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Practicing Freedom: effects of personal anti-racist engagement on a Montessori educator's experience

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Abstract

This self-study was designed to assess the effects of engagement with antiracist media on the work of a Montessori educator in the classroom. Conducted over eight weeks, the study used nightly readings, daily reflections, a tally of daily antiracist thoughts, and a scale of one through five measuring the participant's optimism regarding the integration of antiracist pedagogy with Montessori philosophy and practice. The study was performed at a racially and economically diverse private Montessori school in a Midwestern metropolitan area in a class of twenty children ranging from 2.7 to 5 years old. The results indicated that, although the intervention had no negative effect, it was not optimal for the participant's learning style. While the participant gained confidence in communicating antiracist concepts and teaching methods, further study investigating the effects of working in a community of educators engaged in antiracist integration into Montessori practice is recommended.

Keywords: Montessori, antiracism, antibias, whiteness, education, self-study

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In grappling with the inequities of race, privilege, and power, I initially came to the conclusion that I should not be a teacher. I thought that my intersecting identities of white, female, upper-middle class, and well educated were overrepresented in the field of education and it would be better to leave space for someone else. But to abandon my goal of becoming a teacher would be to deny my inner directives toward working with children and bearing witness to their development. As a result of this conflict, I have committed to tackling these inequities as best I can from the position of power and privilege I occupy. I, like everyone else, come to my work with internalized prejudices and, fight them as I may, I will inevitably and unconsciously enact and perpetuate these racist and biased ideologies. The task of unlearning and addressing racism and discrimination on both the personal and systemic levels will be my "big work" for a lifetime.

In some ways, this commitment to confronting injustice was what drew me to the Montessori philosophy because I saw the potential it has for positive social change. Dr. Montessori wrote extensively on the concept of education as an aid to life, meaning that the purpose of education is more than increasing a student's academic capacity. It is to prepare children for fulfilling lives as members of an interdependent community. In fact, the outcome of an ideal education in the eyes of Dr. Montessori is an adult who participates joyfully and meaningfully as a community member with an awareness of their place in the greater system. Such an ideal requires an education that fosters critical thinking, independence, and social consciousness.

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What does providing such an education demand from the educator? In teacher preparation under the Montessori method, the adult is expected to undertake a process called 'spiritual preparation'. The spiritual preparation of the Montessori adult begins with "…an act of humility, the rooting out of prejudice embedded in our hearts…" (Montessori, p. 94, 1996). The prejudice that Montessori refers to is that which the adult carries about children. But today, as a Montessori community, we must also be rooting out the ethnic and racial prejudices we hold. Antiracist education provides many useful tools for identifying and dissecting prejudice and bias. The application of these tools could be a very positive integration of the two educational philosophies.

In this paper, white supremacy and racism will be used interchangeably because white supremacy is the institutionalized form that racism takes in the United States (Baldwin, 2011). The United States is a nation guided by white supremacist principles, and education is not shielded from the insidious invasions of this oppressive ideology. The education system is both a product of and driving force in the way white supremacy manifests in the US. For example, our educational system replicates many of the racist beliefs we hold as a society by the literature it chooses to canonize (hooks, 2003) or the inequitable funding streams that help public schools in white neighborhoods improve facilities while public schools in communities of color deteriorate and close (White, 2015). Though Montessori education is non-conventional, it is still susceptible to these oppressive principles and practices. White supremacy enters Montessori practice primarily through unconscious biases and prejudices held by the educators resulting from developing under these systems of oppression.

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As Montessori educators, our valiant goals of shaping a more just world cannot be accomplished without confronting our own prejudices and biases. We have the opportunity to create a system that actively dismantles the existing hegemony through the application of an actively antiracist Montessori philosophy. Because the Montessori method is not inherently antiracist, I see the need to engage intentionally in antiracism as we continue to adhere to the Montessori principles.

During my time in the Children's House – the Montessori term for a preschool community of 3- to 6-year-olds – I began to see the importance of a concerted and sustained effort to reflect on my privilege, whiteness, and internalized racism. My Montessori training did not provide me with the tools I needed to do this type of reflection so I began to look to resources outside of the Montessori world. In the research I did, many of the scholars and practitioners agreed that confronting bias and prejudice was paramount in working toward an antiracist educational philosophy.

In this self-study I was both the researcher and the sole participant. I am a 28-year-old recent graduate of the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) primary training program. Before beginning the study, I was engaged casually in challenging my prejudices and expanding my knowledge of the issues of race and white supremacy. I conducted the study at my school, a mixed income, racially integrated metropolitan school in a Children's House of 21 children between the ages of 2.7 and 5. The research methods included daily engagement with antiracist media and reflexive journaling in addition to the completion of both a daily tally and scale of optimism about the integration of Montessori and antiracist education. In this study, I delved into my own murky experiences of privilege, oppression, and race in the United States. The question I

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sought to answer was how personal engagement with antiracist literature and media

would affect my professional experience working in the Children's House.

Review of Literature

A Litany for Survival
by Audre Lorde

For those of us who live at the shoreline
standing upon the constant edges of decision
crucial and alone
for those of us who cannot indulge
the passing dreams of choice
who love in doorways coming and going
in the hours between dawns
looking inward and outward
at once before and after
seeking a now that can breed
futures
like bread in our children's mouths
so their dreams will not reflect the death of ours;

For those of us
who are imprinted with fear
like the faint line in the center of our foreheads
learning to be afraid with our mother's milk
for by this weapon
this illusion of some safety to be found
the heavy-footed hoped to silence us
For all of us
this instant and this triumph
We were never meant to survive.

And when the sun rises we are afraid
it might not remain
when the sun sets we are afraid
it might not rise in the morning
when our stomachs are full we are afraid
of indigestion
when our stomachs are empty we are afraid
we may never eat again
when we are loved we are afraid
love will vanish
when we are alone we are afraid
love will never return
and when we speak we are afraid
our words will not be heard
nor welcomed
but when we are silent
we are still afraid

So it is better to speak
remembering
we were never meant to survive

Many researchers and scholars have described the ways that education and educators promote and perpetuate systems of oppression (Castagno, 2014; Gay, 2010; Henze, Lucas, & Scott 1998; hooks, 1994, 2003; Souto-Manning & Mitchell, 2010). The essential work of education is to guide the child in developing as a contributing member of society. What does "contributing member of society" mean when the implicit requirements for being a member of this society include conforming to colonized ways of being and complacency with oppressive systems of power and hierarchy? The literature reviewed addresses different approaches to chipping away at white supremacy and its manifestations in education.

Defining whiteness

Taking from Calgary Anti-Racism Education (2015), whiteness can be defined as the socially constructed racial identity that people who consider themselves White occupy. This identity is a state of racial unconsciousness that affords the individual a set of privileges based on race. The definition of Whiteness has shifted throughout history; as different ethnic groups have come to the United States, they have either been subsumed into the identity of White or rejected as 'other'. Whiteness gains its power from its invisibility and is in opposition to other racialized groups in the race hierarchy (Calgary Anti-Racism Education, 2015). In America, Whiteness is default– meaning that it is considered normative and is often implied or invoked under the guise of being aracial– and invades work with children, defining the expectations and barometer of success for learners. Essentially, the educational baseline is set at White. Robinson and Jones Diaz

(2006) assert that educators need to critically examine the way Whiteness is understood to be normative therefore legitimizing and naturalizing White domination.

