to their ability to make good decisions; b) identify challenging or negative emotions during situations of conflict and to deescalate or remove themselves from a volatile environment; c) pause to think, or, take a meta-moment in order to logically assess the consequences of their actions before being behaving towards their peers in a reactionary manner. I do not have enough data to say whether or not these practices enhanced their well-being, but future research efforts would benefit from exploring whether or not the practices of yoga and meditation can somehow support the emotional resilience that students bring with them into the classroom.

The data from the section in the findings on "The embodied impact/general experience of the FY program" supports the idea that that these students liked having time to move, breath in a calm manner that supports introspection and quiet time during the school day, and they liked having the support of additional, positive adult mentors in the classroom besides their teachers who helped to guide them in an embodied experience of creating and internal feeling of self-regulation. Both the practices and the relationships with FY staff members seemed to contribute to positive embodied experiences in that they described feeling an improvement, physically and emotionally, while the FY program was at their school site, as opposed to beforehand.

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The students did *not* describe liking, enjoying, or remembering all of the practices. In fact some of the breath work practices, such as the power breath they distinctly did not enjoy because it caused great physical discomfort, and this discomfort seemed to work against their desire to use this practice to support their resilience. It seems possible that not all of the practices FY taught were appropriate to support *all* student physiologies, but post-intervention, without survey data, it is altogether impossible to evaluate which of the 8 meditation and breath work practices FY taught were the best for this particular student population.

Future iterations of programs like FY could be modified in order to reflect a more student-centered approach to intervention implementation. This could be achieved by surveying students prior to intervention design or implementation, in order to identify the social and emotional needs that are unique to their school culture and community, and to design intervention experiences that support students' *pre-existing* skills and strategies for being emotionally resilient that reflect a capacity to be mindfully aware. This intervention strategy will better acknowledge the incredible diversity of embodied experiences, and will frame its curricular approach from the knowledge that not all students will benefit from yoga and meditation interventions in the same way.

In regards to trauma, these practices seem to work to bring about very different embodied and psychological experiences for some students who have differing histories of emotional and psychological trauma. Just as we would not prescribe one pill for every symptom of illness in the physical body, we should not seek to prescribe a yoga or meditation practice to support the cultivation of well-being in the mind-body connection without further research on its effects. There are many dozens of different kinds of yoga being taught throughout the U.S., all of them with differing benefits or drawbacks for certain populations, but research has only been

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conducted on some of the more popular practices such as kundalini yoga (Vallejos et al., 2016; Sharma et al., 2017) and hatha yoga (Haden, Daly, & Hagins, 2014; Sieverdes et al., 2014; Dahl, 2015; Fishbein et al., 2016) in the past decade.

In addition, the students I interviewed seemed to gravitate toward different types of breath work and meditation practices at *different times of day*, depending on amount of rest they had the night before. This may seem like an innocuous factor at first glance, but it could make a great difference in how the practices are received especially in an adolescent population. Some students described wanting to use the practices to feel more energized, or calm, or even to feel more focused before a test, or wanted to use the practices to help them sleep. However, none of them quite experienced the practices in a standardized kind of way, meaning, in spite of whatever effect was prescribed to them by FY about a particular practice, their bodies *did not* necessarily respond accordingly. Perhaps, from the standpoint of biopsychosocial intervention implementation, this might mean that instead of attempting to impose a prescribed embodied impact by naming and defining for students how they are supposed to feel during a biopsychosocial practice, it would be more empowering and supportive of students to let them define their embodied experience for themselves, and leave these labels off of how the practices are taught.

Students Using the Practices to Cope with Stress/Self-Regulation:

Students who experienced and described themselves as coping some kind of life stressor, whether social or academic, reported being able to use the breath work practices of power and straw breath to release or calm down from negative emotional states, such as anger and aggression. These specific students also used the skill or strategy of the "meta-moment" along

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with breath work practices in order to pause and give themselves time to think before making

decisions in emotionally intense situations. An important distinction to be made here, is that the

two students (Waheeda and Aliyah) who described their lived experience as not being stressful

during the time of the intervention, thought that FY, whereas it was nice to participate in, did not

have any impact on them positive or negative. It is altogether possible that for students who

already have well developed coping mechanisms for stress, that yoga and meditation

interventions like FY might not be appropriate for them; further research is needed to assess

what kinds of interventions work best for students who do not self report as having the

experience of chronic stress or anxiety. One student, Paulina, who voiced a history of trauma and

abuse in the home, seemed to be negatively impacted by the breath work and meditation

practices.

These students exemplify the manner in which, though stress is generally unavoidable in

a lifetime, it is important for educators and researchers alike who are interested in how stress

affects student well-being to know that the inability, or difficulty coping with *stress is not a*

universal experience for all students, on a given school day. It may be that students experience

academic and social stress very differently and that these may require very different approaches,

whether methodologically in the classroom, or via reforms to overall school climate brought

about on the administrative level. For biopsychosocial interventionists who use surveys to assess

levels of student stress, I would to offer an alternative explanation: that students who do not self-

report on surveys that they experience high levels of stress that they are not able to cope with

may be experiencing *eustress* in the school setting, or, the kind of stress that is positive in that it

can motivate them to perform their best and can help support creativity, social imagination, and

critical thinking processes that are crucial to academic success (Grover, 2014; Thenga,

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Mutshaeni, & Mashau, 2015), although further research is needed to substantiate this as a possibility. For students like these, it may be that they need to be given the chance to opt out of interventions that are designed to target students who need help coping with academic or social stress, in order that they are not made to feel as though they are wasting important academic time.

In addition, some students seemed to gravitate toward some breath work or meditation practices more than others to the point of wanting to be excused from participating altogether in the practices that were physically uncomfortable or decreased their feelings of emotional resilience; some felt less of a sense of emotional safety around their peers while practicing and preferred to do them at home. On the more extreme end of experience, some practices brought back feelings of unresolved trauma and were overwhelming to their sense of emotional resilience. In examples such as students Paula or Jazzy in the findings, both of whom clearly struggled to cope with long histories of complex trauma, having trusting relationships with FY staff members seemed to give students them additional positive support; it would be interesting to see further research efforts determine if the presence of additional adult mentors in schools helps students with trauma maintain their sense of overall safety and emotional resilience. Additionally, the findings demonstrate that interventionists could benefit from having clear lines of communication with school mental-health staff, so that they can be notified in the case of students who are currently experiencing trauma, so that these individuals can both assess whether or not these students should participate in any given classroom intervention.

The important point here is, students whom school mental health staff have identified as experiencing or coping with trauma may benefit from active partnerships between their parents, administrators, and social workers or school psychologists in order to fashion an *individualized*

mental health plan to assist them with their specific needs, much as other students who struggle with the various manifestations of academic stress receive an individualized education plan (IEP) that lays the blueprint for their teachers and parents to follow (Blackwell & Rossetti, 2014; Zeitlin & Curcic, 2014). In other words, maybe the student with emotional trauma is predominately experiencing academic stress and so is more in need of trauma-sensitive mental health care services, but is also in need of targeted academic support, such as a tutor or teaching assistant, that would help alleviate negative emotional associations with their academic activities. It may be interesting for educators to experiment and see how individualized mental health care plans can even be tailored to be complimentary to IEP's.

Student Participation or Resistance to FY Practices:

The top-down manner in which the FY program was brought to Ramses Middle School had an immediate impact on how FY was able to effectively implement their intervention strategy. All of the students I interviewed expressed that they had negative sentiments about the FY intervention at the start of the school year, in that they perceived participating in FY to be a waste of their academic time. The picture that developed in the Findings section of Chapter 3 about student participation is complex, because we cannot assume that those students who were being disruptive, or not participating while their peers were trying to engage in the breath work practices were doing so because they were simply oppositional and misbehaving. It could be that this was a manner in which they felt that they could be agentive if they felt that the intervention had been imposed upon them without it being clear whether or not they actually had a choice (the issue of student choice will be explored below on the section on issues with FY intervention implementation); it could be that they, too, felt uninformed about the purpose of the practices, or

that they simply had no desire to engage in them. I did not have enough data to make a claim about any of these conjectures. Nonetheless, it seems as though some students did not perceive the practices as being optional, like with Nathan's example. As such, I will briefly discuss theory in education on agency, in order to frame for the purposes of future research, why agency is desirable for students, and how studies on yoga and meditation might incorporate the concept of agency into their conceptual frameworks.

