The Impact of Anti-Bias Literature Small Groups on Children's Understanding of Themselves, their Families, and Others

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Abstract

The purpose of this action research study was to explore how sharing anti-bias children’s books in literature small groups in a lower elementary Montessori class affects children’s perceptions of and ability to communicate about themselves, their families, and others, as well as the classmates with whom they choose to associate. The sample studied in this research was a class of 20 children aged six to nine at a private Montessori school located in a small town adjacent to a large Midwestern city. Data was collected through pre and post oral interviews, written reading reflection worksheets, and daily teacher observations of children’s work and play partners. The study found that anti-bias literature small groups are an effective way to improve children’s perceptions of themselves and their ability to communicate about human difference. More research is needed about how to improve children’s perceptions of their families and their ability to communicate about human similarity. Additionally, a longer intervention period and refined data collection tool are recommended in order to learn more about the impact of anti-bias literature small groups on children’s choice of work and play partners.

*Keywords:* Anti-bias, literature, Montessori
On the 22nd of May 1937, Dr. Maria Montessori (1937/2007) proclaimed to educators gathered in Copenhagen for a conference entitled *Education for Peace*:

And these poor, selfish creatures, which experimental psychology has proved are mentally exhausted, find themselves in later life like separate grains of sand in the desert; each one is isolated from his neighbor, and all of them are barren. If a storm comes up, these little human particles possessed of no life-giving spirituality are caught up in the gusts and form a deadly whirlwind.

Was Dr. Montessori reflecting on the fascist movements of the early 20th century in Europe or prophesying the burgeoning hate movements of the early 21st century in the United States? Could she be speaking to the isolation and desperation of the individuals and groups responsible for the 17 percent increase in hate crimes between 2016 and 2017 (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2018)? Her words ring true in her place and time, as well as in ours.

Our society today is full of gusts, as Dr. Montessori says, that threaten to sweep atomistic individuals into deadly whirlwinds of hate and destruction. Systemic forms of oppression—racism, sexism, classism, ableism, the normativity of “the traditional family,” and others—all have the effect of isolating humans from one another based on false perceptions of superiority and inferiority. In an attempt to combat these systems of oppression, in the last several decades, early childhood educators in the United States have tended to adopt a “colorblind”—and correspondingly, “gender-blind,” “class-blind,” etc.—approach in schools (Derman-Sparks, 2006). However, though colorblind approaches appear to be politically neutral, they actually work to exacerbate oppression in schools and society (Kalin, 2002). It is certainly my experience as a Montessori
elementary teacher that, when allowed to remain unspoken, the destructive powers of social inequity run rampant. In my lower elementary class (first-third grade) in recent years, I have observed my students harm and be harmed by internalized superiority and oppression. This looks like a girl in a math lesson sighing, “Boys are just better at math.” It looks like a white child, who is a citizen of the United States, informing a brown child, who is also a citizen, that the latter is “not American.” It looks like a white child responding to a book about slavery by saying, “White people are evil. We’re all bad!” These statements exemplify the ways systems of social inequity are internalized, used to put others down, and even, paradoxically, erode the self-esteem of the privileged.

The fact that children recognize and interpret power-laden markers of identity is validated by much scholarship. Children develop an awareness of their own “self”—and conversely, the “other”—at around 18 months, and this understanding begins to shape their behavior (Baldwin & Moses, 1996). This self-concept includes multiple identities, including gender (Poulin-Debois, Serbin, Derbyshire A, 1998; Stennes, Burch, Sen, Bauer, 2005; Campbell, Shirley, Caygill, 2002; Levy, 1999; Zosuls et al., 2009), race (Katz, 1976; Ramsey & Meyers, 1990; Katz & Kofkin, 1997; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001; Katz 2003; Ramsey & Williams, 2003), and socioeconomic status (Leahy, 1983; Ramsey, 1991; Chafel 1997). This means that by the time a child enters first grade at age six, they are well aware of the similarities and differences between themselves and others. Pretending otherwise is insulting to their intelligence and dangerous to the classroom society, as well as society at large.