White supremacy in education

White supremacy is present in all aspects of American life– in the systems, relationships, and physical bodies of the citizenry (hooks, 1994). If it is omnipresent, it must also live in the classroom. Education is the breeding ground for the politics of greater society; as such, the politics of education and the politics of society cannot be extricated (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006; Husband, 2011). As hooks (1994) stated, "Again and again, it is necessary to remind everyone that no education is politically neutral" (p. 37). Educators are hard pressed to acknowledge the implications of white supremacy on their teaching; they have difficulty recognizing "their passive acceptance of ways of teaching and learning that reflect biases, particularly a white supremacist standpoint" (hooks, p. 37, 1994). But research demonstrates that it is incumbent on educators – particularly White educators – to actively examine their participation in the oppressive systems that permeate their work (Gay, 2010; Souto-Manning & Mitchell, 2010). This is of particular concern for early childhood educators because it is in the early years of life that children incarnate racist ideologies (hooks, 2003; Souto-Manning & Mitchell, 2010).

Approaches to antiracism in education from the literature

The literature was critical of two existing approaches to ridding education of white supremacy: multiculturalism in teacher education and the colorblind approach. Hooks (1994, 2003) puts forth the theory of Education as a Practice of Freedom, which has an interesting interplay with the Montessori theory of Education as an Aid to Life.

Finally, the research reviewed also highlighted several antiracist educational strategies to combat the perpetuation of white supremacy: self-examination as an antiracist tactic and discussion as an antiracist tactic. Many of these approaches and critiques can and should be applied in tandem.

Multiculturalism and Teacher Education. Multiculturalism is the political and educational philosophy that attempts to address challenges that arise from cultural and religious diversity within a given context. It attempts to acknowledge and celebrate diversity and difference, without the application of a critical lens in regards to systemic inequities (hooks, 1994). Proponents of this philosophy eschew the idea of the cultural "melting pot" in which members of the nondominant groups are expected to assimilate into the dominant culture thereby losing cultural identity (Henze et al., 1998).

The study by Souto-Manning and Mitchell (2010) was supportive of multicultural education. Through their work following a preschool teacher using action research to help her more authentically and effectively practice multicultural education, they developed six aspects of teacher practice that make multiculturalism successful in honoring and promoting cultural diversity: 1) taking a humble stance; 2) applying fluid roles of learner and teacher; 3) assuming the stance of an ethnographer; 4) encouraging dialogue; 5) challenging assumptions held by all; 6) shifting assumptions towards socio-political consciousness (Suoto-Manning & Mitchell, 2010).

Castagno (2014), Husband (2011), hooks (1994), and Robinson and Diaz (2006) were all critical of multiculturalism. Castagno (2014) defined the terms *multicultural, diversity,* and *equality* as "tropes for policies and practices" that are ineffective in halting injustices and inequities (p. 4). Husband (2011) critiqued multicultural education for only

asking teachers and students to respect, tolerate, and include markers of difference in the curriculum and community without acknowledging the relationships between them. Hooks (1994) stated that to absolutely "respect and honor the social realities and experiences" of people of color, educators must be ready to change the style in which they teach (p. 35). Particularly because most educators, white and nonwhite, were educated themselves in a white dominant educational culture where the stories of white people are the norm and at times the only possible reality (hooks, 1994). Robinson and Diaz (2006) believed that though multiculturalism works to promote tolerance and acceptance of cultural diversity, it does not examine or address the structural, systemic, and institutional ways that nondominant groups are marginalized and oppressed. Although it is crucial to expose children to different ways of being, it is equally important to acknowledge that not all those ways of being are afforded the same respect – and in some cases, even rights – in wider society and to highlight inherent inequities. Additionally, lumping all markers of difference together (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion) as equal and parallel aspects of multiculturalism can erase the ways that intersecting identities confer more or less privilege (Robinson & Diaz, 2006). Multiculturalism takes a reformational stance, seeking to reform the educational system to include diversity; in contrast, antiracist education places itself in opposition to many of the norms and values of traditional American education (Husband, 2011).

Colorblind Approach versus Antiracist education. Husband (2011) argued that too many early childhood educators adopt a "colorblind" approach, which erases issues of race and racism by promoting the idea that we are all equal. This can lead to a false sense that people of color's lived experiences of inequality and violence do not occur or

are not related to race and systematic oppression. It also allows people with white privilege to abstain from engaging in the work of repair and restitution in the face of oppression (Husband, 2011). Multiculturalism and the colorblind approach are similar in that neither recognizes racial oppression and how it is systematized.

Antiracist education picks up where multiculturalism and the colorblind approach leave off. Husband (2011) defined antiracist education as, "a form of theory and practice that endeavors to develop a critical awareness of race and racism that exists in direct opposition to the commonly accepted norms, values, and ideologies related to race and schooling in society" (p. 366). Husband (2011) also outlined several central theoretical tenets to define antiracist education. First, the focused examination of all content and its transmission; through critique and reflection, antiracist educators develop curricula and practices that represent a more inclusive and realistic view of the world. Secondly, the explicitly political nature of antiracist education further distances it from multiculturalism. It is established on the assumption that current forms of education are intentionally designed to uphold racial and economic imbalances present in the society at large (Husband, 2011). As such, antiracist education aims to design "a consciousness of race and racism that is contrary to the 'normal' perspectives and understandings of schooling policies and practices." (p. 366). Next, antiracist education is intersectional, meaning that it acknowledges that different kinds of identities intersect and overlap to confer more or less oppression on a given individual or group (Husband, 2011). Finally, a defining characteristic of antiracist education is the application of praxis. Praxis is defined as "the process by which critical reflection (theory) is carried out in practice (action) and whereby practice (action) dialogically informs reflection (theory)." (pp. 366-

367) Furthermore, Husband (2011) detailed essential components of an antiracist curriculum. These include: 1) critically examining the power imbalances in relation to race and class; 2) applying critical thought to social issues; 3) developing the skills to identify stereotypes; 4) including the stories and perspectives of marginalized people throughout history and culture; 5) valuing and respecting differences; 6) continuously acknowledging and affirming diversity; 7) using the scholarship of all genders of racially and ethnically diverse groups; and 8) giving children the skills to challenge bias and oppression in practice and theory. (p. 367, 2011)

Education as a Practice of Freedom and an Aid to Life. These are two theories of education, the former developed by hooks (1994) and the latter by Montessori (1996). Education as a Practice of Freedom is a type of antiracist education. Hooks (1994) describes Education as a Practice of Freedom as a form of educating using an 'engaged pedagogy'; a progressive, holistic manner of teaching that acknowledges the value of knowledge gained through lived experience as well as knowledge acquired in an academic setting. This requires the educator to contextualize the learner and work collaboratively with them to provide an education that reflects their needs (hooks, 1994). Contextualizing learners is an essential element in all iterations of antiracist education (Nieto, 2008). It is also required from Montessori practitioners in the practice of Education as an Aid to Life; a tenet of Montessori philosophy that defines education as more than the dissemination of information but as the pursuit of guiding learners to independence – functional, intellectual, economical, and emotional. This necessitates putting the learner in context so the educator can provide the environment that fosters independence in a manner that is appropriate for the community in question. It also

requires that the educator consider not just the academic and intellectual needs but the needs of the whole child. The acknowledgement of students as whole beings is an important element to both antiracist education and the Montessori method (Gay, 2010; Montessori, 1996). The commonalities of contextualization and consideration of the whole learner create a philosophical bridge between Montessori and antiracist education. This bridge could be employed to integrate the two pedagogies.