Alexander (2005) has conceptualized agency in terms of the question of knowledge and it's desirability, and questions how the student might benefit by increasing that which is good in their life, via their pursuit of knowledge, and how this process might then be translated into community. This definition is useful for this dissertation's analysis because biopsychosocial interventions like FY purport to give students the opportunity, through embodied processes, to discover self-knowledge through introspection and from the standpoint of the body, presuming that this will translate into the development of *good* qualities, such as increased prosocial behaviors and interpersonal relationships, without tailoring their curriculum to reflect the lived experiences of the intervention's participants. The word *good*, for Alexander (2005) however, does not stand on it's own in a conceptual vacuum; it is situated within the subjective context of the desires, beliefs and actions that define the behavioral, cognitive, emotional and political activities that are generated via social interactions within the boundaries of school, classroom and curriculum. More directly, Alexander (2005) defines agency as "...that they [the students] have the freedom within reasonable limits to choose their beliefs, desires and actions, the intelligence to distinguish between better and worse according to some conception of these notions, and the capacity to *make mistakes* in what they feel, believe and do" (p. 314; my italics and parentheses). I believe that students need to have the opportunity to see their beliefs and

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desires reflected back at them in traditional school curriculums as well as in intervention content. I posit that they need to feel as though adult stakeholders trust them enough to decide for themselves what constitutes their own well-being, which might mean being given the explicit freedom and agency to either request changes to intervention implementation, or to be able to continue their learning processes in physical spaces that are not overlapping with that of the intervention; however, there is too little research literature to say what these postulations would like in practice. Future research efforts could examine the relationship between student trust in adult stakeholders, and the manner in which school interventions can shift their implementation to be more student centered and promote the feeling of agency in students.

As for the student protestors at Ramses, it seems like their resistance could be a natural response to the presence of what may have been perceived as a repressive social force inside of the school; it would have been interesting to be able to interview the students who were a part of the protest to see if this was the case, or to simply determine in their own words what the exact impetus was behind their decision to protest. In truth, did not have enough data to make any claims about the reasoning or emotions behind their protest. Beyond this, Ramses administrators' and teachers' top-down decision to punish students for exercising their right to protest FY's presence at the school site *seemed* to further undermine student agency and diminish their ability to advocate for themselves; this, too, would have been a complexity worth disentangling.

The administration at Ramses Middle School did not seem to choose relationship building *over* punitive measures for some students who did not want to participate, or who were otherwise disruptive. This raises the question of whether restorative justice practices or an RJ intervention would have been more desirable because of their emphasis on non-punitive responses to student disruption, and relationship and community building. One of the most

prescient implementation-based issues that I found in the data with students whom I interviewed stated that they would have had more consistent participation in the FY practices, or that they would have felt more comfortable engaging with the FY curriculum if they did not have to be concerned about being disrupted, made fun of, or otherwise antagonized by their peers. They also described situations of conflict, emotional and physical that they perceived FY staff were there to either help them cope with, or to do something about. Because of these observations, I suggest that the inclusion of a restorative justice-based intervention as a part of school reform centered effort might have the ability to shift schools' overall climates in a way where the responsibility for attenuating student misbehavior is not placed entirely upon the student, but rather, the healing of situations of disruption is achieved in a community-based, collective fashion. To me, this way of engaging with students seems to be the opposite of the structure that was in place at Ramses to attempt to ensure student participation. Future research efforts could examine whether or not restorative justice interventions are more appropriate than yoga and meditation interventions to shift school climate, and could also explore what other interventions exist that are viable alternatives to punitive school cultures.

In continuation, it is questionable, for instance, whether or not it was appropriate for teachers and administrators to be penalizing students for not participating in a biopsychosocial intervention like FY, considering, for example, the necessity of having student consent as a prerequisite for student participation in an intervention according to all university and district-level IRB's. In hindsight, it would have been useful to know whether or not students were given the chance to opt out of the intervention, and if so, what was the alternative activity presented for them? For these previous reasons, I think it is possible that students who declined to participate and disrupted instead may have been engaged in a more passive form of resistance against the

breathing practices and were being penalized for this; it would have been interesting to get their perspective and see if this was the case or if the way the practices felt in their bodies was physically unpleasant.

Another critical viewpoint of how Ramses administrators chose to deal with student disruption at Ramses in general, is that adult stakeholders at Ramses also could have opted to bring in professional development seminars or interventions in order to shift how teachers and administrators approach their relationships and emotional engagement with students, using the funds that were spent on bringing FY to Ramses.

Lastly, Waheeda and Aliyah both indicated that their participation in FY left them feeling unchanged; they described themselves as feeling "normal" afterwards. Future research could look at whether students who have pre-existing coping and self-regulation strategies, and are thus more flexible to the normal stresses of school and home life, biopsychosocial interventions like FY might not add to their skill sets. There is also the *possibility* that for those students who are experiencing trauma or heightened stress with their relationships or academics, interventions like FY that utilize yoga and meditation might be very positively impactful for them, but, again, far more research is needed before we can say whether this might be the case, and indeed, there may be other intervention strategies that are far more appropriate than yoga and meditation for this population.

Issues of FY Intervention Implementation:

There were several other factors unique to this case study that seemed to stand out in the interview data with regard to the important role of relationship building and buy-in in terms of intervention implementation, indicating why greater resources need to be put into this aspect of

education in order for the climate and culture of schools to become that which supports positive growth, learning, and development. The fact is, relationship-building efforts between school stakeholders cannot be separated from the issue of school buy-in. I believe that the issue of having buy-in as it relates to intervention implementation, and how to obtain this from as many stakeholders as possible in a school community is absolutely necessary for the successful implementation of a biopsychosocial intervention. To this point, a recent study by Lee and Min (2017) established the importance of principals having 100% buy-in of all school stakeholders in order for any school-based intervention to be successfully integrated into a school climate, and to achieve comprehensive school reform. Another study in the field of education psychology conducted by Bohanon and Wu (2014) on school-wide positive behavior support concluded that 100% buy-in, as established through professional development supports for teachers, was directly correlated with decreased incidents of student misbehavior and overall more positive school climate.

It seems as though buy-in, whether from students or adult stakeholders in schools, is a factor of school reform that cannot be overlooked. In the examples provided in the findings section, it became clear that some students felt coerced to participate in the FY intervention, and so, FY staff and the administration at Ramses cannot claim that the proper effort was made to establish student buy-in. The lack of buy-in amongst students may have resulted in students pushing back through both passive and active resistance to participation in the intervention – both of these are potentially reflections of administrative/interventionist issues not being properly addressed, though further data was needed in order to establish that this was actually the case.

A few questions arose for me from the analysis. What is the role of the parent(s) in intervention selection in schools, and were they given the right amount of information to help their student(s) understand their options and voice their level of buy-in? Was it made clear to students that they could refuse to participate at any time without reprisal? Given student statements about being penalized for lack of participation with lowered grades or other punitive measures, it seems like any message they may have been given with regard to their options for participation by FY staff was immediately contradicted by the actions of school staff. Were parents informed that some students were actively resisting, and if so, were they given the opportunity to be agentive and advocate for their student(s)?

What is certain is that biopsychosocial intervention staff should be able to provide school staff with reports that reflect year long assessments and evaluations of their programs, in order to be sure that a student-centered approach is guiding intervention selection and implementation. If students and parents from other school sites were not given proper buy-in, it will be reflected in these reports and can be a consideration as to whether or not to move forward with bringing an intervention onto a school site. Another issue to consider is that lack of clarity around yoga or meditation instruction and/or the manner of the delivery of the materials is of the essence in terms of students' willingness to maintain their buy-in throughout the school year and overall emotional engagement with intervention materials and content. Teachers most especially need to have consensus around intervention selection and express to the administration their 100% buy-in, and a lack of 100% buy-in by teachers is not a matter that should be overlooked by administration without considering the potentially negative impact this could have for both students and interventionists. When teachers' desires are overridden or they are not properly communicated with about the selection of interventions this can cause discord down the road in

intervention implementation, since teachers often times end up having to co-facilitate the intervention during instruction time. For more information on teacher-student relationships with regard to biopsychosocial intervention, see the section entitled "*FY Program and Student Relationships with Teachers*".

Student Interpersonal/Intersubjective Experience of the FY Intervention

Student Relationships with FY Staff:

In the findings, two issues made themselves immediately apparent: that *the impact of the meditation and yoga practices could not quite be disentangled from the relationships that students forged with FY intervention staff*, and that the time that FY staff carved out to develop deeply trusting relationships with students really mattered. However, it is altogether possible that FY staff were able to engage in this relationship building more so than teachers partially because of the restrictions of instruction time and other commitments that teachers must inevitably navigate. The calmness and approachableness which students attributed to both of the FY staff members' personalities, could be more a reflection of the ways in which they perceived their teachers to be over burdened, stressed out, and displaying symptoms of burnout, which I will discuss further in the section entitled "FY Program and Student Relationships with Teachers" below.