With these facts in mind, it is vital that today’s teachers embrace seeing and loving all markers of identity and empowering their students to do the same. But if
“blinded” teaching is to be discarded, what is the alternative? Educators and scholars have posited many answers to this question, including Anti-Bias Education (ABE), a practice that has been developed by Louise Derman-Sparks and her collaborators. ABE is a way of teaching that supports children and their families as they develop a sense of identity in a diverse society. It helps children learn to be proud of themselves and their families, respect a range of human differences, recognize unfairness and bias, and speak up for the rights of others (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010). This approach dovetails beautifully with the Montessori method in many ways and provided the theoretical framework for this action research project. While many put their hope in the work of adults, both Derman-Sparks and Dr. Montessori preach that societal change must start with the child. Derman-Sparks and Edwards (2010) state:

Racism and other biases are part of our society and part of what children have to learn to deal with, to become savvy about. What we are about in education is preparing children for the future—giving them what they need to be successful. We need to give children a critical perspective and appropriate tools.

Similarly, Dr. Montessori (1958/1995) proclaims:

If help and salvation are to come, they can only come from the children, for the children are the makers of men.

One avenue for ABE is anti-bias children’s literature, which was the focus of this study. While many educators and scholars have studied the use of literature in early childhood education in general and anti-bias literature in particular, there is little research on the implementation of such curriculum in Montessori environments. Little is known
about the impact of sharing anti-bias literature in a Montessori classroom in which children have significantly more autonomy than in a traditional classroom, for example, the freedom to attend any small group lesson, to read independently at any time in the school day, and to choose their own work partners. Consequently, there is a need to gather and share information about working with anti-bias literature in Montessori contexts. The purpose of this action research study was to explore how sharing anti-bias children’s books in literature small groups in a lower elementary Montessori class affects children’s perceptions of and ability to communicate about themselves, their families, and others, as well as the classmates with whom they choose to associate. Specifically, the study asked: To what extent does reading anti-bias children’s books in literature small groups affect:

- Children’s perceptions of themselves and their families?
- Children’s abilities to effectively communicate about human difference and similarity?
- Who children choose to work and play with at school?

**Literature Review**

**Anti-Bias Education**

Over the last five decades, Louise Derman-Sparks and her collaborators have developed Anti-Bias Education. Educators practice ABE by designing instruction around the Four Goals of Anti-Bias Education (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010):

1. Each child will demonstrate self-awareness, confidence, family pride, and positive social identities.
2. Each child will express comfort and joy with human diversity; accurate language for human differences; and deep, caring human connections.

3. Each child will increasingly recognize unfairness, have language to describe unfairness, and understand that unfairness hurt.

4. Each child will demonstrate empowerment and the skills to act, with others or alone, against prejudice and/or discriminatory actions.

This study focused primarily on ABE Goals 1 and 2.

ABE in the early childhood classroom (birth-age eight) can be implemented in a wide variety of ways, including:

- Art activities focused on skin tone (Lee, Ramsey & Sweeney, 2008)
- Role play using dolls and differently sized dollhouses to represent socioeconomic status (Lee, Ramsey & Sweeney, 2008)
- Inviting visitors who are differently-abled to share about how they creatively problem solve (Kuh, LeeKeenan, Given & Beneke, 2016)
- Pointing out bias in day-to-day classroom experiences, for example, bandages labeled “skin tone,” and supporting children’s organic activist responses, for example, writing a letter to the bandage company (Derman-Sparks, 1998)
- Using “family homework” to engage children and families in thinking about differences and similarities between them, for example, “What are your family’s three favorite foods?” (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2011)
- Exploring children’s literature with anti-bias themes in small groups (Certo, Moxley, Reffitt & Miller, 2010; Fain, 2008).
It is this final approach that this study focused on, specifically, the implementation of anti-bias literature small groups in a lower elementary Montessori environment.

**Literature Small Groups**

The model of literature small groups is known by many names, including literature circles (Short, Harste, & Burke, 1996), book clubs (Raphael & McMahon, 1994), literature discussion groups (Routman, 1991), and conversational discussion groups (O’Flahavan, 1988). Researchers generally agree, however, that these small groups are student-centered, heterogeneous in composition, and provide opportunities for students to talk about children's literature (Frank, Dixon, & Brandts, 2001). There is no single approach to implementing literature small groups, but the general idea is to move teachers and students away from the dominant “initiating-response-evaluation” (I-R-E) discourse structure in which the teacher initiates a question, students respond to the questions, and the teacher evaluates the response (Cazden, 1988). Instead, the focus is on collaborative meaning-making that promotes analysis, reflection and critical thinking (Certo et al., 2001).