Self-Examination as an Antiracist Tactic.

All of us in the academy…are called to renew our minds if we are to transform educational institutions– and society- so that the way we live, teach, and work can reflect our joy in cultural diversity, our passion for justice, and our love of freedom. (hooks, p. 34, 1994)

Another point of connection between antiracist education and Montessori practice could be teacher self-examination. All the authors in the literature reviewed stressed the importance of teachers examining their personally held racist beliefs and prejudices (Castagno, 2014; Gay, 2010; Henze et al., 1998; hooks, 1994, 2003; Matias & Mackey, 2016; Souto-Manning & Mitchell, 2010). Before pervasive systemic and institutional racism can be challenged, each person living in the colonized world must first address the racism and prejudice that has been instilled in them by white supremacist hegemony (Henze et al., 1998). This is akin to the Montessori philosophy of the spiritual preparation of the adult. Montessori (1996) calls for all prepared adults to rid themselves of bias and prejudice in regards to the child. In current training practices, this aspect of the spiritual preparation has been broadened to include the elimination of prejudices and biases more generally. Some strategies from antiracist education could be applied to Montessori teacher training to help teachers in this journey of self-examination. Matias and Mackey

(2016) present persuasive arguments for a critical whiteness pedagogy in teacher training with specific teacher education practices that could be employed by Montessori training programs. Their course for training teachers was presented in three emotional phases: the first dealt with becoming emotionally invested in social complexities; the second was entitled "sharing the burden" in which teachers were expected to take ownership of their emotions in response to learning about inequities; and the third was a culmination of the first two in which the teachers applied what they had learned in a more "humanistic education" (Matias & Mackey, p. 37, 2016). This format of self-examination could be used as a model for the spiritual preparation of the adult in a Montessori training program.

Discussion as an Antiracist Tactic. Henze et al. (1998) proposes the tactic of discussion as a means of dismantling racism. This study is close to 20 years old but, unfortunately, it still feels relevant to today's educational landscape. Many of the lessons from this research are still in desperate need of contemporary application. The study examined a two-week staff development workshop with 60 attending educators who follow the Foxfire method– a student-centered educational approach to teaching and learning. The workshop aimed to address how the method could be culturally responsive in multiethnic communities. The authors of the study sought to answer the question of how educators do or do not talk about race, power, and privilege.

The work of Henze et al. suggested that white teachers are willing to discuss "multiculturalism" or "diversity" but unwilling, or underequipped, to explicitly address race in educational practice, partly because of the manner in which privilege cloaks how inequality effects members of oppressed groups (1998). In any discussion of race in the

United States, questions of power and privilege must be addressed (Henze et. al, 1998). This would require educators to acknowledge the hierarchies present in learning spaces. For instance, just in the act of teaching, one is inherently occupying a place of power over learners. Additionally, in the practice of teaching, educators designate content as knowledge to be disseminated. These choices are intimately influenced by systems of power and oppression (Henze et. al, 1998). What is considered to be worthy of teaching speaks to values, including biases and prejudices. In hooks's (1994, 2003) view, educators are fearful of acknowledging these interplays of power and education because it may undermine their position of power in the classroom. These fears lead to conflict, both within and between individuals (hooks, 2003). But conversations about racism, power, and privilege will not and cannot be devoid of conflict; in fact, these conflicts indicate that the conversations are exhuming the bones of learned racism and prejudices (Henze et al., 1998). Henze et al. (1998) give guidelines for effective conversations about race, power, and privilege to use in educational settings, and beyond: 1) create shared definitions of racism, power, and privilege; 2) acknowledge the ways that differing identities intersect with our perceptions and understanding of these issues; 3) bring to attention that some have more power and privilege but that this is systemic and follows lines of race, class, and gender; 4) legitimize the feelings of frustration and anger that those with less power and privilege may experience; 5) develop strategies for participants to engage in further discussion of these topics; 6) include an additional "cool down" period that allows for closure and resolution (p. 189).

Conclusion

The literature points to the need for dialogue around race, power, and privilege (Henze et al, 1998), a movement away from the use of exclusively multicultural education and toward antiracist education (Robinson & Diaz, 2006; Suoto-Manning & Mitchell, 2006; hooks, 1994; Henze et al, 1998; Husband, 2010), and the necessity for self-examination by educators to truly confront systems of oppression in the classroom (hooks, 1994; Henze et al, 1998; Matias & Mackey, 2016). The literature also strongly supports the necessity for antiracist, anti-oppression work as part of education (Castagno, 2014; Gay, 2010; Henze et al, 1998; Husband, 2010; hooks, 1994 & 2003; Matias & Mackey, 2016; Robinson & Diaz, 2006; Suoto-Manning & Mitchell, 2006).

More research is needed on how Montessori educators can effectively perform the tasks of critical conversations and self-examination. There was little research following Montessori practitioners in the process of undertaking an antiracist re-education. This is why a self-study on antiracist auto-education in a Montessori context would be beneficial.

Methodology

In this self-study action research project, I collected data on how my daily engagements with antiracist literature and media affected my experience in a Montessori Children's House. I used the Implicit Association Tests (IATs), a pre- and post-survey, a daily scale of optimism, a daily tally of antiracist thoughts and/or action, and daily reflective journals.

Before initiating the study I compiled a list of engagement materials for use in the intervention (Appendix A). These materials included academic articles, poetry, personal

essays, podcasts, TED Talks, and films. I categorized the materials into general themes and over the course of the study attempted to use at least one piece from each category. The categories were: Whiteness and White Privilege, Personal Histories, Critical Race Theory, Race in History, Race in Policy and Economics, Race in Society and Culture, Race and Education, Science Behind Race and Racism, Creative Approaches, and Action Steps. I culled the resources from various preexisting reading lists – Anne Braden Antiracist Training Program for White Social Activists, Teaching for Change, Racism Review – as well as from searching for such terms as racism, whiteness, white privilege, race in education, etc. through the St. Catherine's library website. After developing the list, I created a schedule of readings (Appendix B). In addition to compiling the list of readings, before initiating the study I wrote a series of reflection prompts (Appendix C), although I ultimately did not use the prompts in my intervention.

Concurrently, I developed a daily tally system to record the number of times during the morning work cycle (the children's 3-hour work period from 8:45 to 11:45) that I had a conscious antiracist thought or took an antiracist action. Before the study, I devised a daily scale to measure my confidence in applying concepts from the readings to my work in the school setting with children, parents, and coworkers. Over the course of the study, I altered the scale to reflect my optimism about incorporating antiracist philosophy into my work as a Montessori educator (Appendix D). The scale went from 0 to 4, with 0 being not optimistic about integrating Montessori and antiracist education and 4 being optimistic with concrete visions of the integration of Montessori with antiracist education. I made this change based on the reflections from the first few weeks of the study after a shift in my perception of the relevance of optimism versus confidence.

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In conversation with my professor, it became clear that I was truly processing my optimism around the prospect of integrating antiracism into my Montessori practice, so I altered my scale to reflect that. Finally, I wrote a survey for myself to take before starting the daily engagements and then to take again after the period of the intervention (Appendix E).