In addition, I found it remarkable that Mr. Finely decided to take the time to coach a basketball club afterschool. Nathan's statement about the basketball program Mr. Finely started in the Findings section of Chapter 4 gives an additional layer to nuance to this analysis. School-community-family partnerships, that often take place at after school centers that have been

shown to be very effective in preventing community-level violence and fostering positive personal and academic development (Posner & Vandell, 1999; Bryan, 2005; Hirsch, 2005). It also shows the possibility that students like Nathan, who participated in the after school basketball club, perceived Mr. Finely as showing him and other students authentic care because he saw him as going above and beyond his job. What is apparent is that the additional adult mentorship that FY staff offered to students was being used by administrators to reduce the effect of school-wide issues between non FY-affiliated adult and student stakeholders. These efforts did seem to have a positive, if temporary impact on the students whom I interviewed.

Grossman and Rhodes (2002) conducted a study of 1,138 young, urban adolescents in the adult mentoring program Big Brothers Big Sisters, and revealed that at the time of the study, there were more than 1 million students in mentoring relationships in the U.S. alone. By 2008, that number had grown to 3 million students. Ahrens et al. (2008) discovered that the duration of time that youth were involved in adult mentoring relationships was a significant factor in the overall improvements that they evinced, meaning that though all of the students they surveyed showed positive emotional and relational developments even during relationships that lasted for a few months, mentor relationships that lasted for at least a year were more likely to contribute to lasting change. However, the students who had been volunteered to enter into these mentorship relationships most often came from homes where they had dealt with some form of emotional severance or outright abandonment by one of their parents, and so, early termination of the mentor-mentee relationship by the adult resulted in feelings of severe rejection that were amplified by their previous experience of emotional trauma in the home. A recent study about the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program looked at the impact of what they termed Youth Initiated Mentoring, in which youths found and selected their own mentors from within a pool of

candidates; these relationships exhibited greater bonds of trust and lasting for longer periods of time than those where the mentor selected the mentee Spencer et al (2016).

These studies cast a critical light upon the role of school interventionists such as the FY model, which brought interventionists where they could form, as I saw in the data, intense emotional bonds with students that did not continue past the duration of the intervention. This also calls into question whether or not the emotional bonds formulated during semester or even year-long interventions, which were exemplified by the case of students such as Jazzy and Paulina who called Ms. Gerrard their "adult best friend" and went to her for assistance during moments of great duress instead of school staff, might represent the complex problematics of what happens when positive relationship supports do not exists in school communities between student and adult stakeholders.

With regards to the potential benefits of adult-youth mentorships relationships, (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002) also stated that, "Researchers generally agree that mentors promote positive developmental outcomes through role modeling and the provision of emotional support and positive feedback… By helping adolescents cope with everyday stressors, providing a model for effective conflict resolution, and indirectly reducing parental stress, mentor relationships are thought to have the capacity to facilitate improvements in parent–child interactions" (p. 202). Philip and Hendry (2000) framed the mentorship relationship in terms of the positive benefits that they adult mentors received from their relationships with youth, examining how, in their words, adults get a kind of cultural capital from the manner in which they are able to reflect upon the adversities they face as adults, suggesting that there is a reciprocal benefit which occurs in the context of these relationships. For further current research on the adult mentor and youth relationship and their benefits, please see: Zeldin et al. (2013); Brandt and Klein (2016);

Schwartz and Rhodes (2016); Stanton-Salazar (2016); Suffrin et al. (2016); Sánchez et al. (2017). Future research efforts in education would benefit from closely examining the role of adult mentorship relationships, trust-building, and how students may lean into these relationships in order to resolve conflict in and out of the classroom.

FY Program and Student Community Engagement:

I suggested in the findings section that addressed students' perceptions of how FY facilitated their level of community engagement, that strategically integrating opportunities for students to participate in community-based projects as a part of biopsychosocial interventions might be a way to increase students' relationship building skills with one another and their teachers. This strategy would also fit into many school administrators overall aims of supporting socio-emotional learning in the classroom for its benefits to improving the cognitive aspects of learning (Kyllonen, 2016; Maynard et al., 2017) and emotional engagement (Boekaerts, 2016) because of the social and emotional aspects of getting involved in efforts to improve one's local community. For instance, one must be able to develop the skills of communicating with people from different backgrounds, whether religious, age-based, class-based, political, or ethnic, in order to reach collective conclusions about what the community needs. Teachers are uniquely positioned to then turn these conversations into the basis of teachable moments, where they can discuss issues such as the intersectionality between race, gender, and socio-economic status for example, and how these forms of identification inform our lived experience as well as shape the kinds of relational interactions that are the basis of the cultural and social capital of communities.

Paulina and Ricky's are two students whose statements from the Findings in chapter 4 seemed to indicate that they are a part of a student population at Ramses that *could* be interested in activities that are designed to improve their communities, but it doesn't seem like they have

been given very much opportunity to explore that by the adult stakeholders at Ramses; as I previously mentioned, teachers are particularly positioned in schools to engender interest in civic engagement. The lack of knowledge by any of the students I interviewed about the existence of community-based projects at Ramses, in spite of the probability of their existence, speaks to a gap in student civic engagement that the administration at Ramses could explore in terms of how bringing programs oriented towards developing this particular type of student involvement might facilitate increased social and emotional engagement, and thereby have a positive impact on peer-to-peer relationships in and out of the classroom. Though getting students involved in projects that develop their understanding of the importance of civic engagement for community-level empowerment is not necessarily a typical response to a school-wide traumatic event (which was why FY was brought to the school site to begin with), the relationship-building benefits might have an equally lasting positive impact as SEL-based interventions have been shown to do as well. Future research should look at schools that have experienced school-wide traumatic events, and are actively involved in projects based on cultivating student civic engagement, in order to determine whether students involvement in their community lessens the impact of the trauma.

In continuation, current research on how community-based organizations build civic engagement indicates that urban youth in particular are more apt to develop a civic identity if they are involved in projects that actually actively and visibly improve their local community, instead of just passively absorbing knowledge about the concept of civic engagement by itself (Shiller, 2013). Collins et al. (2014) looked at the role of social capital (reciprocity, trust, shared norms) and how this mediates civic engagement, and found that as one domain increases, so does the other, and vice versa. As such, the emotional components of social capital are clearly of great

importance to stakeholders' ability to forge the kind of relationships that bring about positive changes in communities. Lerner et al. (2014) confirmed that civic engagement in adolescent populations, in that community-based projects normally occur in the context of positive adult mentorship relationships, benefit enormously from the emotional connection and trust building that characterizes the relational aspect of the process of developing their civic identity. Finally, Chan, Ou, & Reynolds (2014) conducted the first longitudinal study of how involving urban low-SES youth in civic engagement projects in their local community impacts their life trajectory, and found that civic engagement was strongly related to higher life satisfaction and educational attainment.

According to this research, the social and emotional rewards of forging relationships between schools and community-based organizations that foster civic engagement could be one of the factors that schools similar to Ramses might want to consider in order to positively shift their school culture. Getting students involved in community-based organizations seems like a viable alternative to bringing biopsychosocial interventions into schools. Additionally, getting students active in projects oriented around building civic engagement seems as though it might help build the kind of social capital that would be very complimentary to the aims of biopsychosocial interventionists who aim to improve social dynamics in student populations as well. A more recent study conducted by Hamilton et al. (2016) found that adult-youth mentoring relationships helped low-SES students with fewer economic resources build on human and social capital. These authors also observed that the adults that most youth identify on their own to be their mentors, without the help of an organization, do not belong to official programs, but rather are adults with whom they forge relationships organically because of shared interests and a naturally developed emotional connection. It seems altogether possible that this might have been

the case in the instances of the students whom I interviewed, but I do not have enough data to support this claim.

FY Program and Student Relationships with Peers:

On the surface, it seemed as though the primary issue that student's articulated with their peers with regard to the FY program itself, was that the students who did not want to participate in FY did not show respect to their peers who wanted to participate in FY, thus disrupting their ability to practice by deliberately distracting or making fun of them. However, students did not articulate having problematic relationships with their peers, but rather seemed to perceive themselves as having positive relationships with their peers. They did not express that they felt they needed the FY program to help them better understand how to navigate their peer environment. They did, however, speak at length about what they found to be problematic about their relationships with teaching and counseling staff. This indicates that rather than having a lack of respect for their peers that caused them to disrupt the intervention, that there were issues with the adult stakeholders at Ramses that resulted in their unwillingness to participate initially with the FY program.

The process of healing the relationships between students and staff members at Ramses needed to be prioritized in ways that were generated from a bottom-up consensus. Varying methodologies exist for navigating the issues of student participation and buy-in, building students' positive relationship building skills through civic engagement, and for exploring non-punitive strategies for healing the source of student disruption was discussed in the section entitled "Student Participation or Resistance to FY Practices". The importance of supporting teachers' own emotional resilience and how this impacts the relationships between students and

teachers (and by association peer-to-peer relationships) is also explored in the section below

entitled "FY Program and Student Relationships with Teachers".