Research has found that students tend to have a positive experience working in literature small groups. Findings include the student perception that when they help one another more, they learn more (Elbau, Schumm, & Vaughn, 1997), and that they enjoy reading in a small groups more than independently or as a whole class (Burns, 1998). According to Certo’s 2010 study of 270 elementary students participating in literature circles, out of the group of 24 stratified and randomized students who were interviewed, 23 reported enjoying literature circles, referring to them as “fun” and “the best part of language arts.” Specifically, the study found that students enjoyed meeting new friends,
increased student-to-student talk, and getting to read “real books,” as opposed to reading textbooks. In keeping with these findings, one of Certo’s main conclusions was that literature circles have the potential to rejuvenate excitement about teaching and invoke excitement about reading and discussion among students.

In preparing to implement literature circles, Rafael (1994) suggests:

- Identifying good literature around an identifiable theme.
- Talking with students about the differences between conversations about books and answering questions.
- Introducing reading logs instead of workbooks.
- Discussing characteristics of good speakers and listeners in small groups.

Rafael’s literature small group model included four components: Reading, writing, community share, and instruction. Reading concerned fluency, reading vocabulary, comprehension strategies, genres, and aesthetic and personal response. For writing, students had eight reading log prompts to choose from, for example, “Character Map: I can think about a character I really liked (or really didn’t like, or thought was interesting). The map can show what I think the character looked like, things the character did, how the character went with other characters, what made this character interesting, and anything else that I think is important.” As the program evolved, students and teachers added to the list of reading log options. Community share was done with the whole class and centered on a variety of relevant topics, such as discussing new vocabulary, debating issues brought up in the text, or sharing pertinent background information related to the text. Finally, instruction was focused on enhancing the quality of literature circle conversations. This included students listening to audio recordings of meetings and analyzing strengths and weaknesses, acting out transcripts of meetings and reflecting on the quality of the
conversation, and observing each other’s literature circles for best practices. Rafael reported that following a year of literature circles, his students’ standardized test scores were equivalent to those students receiving more traditional reading instruction. Also, in the fall following a year of literature circles, his students could remember and talk about at least nine of the 16 books they had read the previous year. In contrast, students who had read from reading textbooks could not recall any titles, authors, or stories they had read the year before.

In most literature small groups, the same book is read and discussed by all participants. However, in Frank’s 2001 study, she documented two years of book clubs in a second grade classroom in which teacher Lois Brandts invited her students to individually choose books that interested them. Brandts’ intention was to inspire children to have real conversations about books, similar to an adult book club. Each week, book club members followed these steps:

- Read a book at your level at least twice on your own and once to an adult.
- Write a letter to your book club and answer some of the questions below. After reading your letter to an adult, copy it over.
  - In a few words, what is the book about? Is there a problem in the book? What is it? Does it get solved? How?
  - Who are the characters? What are they like? Do they change?
  - Why might someone else in our class like to read this book? Is there someone in our room that you would like to tell about this book? Who is it? Why?

Then during book club meetings, students shared their letters and discussed the questions. There are a several other aspects of Brandts’ book club model that stand out. First, Brandts intentionally planned book club meetings while the remaining three-fourths of the class was engaged in reading workshop, i.e., reading silently, choosing new books, and writing in reading
logs. This meant that children not in the book club were able to—and often did—listen in on club discussions and, thereby, shared in those learning opportunities. Second, mirroring refreshments at adult book clubs, Brandts served apple juice at each meeting. This nicety further underscored her intention that the students have “civilized conversations” about literature. Third, Brandts was surprised to find that while was away getting the apple juice toward the end of the meeting, the children continued to talk about their books. Therefore, she started intentionally leaving each group alone for seven to eight minutes to allow them to practice conversing with one another independent of her. In conclusion, Frank likened the experience of Brandts’ book clubs to the findings of Kucan and Beck (1997), who question what is actually learned in and through discourse environments. They suggest that along with academic and social learning about literature, students learn how to learn and that this knowledge about the process of learning can be transferred to other content areas.

**Anti-Bias Themes in Literature**

Anti-bias themes can be defined by any significant human identity: Culture, language, race, gender, socioeconomic status, family structure, ability, etc. (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010). To illustrate how such themes can be explored in literature small groups, considerations related to gender and race were examined with the suggestion that such considerations can be extended to all anti-bias themes.

**Gender.** Derman-Sparks and Edwards (2010) define gender as including both gender anatomy and gender role: “The physical (anatomical) characteristics that will define us as being male or female are a product of our biology. Then our environment (family, culture, peers, society) teaches us male and female expectations; that is, how someone with that anatomy is ‘supposed’ to behave.” A more recent conceptualization of gender comes in the form of an info-
graphic titled “The Gender Unicorn” created by Trans Student Educational Resource. “The Gender Unicorn” (Appendix A) includes five spectrums on which the identifying individual places him/her/them-self: gender identity, gender expression, sex assigned at birth, sexually attracted to, and emotionally attracted to. The combination of these positions constitutes that individual’s unique gender identity (Pan & Moore, 2019).