In the week before to the intervention, I collected baseline data. I did so by taking the IATs, completing my pre-survey, and doing pre-intervention daily reflections, daily tallies, and scale measurements.

During the intervention, I engaged with (read, watched, listened to, etc.) the antiracist media in the evenings at home, typically right before sleeping. During the morning work cycle, I kept my tally on a small piece of masking tape stuck to my clothing. For the initial few weeks, I reflected at school on my morning break. I also recorded my tally and daily scale at this time. I discontinued this practice after two weeks because of several factors: the unreliability of the duration of my break; the disconnection from my community (as my break is the only time I have to connect with coworkers); and the conclusion that reflecting at school was interfering with my ability to do so openly and thoroughly. After this period, I began reflecting either during the afternoon work cycle when there were only two older children present or at home after school. If in the process of reflecting, my sense of optimism shifted, I recorded a second data point for my scale on that day. This period of intervention lasted six weeks, from approximately February 5th, 2017 to March 23rd, 2017.

For a week following the period of the intervention I continued to perform the daily scale, tally, and reflections. In this week, I also completed the post-survey and re-took the IATs.

After completing the data collection, I began the data analysis process. I started by analyzing the daily reflection journal for themes. I identified eighteen themes or categories including: community, child-generated, interactions between adults, parent conversations, chaos/ no time, no reflection, whiteness, and skin color. Going through the journals I highlighted reflections that fell into any of the categories. Some reflections fell into more than one category. I recorded the dates of the highlighted passages in a spreadsheet under the category headings. I also chose two or three passages per category that I felt best expressed the theme or that were of special interest. As I read the responses I also noted extra themes not originally considered and comments that did not necessarily reference a category but seemed noteworthy.

In analyzing the daily tally and optimism scale, I compiled all the scale ratings and tallies on a separate spreadsheet. I calculated the mean and mode for each, in addition to the range. I also determined the number of recurring responses for both the tally and the scale. I then calculated the percentages and standard deviation. I put this data into two bar graphs.

I read the pre- and post-intervention surveys and noticed a shift in tone. To further analyze this and to quantify it, I searched the surveys for "positive" and "negative" word choices and calculated their relative percentages to see if the tone of my responses had in fact changed appreciably. I also calculated the word counts for each response. Finally to

analyze the IATs, I compared the results and noted the sentiments upon completing the

tests for the second time.

Analysis of Data

Implicit Assumptions Tests

I took the IATs pre- and post-intervention. These online tests are designed to

measure automatic unconscious associations. The participant is asked to click through

images, words, or both and make associations or categorize based on the instructions. The

automatic associations or preferences are then described as "slight," "moderate,"

"strong," or "no preference." These tests are cursory and not holistic but they do provide

some interesting information for consideration. Although I do not hold the tests or the

results in very high esteem, I do think the data are important to report as an act of

vulnerability. The work of overcoming prejudice and addressing internalized racism

depends heavily on one's willingness to be vulnerable. I am publishing these results as a

way of demonstrating my journey. The wording I am using is precisely from the website

including the titles of the tests. There were only two tests for which my results shifted

between the pre- and post-intervention: the Arab-Muslims IAT and the Native American

IAT. Initially I tested as having a moderate automatic preference for Other People over

Arab Muslims but in the post-intervention I had a slight automatic preference for Arab

Muslims over Other People. I tested as having a moderate automatic association for

American with White American and Foreign with Native American before the

intervention but in the post-intervention test as having a weak automatic association for

American with White American and Foreign with Native American. The other three tests

remained the same both pre- and post-intervention. I tested as having a moderate

automatic association for European American with American and Asian Americans with

Foreign; a moderate automatic preference for Light Skinned People over Dark Skinned

People, and no automatic preference between Black people and White people (Appendix

F).

Pre- and Post-surveys

In reading the pre- and post-surveys, I had the impression that the pre-survey was

more hopeful, positive, and optimistic than the post-survey. To investigate this

impression, I choose eleven words from the responses and classified them as either

positive or negative and then calculated the percentages of use in both surveys. I graphed

the percentages of each word along with the total positive or negative word use

percentage. The data do not overwhelmingly support or refute my impression (Figures 1
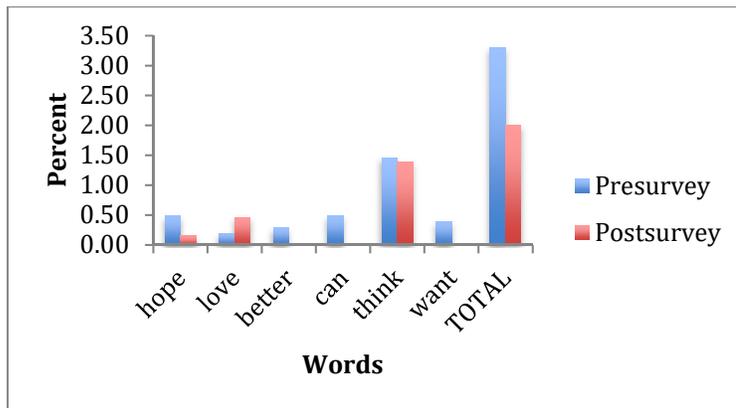
and 2).

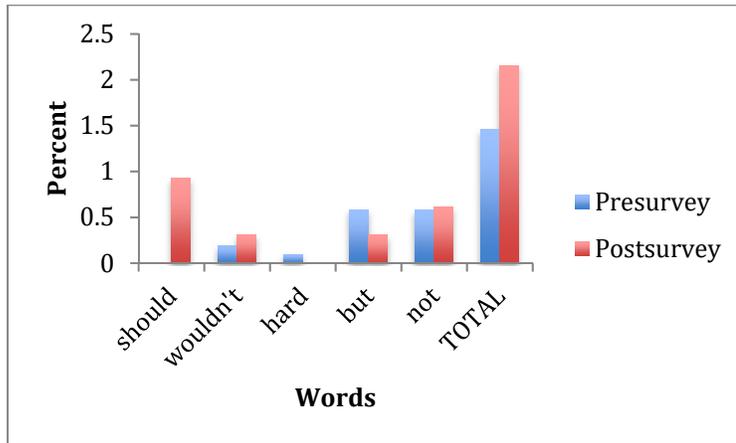*Figure 1:* Positive Word Use Percentages in Pre- and Post-surveys

Figure 2: Negative Word Use Percentages in Pre- and Post-surveys

In addition to the tone of the surveys, I noted that the responses to the pre-survey questions were longer. The mean word count for the pre-survey was 101 and the post-survey is 59. The shorter, more concise answers in my post-intervention survey contributed to the impression of decreased optimism and positivity.

Question Number	Pre-survey	Post-survey
1	99	175
2	95	68
3	61	43
4	99	38
5	169	100
6	95	35
7	69	30
8	33	34
9	192	11
Mean	101.3333333	59.33333333
Standard Deviation	47.41307836	47.4458756

Table 1: Total Number of Words Per Question in the Pre- and Post-intervention Surveys

One set of responses in which my attitude soured notably was to the question, 'What do you feel is your strongest attribute as an antiracist educator?'

> Pre: My drive, sense of justice, my belief in the possibility of something better, and my belief that love is a political and radical act that can shape our world for the better.