FY Program and Student Relationships with Teachers:

The data in the findings that examined how the FY program impacted students'

relationships with their teachers also highlighted another important issue in education – the fact

that teachers' emotional burnout can potentially lead to a significant reduction in their ability to

emotionally connect in a positive manner with students, leading them to feel high levels of

exhaustion and decreasing their overall job satisfaction (Chang, 2013; Pietarinen et al., 2013;

Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014; Shen et al., 2015). A recent study by Oberle and Schonert-Reichl

(2016) even suggested that stress levels are 'contagious' in the classroom, leading to decreased

motivation among students. These studies elucidate the incredible salience of how administrators

need to support teachers' emotional resilience and well-being in the classroom, for the benefit of

the entire school community. In addition, exploring preexisting self care practices among

teachers, as well as investigating the social and human capital they bring to the classroom that

may stem from their community bonds, and how these might directly impact student resilience,

are areas of under-explored research in education that are ripe for future exploration. We need to

better understand how teacher resilience is reflected in their emotional engagement and

relationships with students, as well as how their resilience may manifest in different ways from

other professions who work with children, such as pediatric nursing, where there has been a

longer history of research and documentation about burnout/self-care/resilience in that

population (Cañadas-De la Fuente et al., 2015; Fong, 2016).

I believe that students need the support of self-aware, compassionate, and caring adult

stakeholders in schools to not only model for them what positive relationships look like, but to

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act as mediators in peer-to-peer relationships; teachers who are experiencing burnout may not have the emotional resources available to accomplish this. Many of the students whom I interviewed expressed situations of negative emotional engagement with their teachers, or seemed to be acutely aware of how stressed out and over-worked their teachers were based on their interpersonal interactions with them. Additionally, Jazzy and Paulina, the two student who described their struggles coping with trauma in school and as a part of the FY intervention, did not choose to go to their teachers for help when they experienced negative side effects from the practices (in the case of Paulina) or in the most extreme and disturbing case, when Jazzy attempted suicide prior to coming to campus and needed medical assistance.

This evidence highlights the interconnectedness of the potential importance of relationship building and teacher and student resilience, and indicates that further research is needed to understand how diverting resources for relationship building may support the emotional resilience of the entire school community. It seemed as though some students interpreted their teachers state of emotional aggravation as being partially stemming from the students behavior, locating the fault within them, but also, they perceived their teachers as having a heavy work load which students then perceived, due to their participation in the FY program, that they could possible help alleviate by shifting their behavior. At no point did it seem as though the kind of self-regulation being asked of students was equally being asked of the teachers as well, though teachers were expected to teach the meditation practices. This raises the question of how teachers can be expected to teach, or model self-regulation and coping skills, if they do not have their own lived experience of well-being and self-care practices that are foundational to biopsychosocial practices to draw from and/or are not being supported in developing these skills through other means by school administrators.

It is evident that students are not alone in needing to be taught additional skills in self-regulation, coping, resilience, and self-care practices. Teachers, too, need adequate support systems to help maintain these skills (Beltman et al., 2011; Hong, 2012; Richards, 2012). Therefore, research efforts aimed at finding out what teachers need to increase their emotional resilience and decrease work related stress would greatly contribute to cultures of well-being in schools. With regard to FY intervention implementation; we know that teachers at Ramses went through a teacher-training course with FY staff prior to facilitating the breathing and meditation exercises, so they could be familiarized with how the practices felt, perhaps they were also in need of continual support and training as the school year went on. This is a reality that FY staff could not possibly accommodate with only two staff members at the school site; it is apparent that FY staff needed additional staff members given the sheer amount of students and teachers that they had to interact with.

Additionally, if teachers agree to facilitate biopsychosocial interventions during classroom time, they need the regular support of intervention staff equal to the population of the school, in order that teachers' emotional resilience is not negatively impacted by trying to incorporate this material with lesson-planning and instruction time. In the case of FY, two interventionists delivering curricular content to 500 students rotating through their health class over the course of a semester seems to be an unfair work load on them. It was impossible for them to assist all 138 teachers who were expected to teach meditation and breath work daily in their homerooms. In other words, this means considering how many intervention staff members can be available to be present at a school site during the school year, in ratio with the number of teachers who are expected to assist with intervention delivery. Depending on the size of the

school site, the lack of enough intervention staff to properly support teachers may indicate the need for a different program.

Conclusion:

This discussion chapter elaborated upon what the data from the findings sections indicated were some of the more pressing issues are that educators and researchers should be aware of if they are interesting in the potential benefits or draw backs that can occur in the context of bringing a biopsychosocial intervention into their school. It is intended to help guide their decision making about whether this kind of intervention would offer the most benefit to their particular student population. The following chapter will go into greater depth as to what the current literature in education and yoga, meditation and mindfulness-based intervention studies suggests are the best practices and recommendations for implementing biopsychosocial interventions in schools, in order for educators to be aware of what factors comprise what we know about the best interventions that are available to impact student well-being. Additionally, I will explore the future implications of developing a critical yoga and meditation practice, in order that practitioners and interventionists teaching yoga and meditation in schools might continually develop language and skills around social justice that would be particularly helpful for use with marginalized student populations.

Chapter 6:
Recommendations for Introducing and Implementing Yoga and Meditation Interventions in Schools:

Introduction:

The Yoga Service Council, a non-profit organization whose stated mission is: "…to maximize the effectiveness, sustainability, and impact of individuals and organizations working to make yoga and mindfulness practices equally accessible to all"[5] in partnership with the Omega Institute, a non-profit educational retreat center specializing in the dissemination of research and educational initiatives centered on well-being practices, has begun to publish an annual book series on what they define as the best practices for delivering yoga interventions to differentiated populations; the first of their series being *Best Practices for Yoga in Schools.* The information in this book, which has been peer reviewed, is the result of an effort to synthesize the collective knowledge of their community of advanced yoga and meditation practitioners, yoga teachers, policy makers, and health care professionals into a guide that can be used by anyone who is interested in what this segment of the yoga community considers to be the best ways to go about introducing yoga into public schools.

Two other seminal works of research-based literature have been published in the past two years on the topic of best practices for implementing mindfulness-based interventions, and for combining mindfulness and yoga-based interventions specifically in the school context: *Mindfulness and Yoga in Schools: A Guide for Teachers and Practitioners* (Cook-Cottone, 2017a), and *The Handbook of Mindfulness in Education* (K. Schonert-Reichl & Roeser, 2016). I will use these books to guide the following delineation of how educators and administrators

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[5]   Quoted from: https://yogaservicecouncil.org/about

interested in biopsychosocial interventions can understand how, or whether, these interventions are right for their particular student population. In addition to using the previously mentioned texts to structure a conversation about best practices in schools for biopsychosocial intervention implementation, below, I will also discuss both what was successful, as well as what issues arose for the students whom I interviewed with regard to the implementation strategies of FY. I am combining data from my field notes, participation observational data, as well as what students conveyed to me during semi-structured interviews to guide the conversation. The issues with intervention implementation that arose from the data will be framed with suggestions from the literature on best practices to demonstrate the linkages between theory and practice and to generate suggestions centered in educational praxis.

The students that I conducted semi-structured interviews with revealed a variety of different issues with FY intervention implementation that they perceived to be problematic or in need of improvement. In addition, students also revealed what dynamics with FY staff they found to be the most supportive and emotionally engaging. The following sections of this chapter represents a collective summary of the issues and positive developments which arose either from analysis of the interview or field note data, followed by descriptions of where the current literature suggests changes could be made for the betterment of school-based biopsychosocial interventions like FY, or which of their practices (implementation or relationship-based) reflect what is best for student populations. In other words, the following sections pertain to what my research has indicated could be beneficial and/or detrimental about the FY program that could be replicated in certain school environments, though intervention implementation, I must stress, is highly context dependent. Thus, it is up to school stakeholders to determine the degree to which these recommendations resonate with the needs of their particular school community. The last

section of my recommendations also deals with what I learned about the FY program that can potentially inform how similar interventions could improve *for students of color* specifically (i.e. how to incorporate an anti-oppression framework and why this is necessary.)

Issues With Yoga and Meditation Intervention Implementation:

What should be the role of the yoga and meditation interventionist?

According to my observations and field notes, FY intervention staff were experienced yoga and meditation practitioners and teachers, who ran a school-based intervention wherein they occupied more roles than they had the proper training to fulfill. The FY staff members, Mr. Finely and Ms. Gerrard, are consistently described by all nine students that I interviewed as two individuals who embody the qualities of being approachable, trustworthy and showing students authentic care. I believe that their rapport with the students that I interviewed says a lot about their ability to develop positive and supportive mentorship relationships with students. Not only did they teach students at Ramses the FY yoga, meditation and breath work curriculum, they also taught and incorporated an SEL-based curriculum, as well as acted in the *role* of school meditator, psychologist, and administrator. I am placing emphasis on the word role deliberately because the instances I report below represent times when FY staff were either acting as confidant of the students; making administrative decisions such as taking them out of a class to practice breath work and meditation with them; and making decisions about when to administer the breath work practices during times of clear student emotional duress/emergency wherein clearly a mental health professional should have been consulted.