> Post: I'm not feeling comfortable assuming that label for myself at this time. I think before I started this project I felt more confident about myself as an antiracist educator than I do now.

Alternatively, my response to "Do you feel equipped to negotiate conversations about race, whiteness, and privilege with parents? Why?" shifted positively after the intervention.

> Pre: No. I do not. I barely even feel confident having conversations about the children. But I am interested in gaining this skill. I think I would initially need to have an opportunity in some kind of official capacity. Like if I was acting as a speaker or sharing information in a meeting or workshop, I think I would feel more confident. But in an interpersonal interaction I would likely feel less confident. I certainly wouldn't initiate it. Perhaps, I will be in the position to talk about race with families because of my study and the assent letter.

> Post: I do. It wouldn't necessarily be comfortable but I do feel capable of having those conversations. This project has opened doors for parents to approach me with questions and stories. That has been a fantastic side effect.

Interestingly in both surveys I mentioned cultural folders in response to the question: "If you could envision an antiracist/ antibias Montessori environment, what would you see?" Cultural folders are a Montessori material comprised of high quality photos compiled by the adults in the environment that are meant to represent the diversity of life on each continent. In the pre-survey I answered, "…cultural folders would have to be created with great attention to detail and implications, hopefully vetted by others. Perhaps the school would have a master set that the staff created together very

intentionally." Post-survey I said, "…cultural folders could be reimagined and

investigated." In this question and in several others I also discussed the importance of the

books that are read and shared in the Children's House. In the responses to this same

question in the pre-survey I said, "I would hope to have a variety of books available both

in the library and for the guides to share that depict the lives of racially diverse people."

In the post-survey in response to the question: How would you explain white supremacy

to a child (3-6)?, I mentioned, "… reading and discussing books that have both positive

and negative images and concepts– this also encourages them to be critical thinkers/

readers." This idea is based on a reading I did over the course of my intervention that

discussed critical reading with children as an antiracist educational tool. In this reading

the authors also discussed challenging any negative images in children's books with the

children. I was struck by this idea and have gone on to use it in my work since reading it,

not only for problematic images of race but also of gender and ability. The shift from

thinking all books had to be heavily vetted to being openly critical of any books that do

depict problematic ways of thinking is a direct result from my intervention.

Daily Tally and Optimism Scale

My hypothesis was that both the tally and the optimism scale response values

would increase over time and would follow a somewhat parallel pattern. The results did

not support this hypothesis (Figure 3). Although they appear to have some shared

patterns, it is not consistent overall that when a high tally score was recorded that a high

optimism scale score was also recorded. The trendlines indicate that there is little to no

change over time in the optimism scale and a slight negative trend in the tally response

values. These results were unexpected based on my hypothesis but not surprising based on my experience of the intervention.
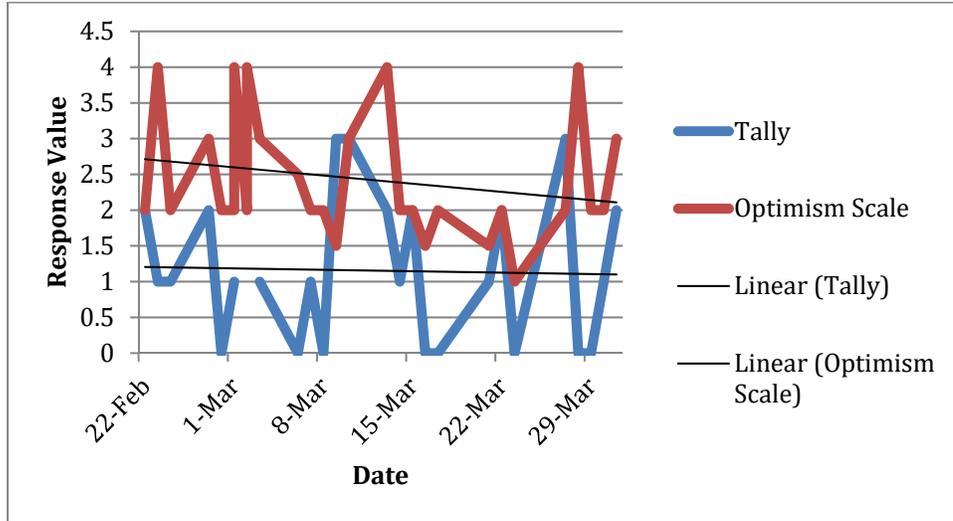

Figure 3: Tally and Optimism Scale Trends

In addition to graphing the trends, I took the mean, standard deviation, and mode for both the tally and optimism scale data. The mean daily tally was 1 with a standard deviation of 0.9; the mode was also 1. The mean optimism scale response was 2.4, with a standard deviation of 0.8, and the mode was 2. Additionally, I wanted to look at what the trends were in the reoccurrence of each response– meaning how many times I repeated the same response over the course of the intervention. I calculated the occurrence of every value for both the scale and the tally and then found the percentage of the total responses for each reoccurring response. I also calculated the mean and standard deviation for the reoccurring responses. The mean of reoccurrence in the daily tally was 9 times with a standard deviation of 3.9 and the mean of reoccurrence in the optimism scale was 4 times with a standard deviation of 4. I graphed the rates of reoccurrence with

the standard deviation error bars (Figures 4 and 5). It was heartening to see that I never placed myself at a 0 on the optimism scale.
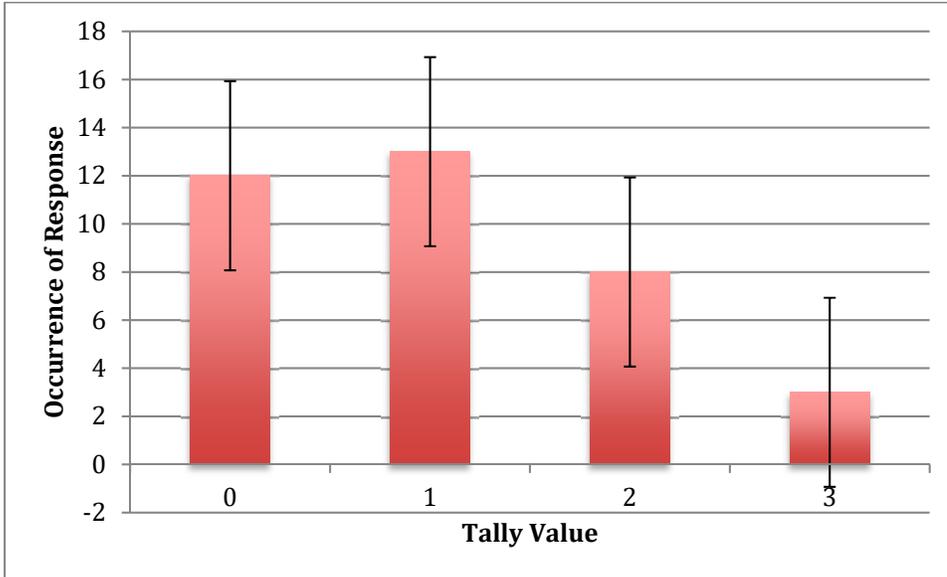

Figure 4: Daily Tally Response Reoccurrence
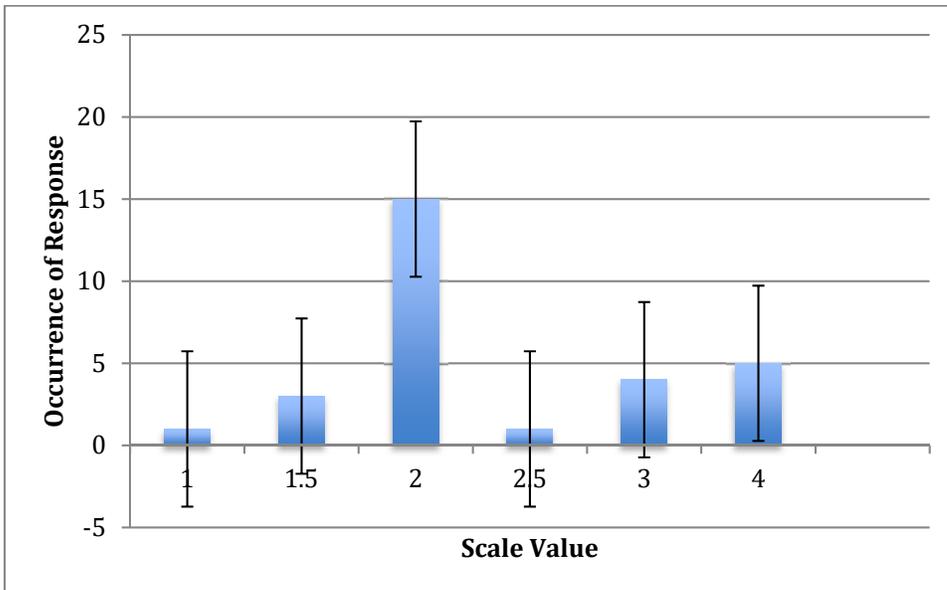

Figure 5: Optimism Scale Response Reoccurrence

Daily Reflections

I analyzed the daily reflections by coding my responses according to themes. I had devised several themes before I began coding but I also added themes as they

emerged. In the end, I had a total of eighteen themes. As I coded my responses by color, I also recorded the dates of the responses in a spreadsheet. The most prevalent themes I identified were community, teaching practices, no reflection, and directly from the reading, all these themes had at least eighteen recorded reflections. There also emerged a second tier of prevalent themes that reoccurred at least thirteen times; these included politics or current affairs, skin color, area of improvement, and discouragement (Figure 6).
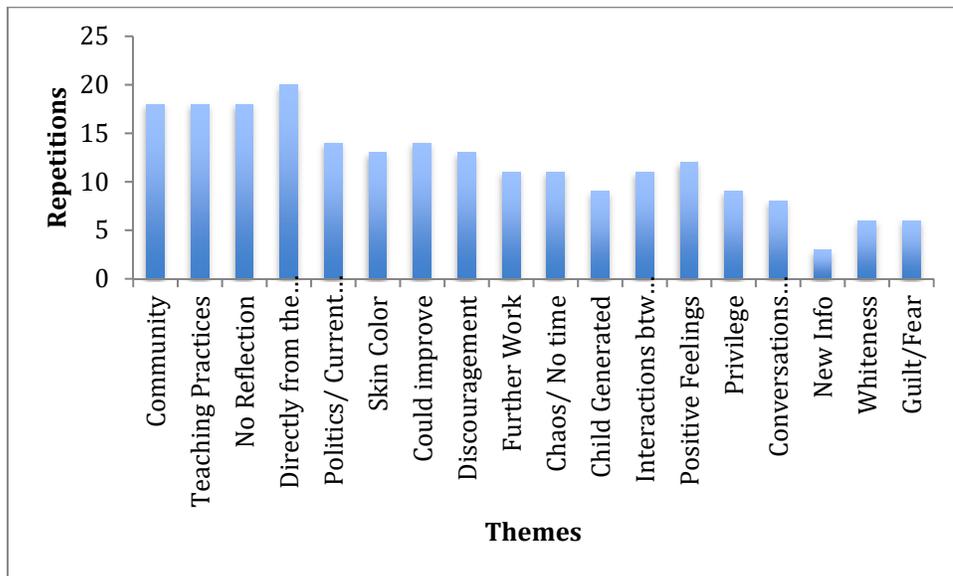

Figure 6: Repetitions of Themes in Daily Reflections

It came as no surprise to me that 'community' was a prevalent theme. I sensed throughout the intervention that community was very important. Whether I was lamenting the lack of community I felt or fantasizing about an ideal community I wanted to be a part of, it resurfaced frequently. The importance of community in antiracist work is supported by the research (Henze et al., 1998; Matias & Mackey, 2016, Derman-Sparks & Phillips, 1997). I was also not surprised that 'no reflection' surfaced as a prevailing theme, especially considering the most common tally recordings were 0 and 1.

I wasn't reflecting on the readings or on race and racism during my workday as much as I had predicted.

I did not expect to see so many of the reflections come directly from the reading, but it does make sense. I was expecting to see more responses based on events in the Children's House. Instead, I often explicitly discussed what I had read, rather than relating it to my daily work experience.

Of the second tier responses, I was surprised to see 'skin color' as having so many recurrences in the research. This is in keeping with much of what I read about discussing race with a young child. Many of the readings encouraged educators to discuss race with children by first noticing differences in skin color among members of the community. This way of approaching conversations about race with young children is supported by the Montessori theory that describes children 3 to 6 years old as very concrete thinkers. Race itself is a very abstract concept but skin color is a concrete representation of this abstraction. The fact that 'discouragement' had enough reoccurrences to be considered second tier was also unexpected. But it is in congruence with the other results of a lack of optimism.

Conclusion

It was unexpected to see so little change in the tally and scale responses over the course of the intervention. Perhaps if the intervention had been longer or if the experimental design had explicitly included more community support, I would have seen more change. I also expected that I would see more of a relationship between the tally and the optimism scale, for instance on days when I was reflecting a lot, I would feel more optimistic. But that does not account for the fact that some reflections are not

optimistic! This could be further investigated by creating a data collection tool in which the emotional quality of each reflection was recorded using symbols to represent "positive" reflections and "negative" reflections.

Action Plan

Indications from the Results

My research would have benefitted from a more defined "desired outcome". I went into the research with a lot of curiosity and openness but without explicit ideas of what "success" would look like. Although this open approach is often helpful, in this instance it led me to the emotional conclusion that my research was unsuccessful. A concrete vision of a successful result of the intervention would have given me an evaluative framework for the experience. Post-research, I can imagine my "desired outcomes" being: changes I would like to make in my practice, ways I would like to extend my research into my community, and refined plans for future research. Reflecting on the intervention with those "desired outcomes" in mind, the research feels successful. Framing this research as a first step in a longer journey towards an antiracist Montessori philosophy gives me much needed perspective.

The results indicate that this manner of engaging with antiracism did not increase optimism and rate of antiracist reflection but did increase confidence and fluency around issues of racism in education The research was isolating by design therefore my perceived increase in feelings of isolation was unsurprising. The feelings of isolation, increased discouragement, and decreased motivation over the course of the intervention could have been mitigated through the inclusion of an anti-racist teacher community – perhaps in the form of a discussion group. This finding is supported by the existing

research on the importance of community and discussion in antiracist teacher education

(Derman-Sparks & Phillips, 1997; Henze et al., 1998).