In continuation, the interview data are full of examples of FY staff being described as students' "best friend", or as being the only people whom students' felt they could turn to in a

time of emotional crisis. For example, while I was on site, I observed a practice of the FY staff

that they called "one-on-one's", wherein if a student was going through a particularly hard time

at home, or was displaying behavior at school that indicated that they were stressed out, agitated,

overwhelmed emotionally or displaying aggression or violence, FY staff would take them into

the 'FY room', a room reserved specially for students to be able to practice meditation when they

wanted to with FY staff. Sometimes during class, but mostly during the students' lunch, they

would sit and talk with them about the issues they were facing, and then they would practice

breath work and meditation together until the student reported feeling better. Many students

conveyed to me how much they looked forward to being able to spend this time with FY staff,

especially when they were feeling overwhelmed by school responsibilities and stress at home. It

was clear to me that they felt as though they were receiving some special attention during a time

when they felt they needed it most, and many of them relayed to me that they felt they could tell

FY staff things about their lives that they did not necessarily feel safe or comfortable revealing to

school counseling staff, teachers or administrators.

At any given time, I would consider these one-on-one sessions to be fulfilling the *role* of

friend, mediator, and school psychologist. Again, I place emphasis on the word role because the

FY intervention staff had received their training to be yoga and meditation teachers through an

FY teaching training program, and in a sense, they were stretching out their training to

supplement what they saw as a deficiency among school staff. There are two different ways in

which I can interpret this student-counselor relational dynamic: it either speaks volumes about

some sort of emotional disconnection between the school counseling staff at Ramses and student,

that some of them expressed complete distrust in revealing the interpersonal dynamics that they

felt caused them stress; or, in many cases, counseling staff are often overwhelmed with

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programming and scheduling duties such that they have very little time for actual counseling. This is part of the reason why FY was brought in – to address an institutional failure to these students, in spite of Ramses administrators having good intentions to cultivate an atmosphere of well-being, as I perceived it.

In particular, when Jazzy discussed her suicide attempt at school with me, she indicated that the first person she requested assistance from in this time of emergency was FY staff; she describes doing a brief breath work practice with Ms. Gerrard prior to having other school staff notified, such as the school nurse, as well as her father, *prior* to being rushed to the hospital. This example brings up the issue of best practices and how biopsychosocial intervention staff should be trained to respond in the case of severe student trauma that occurs on school grounds. Though I think it is telling of the emotional closeness of the mentorship relationship between Jazzy and Ms. Gerrard that her help was sought out during this time of dire need; indeed, it is beyond a good thing that she felt safe enough to reveal that she had taken pills to FY staff before they were able to do more physiological damage to her system, we run into an area of great complexity when it comes to answering the question of whether or not it was appropriate for FY staff to be administering breath work practices at a time of imminent physical threat to a student's life.

Beyond that, given Jazzy and Paula's previous histories with severe trauma in her home prior to the FY intervention, it is quite possible that FY staff should have consulted with school administrators, teachers, and parents about prior histories of trauma in order to deliver a separate intervention to these students that was trauma-sensitive. I talked about this at some length in the discussion section. Though Jazzy and Paula were very clear about how much the positive adult support of Ms. Gerrard meant in their lives, we also do not know if the meditation practices in homeroom may have actually exacerbated her mental health condition; it is also safe to say that

if intervention staff find out that a student's life is endangered as was the case with Jazzy, that they should know to a) concede their lack of mental health training and expertise in that kind of situation; b) take the student to school administration/mental health staff immediately instead of assuming that they had the knowledge and/or authority to administer breath work in the same way that a medical or mental health professional might administer a treatment. I will discuss in greater detail in the section below the manner by which interventionists can prevent the replication or exacerbation of student trauma by covering some of the current research on trauma-informed school building approaches, as well as extant trauma-informed interventions that do not necessarily utilize contemplative practices as a part of their framework.

Though it may be that some of the breath work practices have a calming effect on students, it was also very clear from the data that not all of the breath work practices have the same effect on the same students at the same times of day. Some students expressed a strong personal affinity for using some breath work practices before bed in order to help them go to sleep; some of them expressed a very strong dislike for some of the breath work practices (power breath in particular, which was explained to the students as being for the purpose of energizing them but seemed to mostly to agitate them and turn them away from wanting to try to the other breath work practices initially) and articulated not wanting to use specific practices at all regardless of whether they were touted as being for relaxation. Obviously, some of the breath work practices were not what they claimed to be in student's subjective experience. The top-down structure of the way in which FY was implemented prevented them from exercising the kind of sensitivity to an incredibly heterogeneous student population who could not possibly respond to the all of the practices in the same way.

Given the incredibly varied response that arose in the interview data about which of the yoga, meditation and breath work practices students found to be beneficial to cultivate certain kinds of subjective energetic states, I posit that substantial exploratory evidence-based research could to be conducted on student physiological response to all of the breath work practices, with careful attention paid to details such as differences between gender, age, and student sleep practices prior to administering the intervention at the school at all. If this is not possible for reasons of resources or time management, then interventionist's could at minimum build into their framework more time for students to reflect, either verbally or through journaling on their experiences so that they can become progressively more sensitive to students needs.

Lastly, my dissertation research indicates that there needs to be broader and longitudinal research efforts on what low-SES school communities consider to be the best practices for biopsychosocial intervention implementation. In other words, there needs to be data-driven conversations about those guidelines which have been stipulated by the community of yoga and meditation practitioners about yoga, meditation and mindfulness in schools, wherein teachers, parents, administrators and students are equally consulted. *The Best Practices for Yoga in Schools* (Childress et al., 2015) book that I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter represents a consensus on best practice through the lens of practitioners and researchers solely, without enough input from other relevant school stakeholders to round out the perspectives offered. Additionally, best practices manuals being produced that are geared towards school communities should outline, based off of research, demonstrate how interventionists should navigate their interpersonal relationships with students so as to be sure that they are not attempting to occupy roles inside of schools that they neither have the education, training, or expertise to fulfill appropriately.

Preventing the Replication of Student Trauma:

One of the more powerful findings from this research study were the examples of the two students who exhibited signs of childhood trauma, and the way in which they described their experience with FY. These student examples demonstrated the manner in which students with trauma need a specialized intervention approach. In other words, my findings indicate that FY implicitly engaged in some trauma-sensitive practices, which will be discussed further below, but did not explicitly consider how yoga/meditation could aggravate certain issues of trauma. So, I'm suggesting a better integration of trauma-sensitive teaching practices and school cultures that could be very complimentary to yoga and meditation intervention efforts, if indeed a school determines that yoga and meditation is right for their student population. In the case of Ramses Middle School, there were specific and individual cases of trauma among students, as well there was a school-wide, collectively traumatizing event that called for an intervention to re-establish a school culture of safety, as was mentioned in Chapter 2. Current research in education indicates that trauma-sensitive interventions and strategies may be an appropriate option to select out the many available for positively shifting student behavior when situations of individual or collective trauma arise in schools, but further research is needed before I can make any claims that these interventions are broadly appropriate.

For instance, Chafouleas et al. (2016) have conducted research on what they consider to be a blueprint for schools that want to become trauma-informed. They utilize the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Care Services Administration's (SAMHSA) definition of trauma to situate what educators should be looking for in their school communities: "Individual trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an

individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individuals' functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being (p. 7, 2014; quoted in Chafouleas et al., 2016)". The authors recommend: a) early identification of students who may be at-risk for trauma b) varied degrees/levels of intervention support in accordance with different intensities of the experience of trauma, and c) a data-driven evaluation of students' response to school-based trauma interventions or other kinds of school reform designed to create a trauma-sensitive school culture. The authors also named School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS) as a trauma-informed approach to school service-delivery that they felt exemplified a wide range of trauma-sensitive interventions and approaches that have been previously validated, which in my opinion, could be theoretically combined with biopsychosocial intervention strategies such as yoga or meditation to enhance the kinds of skills and relationship building that students may learn as a result of attending a trauma-informed school.

Additionally, the authors cite the example of The University of Washington's Center for Communities that Care, which has developed what they term a social development strategy that targets the family, school, and community as a part of their approach. They espouse the use of strategies in schools to develop a) meaningful prosocial interaction, b) recognition of achievement, c) emotional bonding, d) skills for success, and e) healthy standards of behavior. A 15-year longitudinal study conducted by the National Institute of Health (NIH) on the implementation of their intervention strategy in schools yielded results of improved economic and mental health outcomes over this span of time for the students who participated (Chafouleas et al., 2016).

The Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools (CBITS) Program

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(Bradley, 2008) and the Healthy Environments and Response to Trauma in Schools (HEARTS) (Dorado, 2016) are two other evidence-based programs for creating trauma-sensitive school environments with extensive research behind their methodological approaches that interested researchers and educators can consult to compare relevant and cutting-edge programs for their efficacy. It should be noted that (CBITS) in particular was designed for work with ethnically diverse youth, which may appeal particularly to school-sites in low-SES communities. The results of the study conducted on their program advocate finding a balance between evidence-based treatment and culturally-informed care (Bradley, 2008). We do not know whether or not yoga and meditation interventions are complimentary with these interventions, or desirable for most student populations; further research on specifically trauma-informed yoga and meditation interventions is needed in order to justify their use in schools.

Curriculum Retention:

The fact that the FY intervention was conducted at the same time as health class, which all students at Ramses only have for one out of the two semesters, those students who had health in the first semester had a hard time retaining the information that they were taught by the time I interviewed them in the end of the school year. In contrast, those students who had health class during the last semester had information from the intervention much more fresh on their minds. By this, I mean that all of the students I interviewed had a hard time verbally recalling SEL-based lessons that they incorporated into their curriculum (teaching about personal responsibility; emotion regulation; being "button proof"; turning problems into adventures; growth mindset; taking a meta-moment). In addition, they were unable to recall the names of all of the breath work techniques they had been taught, nor were they able to physically model more than 5 out of the 8 breath work practices when I asked them if they were able to during the

interviews. To me, this indicates that there needs to be some sort of structure in place that ensures that students are able to either have access to the major points of the curriculum materials, either in written or online in video format such as on YouTube, or even in an app-based interface. This way, students have a way to interface with the materials and continue growing their own understanding of which practices work best for their bodies and minds. This could in theory support their retention of curriculum materials and bolster their understanding and engagement with the intervention if it continues at their school the following year, and indicates why these interventions need to be a continuous experience in order for them to truly be effective.

Intervention Selection:

The FY program was allocated funds from the district to start intervention implementation in the form of a 2-day training in FY techniques for the teachers. This training had the purpose of familiarizing teachers with the FY curriculum so that they knew what their students could expect to learn in the intervention, but also, it taught them how to deliver the meditation instructional content during homeroom. My criticism of this form of professional development is that teachers were not given the opportunity to select this method for themselves, thus implying coercion for those who had fundamental disagreements with FY's approach to begin with, and resulting in very little impact for them. This is why in my interviews, the students who did not receive the FY intervention during health until the last semester of the school year were already aware of the breath work practices because they had heard about them from their peers who were actively participating in the intervention. However, students from this group remarked that since their primary introduction to the mediation and breath work

techniques happened via a school loudspeaker or assembly, yet they had yet to meet the interventionists nor had the proper contextual understanding for why their teachers were helping to deliver this content in their homeroom they had felt hesitant and/or completely resistant to participate. These students desire to participate changed once they actually started the intervention. This could be because their experience of the intervention itself, outside of the homeroom practices, gave them far greater explanation and detail about the "why" of the practices in terms of how they were intended to impact body and mind and in what ways the practices could be beneficial to their education. In addition, they indicated that the way they developed interpersonal relationships with FY staff was an additional motivator to participate.

This example explicates how the manner in which a school-based intervention is selected from the beginning, and the decisions made about how it fits into a previously existing school structure has an impact on its implementation and reception by students throughout the school year. All stakeholders in a school community need to be consulted from the very beginning of the intervention selection process and their experience needs to be reassessed throughout intervention implementation in order to mediate the effects to suit their unique needs. Adult stakeholders in schools especially need to feel included in the processes that will impact the growth, development, and relational dynamics of their students. Student stakeholders need to be properly informed and educated about the interventions being brought into their schools in terms of what methods and strategies the interventions seek to teach, and most importantly as we saw from the interview data, they need have a choice to participate in the intervention if/when it is eventually decided upon. To the degree that adult or student stakeholders in education feel as though school-based interventions are being coerced upon them, or in other words, if they are

being implemented without complete consent from everyone in the school community, then pushback and/or a lack of participation can only be expected.

Teachers vs. Interventionists Delivering Intervention Content:

While conducting my participant observations of the FY intervention, a few questions arose for me regarding whether or not it mattered to students if their teachers or FY staff delivered the meditation and breath work content. For instance, did the fact that the students had a previously established relationship with their teachers affect their willingness to participate, as opposed to when content was delivered by FY staff members whom they had only recently met? I also wondered if for those teachers who gravitated to the practices and sought outside instruction to enhance their understanding of meditation practices, if these were the same teachers who consistently delivered the meditation and breath work content in their classrooms. It would make sense if a teacher with a *personal interest* in meditation practices may have felt more invested in being consistent with their ability to assist FY with the intervention delivery.

However, the interview data revealed that many students were not receiving the meditation practices towards the end of the school year, as some teachers no longer felt it was important or that they did not have time to deliver the instructions during their homeroom hour in favor of academic preparation. It would have been interesting if I had been able to find out whether those teachers who expressed frustration or disapproval with being forced to learn the meditation practices, according to what students whom I interviewed overheard and reported to me, were also quicker to bypass administrative orders and stopped delivering meditation content. Nonetheless, my take-away from my experience observing teachers at Ramses, was that who

delivers intervention content matters and is an important issue for schools to consider given the pros and cons of intervention delivery by school teachers that I have alluded to.

Yoga and Meditation Intervention Methodology: Points to Consider

The evidence in the previous sections illustrates one of the important issues for school-based interventionists that I have already discussed in this dissertation: how interventionist obtain school buy-in prior to implementation of any kind can affect their ability to successfully meet the needs of a given school community. In the recently published manual *Best Practices for Yoga in Schools* (Childress et al., 2015), the authors assert that "…sharing yoga with school staff supports a broader cultural acceptance of the yoga program within the school and helps promote the recognition and reinforcement of the use of yoga-based tools throughout the day." I would add to that the acceptance of a yoga program has to do firstly with whether staff have been given the opportunity to select the program themselves; their participation would be more uniform in this case.

One notable study conducted by Chen and Pauwels (2014) on the program Yoga Ed. utilized a similar framework as FY to train teachers at a school site. Teachers were given a two-day training in how to deliver meditation and yoga content to their students during their class time. The training was as much about how to develop their own self-care practices as this was the basis of how teachers would be able to model the behaviors they sought in their classrooms. Teachers in this study delivered 5-15 minutes of yoga and meditation instruction to their students once a day for the entire school year with 100% compliance. One noticeable difference between FY and Yoga Ed. was that teachers at the school site unanimously pre-approved Yoga Ed.'s presence at the school site, and voluntarily signed a contract stipulating their agreement with delivering the yoga and meditation instructions each day. This case exemplifies one strategy that

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interventionists and schools can use to be certain that all students are receiving the same quality and length of instruction throughout the school year and most likely contributed to the positive reception of the program for all school stakeholders involved.

Beyond engaging adult stakeholders at school sites, Childress et al. (2015) and Cook-Cottone (2017b) both recommend consulting with students via conversations or group interviews for example, and regularly surveying student populations about their lived experiences and well-being needs prior to the selection and implementation of a yoga, meditation or mindfulness-based intervention in schools. This ensures that the kinds of curricular materials that are selected, and the overall intervention approach is student-centered and serves the needs of differentiated school populations.

Cultivating a Social Justice Emphasis in Yoga and Meditation Intervention Delivery:

Beth Berila's (2015) book *Integrating Mindfulness Into Anti-Oppression Pedagogy* is the first and only of it's kind to explore the interconnected potentialities of contemplative practices with critical pedagogical techniques. Though it was specifically written for the college classroom instructor/professor, I find most of her observations about the relationship between mindfulness practices and the art of engaging in critical thinking and the examination of narratives about oppression and critical pedagogy to be highly relevant to how middle or high school teachers may conceptualize this same topic. Two of her quotes stand out to me in particular, pertaining to how biopsychosocial interventions might consider align their intervention content to support the lived experiences of students of color.