Initially, this research made me feel more distant from my work community because it was isolating; I had a sense of working as a satellite. I was disillusioned with both my school community and my Montessori community at large. This feeling dissipated as I continued in my research and had the opportunity to speak to my colleagues about it. Above all, I believe these feelings of isolation stemmed from my need for conversation as a means of integrating new information, but because I was the only person engaged in this work, I did not have a way to meet that need. I did find that the reaction from the families in my Children's House was especially heartening. I was required to send out a letter of assent explaining my research, so the families were aware of the project and it opened an avenue of communication allowing them to share their concerns about race and child development with me. This outcome was galvanizing and has brought to my attention the need for resources on issues of race and racism for parents in my community.

Variables in the Research

I felt rather overwhelmed by the addition of the readings and reflections in conjunction with my existing coursework while simultaneously working full time. I think this feeling may have contributed to my lowered level of optimism. My lack of optimism was frequently related to feeling that it was "too much" to integrate Montessori and antiracist education but I may have felt differently if I had not been personally overextended. I think in a research design where the participants were performing the intervention in a group, this feeling may be alleviated by the ability to discuss and

compare in a community. This highlights again the need for community support in this work (Derman-Sparks & Phillips, 1997).

Another variable worth noting was that during my post-intervention week, I was beginning my data analysis. Analyzing the data included reviewing and thematically categorizing my reflections. This could be classified as a form of antiracist engagement and may have affected my results for that post-intervention week. Time did not permit me to take an extra week before I began my data analysis but in an ideal scenario, that week would not have included any additional antiracist engagement above my baseline.

Effects on My Practice

This research has affected my practice in many ways. Most specifically, I feel more confident when talking to parents about race and racism, which was something going into the research I felt very insecure about, as evidenced by my pre-survey response. I am also operating with a more robust knowledge of antiracism because of the volume of literature I consumed over the six weeks of the intervention.

Through this process I have come to a better understanding of what my ideal community looks like. This understanding will help me either find or shape this ideal community of educators. With the insights I gained from this work, I now know that I would like to be a member of a community that is actively and deeply engaged in dismantling white supremacy. This desire is something I could have guessed for myself before embarking on this research but now I know that an engaged community is essential for me to feel successful as an antiracist educator. Additionally, in keeping with the ourboric nature of action research, this study has led to the generation of many more ideas for further investigations on the topic of antiracist Montessori integration.

Possible Impact on Teacher Preparation

I have come to the conclusion that the intentional inclusion of antiracist philosophy into Montessori training programs is essential for the integration of the two pedagogies. I believe that as a Montessori community, we should consider retroactive antiracist training for all practitioners who have already been trained as well as incorporating antiracist teacher training into the Montessori programs for future trainees. It would be especially effective for these trainings to be lead by practicing antiracist Montessori educators.

Future Action Research

In the future, I plan to focus my research question more directly on the integration of antiracist educational technique and the Montessori method because I believe it is most crucial to investigate and reflect on. Through the readings I did for the literature review and the intervention, I saw a dearth of research investigating the intersections of these two pedagogical approaches. Approaching pedagogy and building school communities from an antiracist perspective would improve Montessori practices. More research on the integration of Montessori with antiracist education would support educators in that process. I am interested in identifying and describing Montessori communities that have been successful in integrating Montessori practice with antiracist philosophy as a means of promoting this work.

I am interested in facilitating a group of Montessori primary educators engaged in antiracist education as a future action research intervention. The hardest part of this project for me was working in isolation. In my reflections and in my sense of the project, I came to believe that a lack of community had a negative impact on my sense of

optimism and my sense of the overall effectiveness of the intervention. Additionally, because of the isolated methodology, I lost motivation over time; this would be mitigated by the addition of a community of peers – and their enthusiasm and energy. Existing research already promotes the power of community in antiracist work (Derman-Sparks & Philips, 1997; Henze et al., 1998).

My proposed intervention would be a group of Montessori primary educators (including guides, assistants, support staff, and administrators) engaged in a weekly reading and discussion group with an individual daily written reflection, tally, and optimism scale. The group would meet at the beginning of each week to discuss a weekly reading and their experiences in their environments. Throughout the week each participant would be responsible for recording reflections, tallies, and the optimism scale. It would be enlightening to have educators paired up to do monthly observations. These observations would serve to bolster the authenticity of their connections. The sessions would also provide an opportunity to see a peer attempting antiracist education and get feedback. This group would be a yearlong commitment with the opportunity to continue if the participants found it useful. It would be invaluable for all participants who are interested to be involved in the action research process as a means of maintaining commitment and of disseminating the skills of action research within the Montessori community.

In reading my reflections, two engagements came up as having the most profound impact: *Citizen: An American Lyric* (Rankine, 2014) and a speech by Dr. Nicole Evans of City Garden Montessori in St. Louis, Missouri. *Citizen* is a lyric essay in which Rankine (2014) uses poetry and personal essay to evoke in the reader the sensation of being the

target of racial microagressions – quotidian acts of indignity perpetrated against oppressed people that take the form of microassault, microinsult, or microinvalidation (Sue et al, 2007) – the tension builds slowly throughout the work and Rankine (2014) very effectively undermines the reader's sense of reality. I believe this work has such an impact both because of its beauty and potency and because it elicits an emotional response. The speech by Dr. Nicole Evans – the head of school at City Garden Montessori in St. Louis, MO, a school committed to antiracist, antibias work – also provoked an emotional response. The speech was compellingly personally but also dealt with themes of bringing antiracism to a Montessori community. Hearing Dr. Evans speak about her Montessori community was heartening and deeply affirming for me. I believe the emotional component of these two engagements demonstrates the importance of connecting with antiracist work on an emotional level. The research also supports the use of the participants' emotional response in the process of unlearning internalized racism (Matias & Mackey, 2016). To this end, the media selected for the engagements should be considered as much for emotional impact as for academic merit. Works that evoke emotional responses should definitely be included in the list of engagements and exercises should be designed to tease out and investigate those responses. Creative approaches and more narrative styles are the most emotionally evocative for me, but if I were designing engagements for a group, an initial survey would help to determine what kinds of media sources are the most evocative for the participants.

Contributions of the Research

   This research contributes to the existing research on antiracist teacher training because it follows a white teacher in the process of antiracist auto-education, thus helping

to bolster an area of research that is lacking. Additionally, the research begins to explore

the attunement of Montessori philosophy with antiracist educational philosophy,

particularly by highlighting the need for integration in the eyes of one practitioner.

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Appendix A

Engagement Resources

Whiteness/ White Privilege
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Appendix B

Schedule of Readings

Date	Material	Creator
02/05/17	I Am Not Your Negro'	Written by James Baldwin, Directed by Raoul Peck
02/06/17	White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack	Peggy McIntosh
02/07/17	The Case for Reparations	Ta-Nehisi Coates
02/08/17	Reflection is Action: The Struggle for White Educators to Balance Internal and External Antiracist Efforts	Elizabeth R. Schulman
02/09/17	Confronting Institutionalized Racism	Camara Phyllis Jones
02/12/17	The Future of Race in America	Michelle Alexander (TED Talk)
02/13/17	Citizen	Claudia Rankine
02/14/17	Citizen	Claudia Rankine
02/15/17	Citizen	Claudia Rankine
02/16/17	White Fragility	Robin D'Angelo
02/19/17	White Teacher Know Thyself	Jamie Utt & Shelly Tochluk
02/20/17	Breakin Down Whiteness in Antiracist Teaching	Cherly Matias & Janiece Mackey
02/21/17	Twenty Years of Critical Race Theory	Kimberle Williams Crenshaw
02/22/17	The Essence of Innocence	Goff et al
02/23/17	How I learned to stop worrying and love talking about race	Jay Smooth (TED Talk)
02/26/17	A Teacher Like Me: Does Race, Ethnicity, or Gender Matter?	Thomas S Dee
02/27/17	Acquiring Double Images	Seidl & Hancock
02/28/17	Schools and the New Jim Crow	Interview with Michelle Alexander by Jody Sokolower
03/01/17	Young Children Learning Racial and Ethnic Matters	Debra Van Ausdale & Joe R. Feagin
03/02/17	Race: Some Teachable- and Uncomfortable- Moments	Heidi Tolentino
03/05/17	Helping Students See Each Other's Humanity	L. Janelle Dance
03/06/17	A Historical and Theoretical Context to the Current Debates on Racism in Education	Julie Kallin & Maxine Greene
03/07/17	The Moral and Demographic Imperative for Antiracist Education	Julie Kallin & Maxine Greene
03/08/17	The Hidden Dimensions of Liberal Racism: How White	Julie Kallin & Maxine

	Teachers Perceive the Problem of Racism in Their Schools	Greene
03/09/17	Valuing Students Home Worlds by Eugene E. Garcia	Eugene E. Garcia
03/12/17	Recognizing the Likelihood of Reproducing Racism	Eduardo Bonilla-Silva & David G. Embrick
03/13/17	Staying Hopeful	Ronald David Glass
03/14/17	Developing Antiracist School Policy	David Gilborn
03/15/17	Teacher Reflection and Race in Cultural Contexts: History, Meanings, and Methods of Teaching	Richard Milner
03/16/17	Storying A White Teacher	Samuel Jaye Tanner

Appendix C

Reflection Prompts

- Education as a practice of freedom looks like…
- This work feels important to me today because…
- This work feels challenging today because…
- To push against the tide of white supremacy, I can…
- I saw the impact of racism today in…
- I feel… about this work today because…
- I challenged white supremacy today by…
- I didn't challenge white supremacy today when…
- Today I am/was motivated by…

Appendix D

Daily Optimism Scale

0	1	2	3	4
Not optimistic about integration of Montessori with anti-racist education	Little optimism about integration of Montessori with anti-racist education	Some optimism about integration of Montessori with anti-racist education	Optimistic about integration of Montessori with anti-racist education	Optimistic with concrete visions of the integration of Montessori with anti-racist education

Appendix E

Pre-/ Post- Intervention Survey

1. How would you explain white supremacy to a child (3-6)?
2. Do you feel whiteness and privilege inform your work on a daily basis? Explain.
3. How would you approach a coworker in a conversation about race?
4. Do you feel equipped to negotiate conversations about race, whiteness, and privilege with parents? Why?
5. If you could envision an antiracist/ antibias Montessori environment, what would you see?
6. Do you think that Montessori is compatible with antiracist/ antibias education? Why?
7. What tools do you feel you still need to be an antiracist educator?
8. What do you feel is your strongest attribute as an antiracist educator?
9. What motivates you to be an antiracist educator?

Appendix F
Implicit Assumptions Test Results

Arab-Muslim IAT
- Pre-intervention

The sorting test you just took is called the Implicit Association Test (IAT). You categorized words of Good and Bad with words of Arab Muslims and Other People.

Here is your result:

Your data suggest a moderate automatic preference for Other People over Arab Muslims.

Your result is described as an "Automatic preference for Arab Muslims" if you were faster responding when *Arab Muslims* and *Good* are assigned to the same response key than when *Other People* and *Good* were classified with the same key. Your score is described as an "Automatic preference for Other People" if the opposite occured.

- Post-intervention

The sorting test you just took is called the Implicit Association Test (IAT). You categorized words of Good and Bad with words of Arab Muslims and Other People.

Here is your result:

Your data suggest a slight automatic preference for Arab Muslims over Other People.

Your result is described as an "Automatic preference for Arab Muslims" if you were faster responding when *Arab Muslims* and *Good* are assigned to the same response key than when *Other People* and *Good* were classified with the same key. Your score is described as an "Automatic preference for Other People" if the opposite occurred.

Asian American IAT
- Pre-intervention

The sorting test you just took is called the Implicit Association Test (IAT). You categorized American and Foreign images with European American and Asian American.

Here is your result:

Your data suggest a moderate automatic association for American with European American and Foreign with Asian American.

Your result is described as an "Automatic association for American with European American and Foreign with Asian American" if you were faster responding when *European American* and *American* are assigned to the same response key than when *European American* and *Foreign* were classified with the same key. Your score is described as an "Automatic association for American with Asian American and Foreign with European American if the opposite occured.

- Postintrevention

The sorting test you just took is called the Implicit Association Test (IAT). You categorized American and Foreign images with European American and Asian American.

Here is your result:

Your data suggest a moderate automatic association for American with European American and Foreign with Asian American.

Light Skinned and Dark Skinned IAT
- Pre-intervention

The sorting test you just took is called the Implicit Association Test (IAT). You categorized good and bad words with images of Dark Skinned People and Light Skinned People.

Here is your result:

Your data suggest a moderate automatic preference for Light Skinned People over Dark Skinned People.

Your result is described as an "Automatic preference for Dark Skinned People over Light Skinned People" if you were faster responding when *Dark Skinned People* and *Good* are assigned to the same response key than when *Light Skinned People* and *Good* were classified with the same key. Your score is described as an "Automatic preference for Light Skinned People over Dark Skinned People" if the opposite occured.

- Post-intervention

The sorting test you just took is called the Implicit Association Test (IAT). You categorized good and bad words with images of Dark Skinned People and Light Skinned People.

Here is your result:

Your data suggest a moderate automatic preference for Light Skinned People over Dark Skinned People.

Native American IAT
- Pre-intervention

You have completed the study.

Your result:

Your data suggest a moderate automatic association for American with White American and Foreign with Native American.

- Post-intervention

The sorting test you just took is called the Implicit Association Test (IAT). You categorized American and Foreign images with White American and Native American.

Here is your result:

Your data suggest a weak automatic association for American with White American and Foreign with Native American.

Race IAT

- Pre-intervention

The sorting test you just took is called the Implicit Association Test (IAT). You categorized good and bad words with images of Black people and White people.

Here is your result:

Your data suggest no automatic preference between Black people and White people.

Your result is described as an "Automatic preference for Black people over White people" if you were faster responding when *Black people* and *Good* are assigned to the same response key than when *White people* and *Good* were classified with the same key. Your score is described as an "Automatic preference for White people over Black people" if the opposite occured.

- Post-intervention

The sorting test you just took is called the Implicit Association Test (IAT). You categorized good and bad words with images of Black people and White people.

Here is your result:

Your data suggest no automatic preference between Black people and White people.

Your result is described as an "Automatic preference for Black people over White people" if you were faster responding when *Black people* and *Good* are assigned to the same response key than when *White people* and *Good* were classified with the same key. Your score is described as an "Automatic preference for White people over Black people" if the opposite occurred.