> Contemplative practices enable students to cultivate emotional intelligence, learn to sit with difficult emotions, recognize deeply entrenched narratives they use to interpret the world, cultivate inner

compassion for other people, and become more intentional about how they respond in any given moment. All of these abilities can transform dialogues about power, oppression, and privilege from intense reactionary debates into more relational, empathetic, and reflective experiences. (p. 15)

Mindfulness in the penultimate form of applied learning, since it cannot be understood in the abstract. *It must be practiced*…Brown University's Contemplative Studies Initiative calls this skill "critical first person inquiry" or the ability to experience something with an open mind and then step back and study the experience (Brown University 2014; quoted in (Berila, 2015a)). This kind of engagement recognizes that learning is not merely intellectual and knowledge is not something "out there," removed from us. What mindfulness practices can bring to anti-oppression pedagogy is a more deeply *embodied* sense of this process. (p. 17)

Discussions about power, privilege, hegemony, domination, and marginalization are as necessary as they may be very emotionally engaging for students of color, since these conversations are a reflection of the history of their lived experience. The FY intervention chose to merge its intervention content with the health class at Ramses Middle School, but, biopsychosocial interventionists could chose to work directly with school teachers who are engaged in the work of teaching ethnic studies, or history or social studies teachers whose work is grounded in critical pedagogy if their school site happens to have a high population of students of color as a way to bring a different approach towards embodiment, healing, and emotional engagement in the context of these critical conversations. What I am discussing here is an opportunity for an entirely new area of research and generative theory in education. Researchers examining how biopsychosocial interventionists work with this population of school teachers could give rise to new opportunities to see how mindfulness, yoga, and meditation practices may impact conversations grounded in critical theory, pedagogy, and inquiry in terms of the depth of

emotional connection that students may feel with both the instructor and the content and the result of the inclusion of these practices.

Berila, Klein, & Roberts (2016) in their ground breaking book *Yoga, The Body, and Embodied Social Change* state that, "One tool of hegemony is to disavow the body as a site of knowledge. By separating one's knowing from one's being, dominant forces can better access oppressed people to internalize standards of morality, success, love, beauty, and so on that serves the interests of those in power" (p. 31). As such, further research examining the process of *critical first person inquiry* as mentioned above, grounded in contemplative practices, in the context of the classroom engaged in working with critical pedagogical texts and practices, may represent a profound opportunity to further understand *student empowerment* in terms of how they shift their relationship to the knowledge that comes from their own embodied experience, as is then reflected in texts that critically explore and examine their lived experiences.

Future Research Implications:

Introduction:

The observations that I made in the Findings chapters 3 and 4, as well as the discussion section in Chapter 5, have led me to suggest a number of different areas of future research that would be beneficial for furthering educators' and interventionists' understanding of the complexities of the dynamics of yoga and meditation interventions in schools. The first section of future research implications is a discussion of the issues and concerns that I was left with from the dissertation research, that are meant to not only guide future research efforts, but can also be used by educators to help structure the development of similar yoga and meditation intervention strategies in order to attempt to address them. After the following section of research-based

issues/concerns, I have written a concluding section entitled *"Possibilities of A Critical Yoga Practice To Heal Marginalized Youth",* which argues why marginalized students, and low-SES students of color in particular could benefit from the development and practice of a critical yoga and meditation practice in order to bridge the mind-body benefits of yoga and meditation practices with the immediate social justice concerns that marginalized students are using formal and informal support systems to navigate.

Research-Based Issues/Concerns:

There are many areas of future research that this dissertation has elucidated. For instance, it is clear that some youth had embodied experiences that incorporated various elements related to the study of consciousness and subjective awareness, such as altered time perception, and an altered sense of presence in the physical body. It is also clear that there is considerable inter-individual variation in theses experiences. For instance, sometimes students reported feeling different effects in their bodies than what interventionists had told them they were supposed to feel; future research could explore questions such as: Can this dissonance impact how students describe the impact of the practices to researchers when they are collecting survey or interview data? When can students be given opportunities to voice felt/embodied differences that they experience during the practices to interventionists in order to have the practices better tailored for their individual experiences? Future research should investigate the range of bodily experiences youths report in these settings, and how different student reports are related to the mode of intervention (type of practice(s), time of day, cultural context, environment of intervention, etc.)

Research is also needed exploring the connections youth build between these experiences and their current emotional feelings, and the possibility that these experiences and emotional feelings can promote emotion regulation, or greater emotional resilience over time. Another issue

related to students' psychological state during biopsychosocial interventions, is whether the manner of intervention delivery causes some to feel too self-conscious to participate. Several of the students I interviewed mentioned that being embarrassed by their peers was sometimes a deterrent in wanting to participate or engage in the practices; this indicates the need for future research to determine to what degree feelings of embarrassment may factor into how biopsychosocial interventions are implemented. On this surface, this may not seem like a factor of incredible importance, but future research should investigate if student embarrassment is enough of a deterrent such that interventionists and educators could collaborate to attenuate the possibility of this occurrence as much as possible. Meaning, future research questions could attempt to answer whether interventionists should possibly respond to this factor of implementation by possibly shifting the space in which the intervention is conducted, and/or by targeting specific gendered populations with their intervention model?

A third open area needing to be explored is the integration of youths' perceptions of relationships with adult teachers and interventionists, and the way that the intervention itself impacts youths. It is clear from this research that some youths' relationships with key adults were developed in the context of the intervention, and that these youths' newly strengthened relationships were important to their ability to cope and be resilient. What is not clear from this research, is the degree to which the intervention itself, including the practices of yoga and meditation and the socio-emotional learning curriculum, were impacting youths' emotional experiences, and the degree to which the adults involved were building positive mentorship relationships that were instrumental to supporting them. In other words, I cannot say whether the relationships or the practices mattered more for these students' well-being. This area of research raises interesting implications for other past studies on mindfulness and/or yoga based

interventions in schools that have made assertions about the effect of the practices on students experience of stress, and have made subsequent claims, without examining the role of relationships on students emotions or narrative self whatsoever.

Lastly, the role of the intervention modality also requires more explication; I did not have enough information to explain why the FY staff chose to incorporate an SEL curriculum with yoga and meditation and breath work practices altogether, rather than focusing their efforts on developing an intervention around one modality. This intervention logic matters because the effects of combining so many different approaches makes it very difficult for researchers to disentangle the effects of each practice on student populations, and so it also becomes much harder to begin to ascertain which practices are the best for students with differentiated needs. I also did not have any information about the endorsement or training that FY staff members received in order to be considered qualified to deliver the intervention, or how the concept of intervention fidelity was established prior to intervention implementation, such that I could track to what degree fidelity was maintained.

Another particularly salient issue for intervention implementation and modality is the issue of *race*; the research community knows next to nothing about whether or not the race of interventionists has an impact on how biopsychosocial interventions are received, especially by populations of students of color if the interventionists identify as white. It would be worthwhile to explore this, not only to determine if there are crucial differences that can arise in how white interventionists language themselves, perceive student ability, or emotional engagement, which would call for interventionists and educators to be more deliberate about the ethnic or racial background of the interventionists they employ to teach their students. Additionally, this research will be especially useful for critical educators who may be interested in utilizing mindfulness or

yoga in the context of their classrooms, but who may be uncertain of how critical pedagogies that engage with the subject of race may or may not be compatible with these practices depending on their racial background and that of the students they teach.

Possibilities of A Critical Yoga and Meditation Practice Towards Healing Marginalized Youth:

Student well-being is intimately tied to the socio-economic disparities that continue to segregate low-SES urban students into schools that do not offer them the kind of opportunities they need to succeed. From a socio-political point of view, students' race and their linguistic background remain two of the most salient factors which stratifies them inequitably along the lines of the achievement and opportunity gaps in education (Berlak, 2001; Hunter & Bartee, 2003; Love, 2004; Howard, 2010). If low-SES urban students chose to participate in yoga and meditation interventions, then I argue that these interventions must deliberately engage them from a social justice-based lens, in order for the manner of instruction to be truly empowering to them. In other words, research in ethnic studies and psychology has shown that African-American and Latino students, for instance, are highly aware of their racial identity, how they are perceived in society, as well as how they perceive themselves to be actively discriminated against (Flores-González, Aranda, & Vaquera, 2014; Sanders-Phillips et al., 2014; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014); and all of these factor into their mental and physical health outcomes throughout their lives (Walker et al., 2017). The experience of being a racialized person in the U.S., or of racism, are experiences that are specifically embodied; thus, yoga and meditation practices that do not explicitly and critically address this aspect of the lives of low-SES students of color risks sending the message that this incredibly salient experience is less than meaningful. However, before I can discuss what a critical yoga and meditation practice might look like, I

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would like to more deeply explain why yoga and meditation in our schools can fit very organically into the objectives of educators who are concerned with how well-being and social justice efforts in schools can support one another, if they determine that yoga and meditation interventions are right for their students.

Catherine Cook-Cottone (2017) in her recently published and ground-breaking book *Mindfulness and Yoga in Schools: A Guide For Teachers and Practitioners,* said it well when she stated, "At the present moment, we are faced with challenges. To negotiate our future, we must not only be capable of the academic solutions, we must also manage the personal, social and civic collaboration that will be required to effectively address the massive challenges we face as a nation" (p. 6). The recent introduction of yoga, meditation and mindfulness-based practices in schools is not completely without precedent. These practices fit into the historical trajectory of the concept of educating the whole child, which was introduced into our educational system due to the recognition that students have holistic needs that need to be attended to if they are to be expected develop in their ability to learn.

I would now like to lend a socio-political analysis to this dissertation. To me, the idea of teaching to the whole child means figuratively breaking the mold of a neo-liberal capitalist paradigm whose main objective is the production of passive consumers and laborers and the repression of dissent, relegating the desire of individuals to self-actualize, or, reach their full potential (Olson, 2014) as an individual as secondary to the demands of the economic market. For instance, David Harvey (2007) author of *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, defines it as,

> Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. (p. 2)

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From a socio-political point of view, then, it makes sense to conceptualize public schools' new emphasis on student well-being, as state run institutions, as representing a radical departure from neo-liberal logic by re-centering the responsibility to bring about student well-being as an educational imperative in the hands of teacher and administrators.

The process of writing this dissertation has led me to believe taking a holistic approach to education is what is best to deliver a form of healing for children in schools K-12, and mind-body practices represent a phenomenally powerful means of giving children the skills they need to cultivate inner resilience and educate mind, body and spirit, if indeed these are appropriate for some portion of the great variety of students in our nation. Similar to holistic education, Beth Berila (2015) quotes Mark Nepo (2011), author of *The Book of Awakening*, who uses the term "transformational education" that is "understood as educating the whole person by integrating the inner and outer life, but actualizing individual and global awakening, and by participating in compassionate communities – ([it] has become a quiet but sturdy movement that encourages the recovery and development of the academy as a liberating and capacity building movement" (p. *vvi*). Educators have recognized the positive potential that bringing yoga and meditation interventions into schools can have, but, my interview data reflected that the story about the usefulness of these practices, and their complexity in implementation, is something that greatly needs to be further explored. Students articulated how these practices as well as their relationships with FY staff, in their perception, seemed to help to facilitate the growth of positive relationships, shift school culture, enhanced their physical well-being, and empowered them to take control of their emotions in ways that allowed them to gain a more nuanced, self aware perspective on themselves and others; but we do not know whether these effects were particular

to the relationships they had with FY staff, as well as the specific practices that were taught, or if these effects can be replicated elsewhere.

This case study represented what could be the start of a model of how schools can engage in transformative and healing educational practices to me. However, a lot of work remains to uncover how yoga and meditation interventions can be tailored to best fit the needs of the incredible ethnic diversity of schools in the U.S., and to do so in way that does not seek to supposedly heal students, while leaving issues of social justice unnamed, unaddressed, and therefore, continuing to render many of the needs of low-SES students of color as invisible. I believe we can actively intend to dismantle and disrupt systems of oppression and "geographies of crime" Sawatsky (2007) that are perpetuated by sustained poverty with acts of fierce, unwavering dedication to self-love and *healing justice*, a term that has been coined as a part of the restorative justice movement, through the efforts of peace education researchers (Sawatsky, 2007).

By this, I mean that we can firstly work on learning how to be compassionate and loving towards ourselves. Then, with patience and time, we see how our self-love manifests in the increasing positivity and emotional engagement in our relationships. From there, we can intentionally extend this love outwards into the community with a critical eye towards the suffering body, mind, and spirit that poverty can inflict in societies who continue to perpetuate structural violence, in order that we can see how the unique talents and skills of our most vulnerable students can be used to help strengthen, unify, and provide healing to historically disenfranchised communities. However, I also believe that we can maintain this cycle of "love as activism" only so long we create structures of support where individuals who express the need to

can retreat into periods of contemplation and self care in a healing container of community engagement. To add a critical feminist point of view to this analysis, Beth Berila (2015c) quotes,

> Feminist and anti-oppression pedagogy mark self-reflection as a central ingredient for a transformational learning process. In this context, self-reflection usually means examining our own positionality in society, our role(s) in power systems, and an evaluation on how issues effect our personal lives. It involves questioning how we both uphold and can interrupt power systems. (p. 20)

What I am saying is that my dissertation research has led me to conclude that it is highly necessary to move from simply bringing yoga and meditation practices to urban schools unquestioningly, and that if educators decide that these interventions are appropriate for marginalized student populations, then it is altogether possible that these students would more greatly benefit from what I am terming a *critical yoga and meditation practice*. A critical yoga and meditation practice would theoretically give the space for students to express how much they value nourishing themselves, and supporting their growing self awareness, combined with actions to improve their communities that are based in teaching on applied civic engagement, social awareness and social justice. After all, I ask, *why shouldn't there be time made available to explore the connection between the sacred and movements for social justice in public schools if this exploration is done in a secular capacity? Isn't it possible that it might be beneficial for some students if educators and parents alike stretched their imaginations in order to envision school environments where students' spirits can be openly nourished through embodied practices in a safe community setting?*

Carol Horton (2016) in the book Yoga, the Body and Embodied Social Change: An Intersectional Feminist Analysis argues that,

Reducing yoga to a mechanistic exercise with some added behavioral benefits eviscerates its true holistic

potential, while reinforcing the impoverished understanding of education that dominates our public school

system. Alternatively, teaching yoga in ways that affirm its status as a mind-body integration practice

(adapted as necessary to support secular educational values) offers a means of revitalizing the commitment

to education the "whole child" that once formed the bedrock of our now-marginalized tradition of

progressive education. (p. 16, quoted in Berila et al., 2016; Horton, 2016)

Horton's (2016) examination of what is potentially problematic about the way that yoga and

meditation in schools has been mischaracterized is of great importance; I believe that students

have bodies that carry stress, pain and trauma that are in need of healing, and they have spirits

that yearn for visibility, empowerment and recognition. I posit that if critical educators and

researchers, and practitioners of yoga and meditation join together to put significant effort

towards the development of a critical yoga and meditation practice, then these healing practices

can potentially be used in the efforts of social justice such that they might begin to help us

understand how to heal the pain of systemic oppression inside of ourselves, at the same time as

we who live to empower one another make strides forward to heal the collective pain that our

society is clearly suffering from, and are trying to rise up from in this unprecedentedly important

historical moment.

A critical yoga and meditation practice, specifically for working with marginalized

populations might look like the following efforts for teachers and practitioners of yoga and

meditation:

- Actively and collectively educating themselves in order to have a vocabulary with which they can language themselves around how the systemic oppression and violence in our society causes trauma for marginalized populations

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- Provides a safe physical space to practice with teachers who teach with authentic care and reflect the ethnic and linguistic population of the community.
- Creating YMP curriculums that make space to include classes that acknowledge and incorporate the linguistic, gendered, racial, ethnic, religious, disabled and able-bodied, as well as the cultural diversity of the local community.
- Tends to the well-being needs of those who are incarcerated or involved in the local prison system so that they are not additionally marginalized by not feeling welcome in YMP spaces because of the stigma associated with imprisonment, current or previous.
- Teaches in a trauma-sensitive manner that refrains from movements that might be emotionally triggering, as well as explores how the experiences of poverty, racism, discrimination and structural violence are felt and lived experiences in the bodies of their students.
- Compassionately gives space for students to shift their practice according to what feels best for their bodies, rather than applying a rigid definition of which poses, or types of breath work or movement the teacher feels is best for the student
- Traditionally, the student of YMP is not given the chance to talk before, during, or after class about their experiences in class with the teacher or with other students. Thus, deliberately creating a community space either in person, or online, in which students can safely vocalize and share their experiences with one another and the teacher, means the student is not being silenced within the context of their own healing experience. This form of deliberate story telling will not only create a record of how the YMP practices are impacting the local community, but will also provide a means of collectively assessing well-being needs in the community.
- Collaborating with critical educators in classrooms and other non-traditional educational centers such as churches or community centers to see how the practices of YMP might support non-institutionalized community supports (for those who chose to explore these options). This action can support the emotional and psychological challenges that can come with the act of critical inquiry in the classroom, and expand upon what we know about how to further the creation of a critical yoga and meditation practice out of the classroom.
- Intentionally creates relationships with community-based programs that teach and support projects around civic engagement in the community, especially for youth. This will allow the YMP practices to support the well-being and self-care of community members and students who are putting forth efforts to create positive developments for the improvement of the local community.

Yoga, meditation, pranayama, and other contemplative practices can be valuable tools for physical and emotional integration when they are taught by individuals who are aware of their positionality in society relative to the students who they are teaching, as well as how the language they use to teach the instruction of movement and breath *matters* in terms of whether the practices are received by practitioners as empowering experiences. These practices represent a form of embodied healing that, for some, has become an utterly necessary means of their ability to stay present and seek healing self care when institutionalized supports to support health care and well-being are hard to come by if non-existent in their communities. It is my sincerest hope that this dissertation motivates and inspires a new generation of yoga and meditation practitioners, researchers, and educators to continue to forge collaborative efforts to understand

how the tools of yoga and meditation can potentially be deliberately cultivated to be at the

service of those who, in addition to seeking a means to ameliorate the negative impact of stress

in their lives, seek to use critical pedagogies to further the cause of social justice and empower,

support, love, and authentically care for our most vulnerable populations.

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