Derman-Sparks and Edwards (2010) set out specific goals for ABE related to all the major human identities. For gender, there are two sub-goals that fit under ABE Goal 1:

- Children, regardless of gender, will participate in a wide range of activities necessary for their full social-emotional development.
- Children will demonstrate positive feelings about their gender identity and develop clarity about the relationship between their anatomy and their gender role.

There is also one gender sub-goal that fits under ABE Goal 2:

- Children will talk about and show respect for the great diversity in appearance, emotional expressiveness, behavior, and gender roles for both boys and girls.

How can literature small groups be used in service to these goals? When selecting books, it’s important to keep in mind that depictions of different genders are not equally distributed in published children’s literature. In a 2016 study of early childhood classroom libraries, researchers found that of the leading characters in the 691 books surveyed, 54% were cis-male, 28 percent were cis-female, 18% were un-gendered, and there were no books featuring transgendered leading characters (Crisp, Quinn, Bingham, Girardeau, & Starks, 2016). When selecting texts that include representations of gender,
it is important to keep in mind Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop’s (1990) iconic metaphor of literature as window, mirror, and sliding glass door. The selection of literature offered to students should provide opportunities for all to respectfully view unfamiliar experience, see themselves authentically represented, and/or feel transported into worlds other than their own.

Practically, Derman-Sparks and Edwards (2010) suggest that teachers can share books that familiarize children with all parts of the body, including gendered anatomy. Teachers can also choose books that show all genders taking on a wide variety of activities and showing a range of emotions. In discussion based on books, teachers have the dual task of being truthful with children and also remaining sensitive to cultural differences related to conceptions of gender. Additionally, it is important for teachers to be mindful of the gendered balance and content of book discussion, for example, ensuring that boys and girls have equal opportunities to speak, encouraging girls to share their ideas, and supporting boys in expressing their feelings.

**Race.** According to Derman-Sparks and Edwards (2010):

The concept of *race* is a societally defined construct used as a way to fraudulently divide people into groups ranked as superior and inferior. The scientific consensus is that race in this sense has no biological basis—we are all one race, the human race. What the system of race *does* have is a long history in the world as a tool to justify one group’s mistreatment, economic exploitation, and annihilation of other groups.

In their antiracism workshops, Crossroads Antiracism Organizing and Training (2017) further clarifies that *racism* is not the same thing as individual race prejudice and bigotry;
rather, it is systemic power that turns race prejudice into racism. In short, race prejudice, plus misuse of power by systems and institutions equals racism. In the classroom, the history of race in our society is a constant backdrop that must be contended with, as we experience both individual race prejudice and systemic racism (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010). All these factors must be considered when selecting books and facilitating discussion about race and racism.

Derman-Sparks and Edwards suggest two race-specific sub-goals under ABE Goal 1:

- Children will have accurate information about and feel comfortable with their physical characteristics linked to racial identity.
- Children will feel positive, but not superior, about their racial identity.
- There is also one race-specific sub-goal under ABE Goal 2:
  - Children will have accurate information about, and respect for, each other’s individual physical characteristics; they will appreciate their shared human physical characteristics.

Additionally, Derman-Sparks and Ramsey (2011) articulate seven Core Learning Themes for white children engaging in ABE, the first two of which are relevant here:

- Develop authentic identities based on personal abilities and interests, family, history and culture, rather than on white superiority.
- Know, respect, and value the range of the diversity of physical and social attitudes among white people.

Concerning the selection of texts for literature small groups, much could be said about the paucity of children’s books by and about people of color (POC). Since 1985, the Cooperative
Children’s Book Center (CCBC) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison has provided yearly statistics about children’s books published by and about POC. In their 2018 statistical gathering, the CCBC found that out of 3,644 books they received from publishers, only 25 percent contained significant content, topics, characters or themes related to POC. Additionally, just 21 percent were written by POC authors (2019). These percentages are up from previous years, but intentionality is clearly still required when seeking out books that contain ant-bias representations of race.

Best practices for sharing literature about race and racism with children include working with children in small groups and encouraging them to take the lead in discussions (Cowhey, 2006). Lee, Ramsey, and Sweeney (2008) also found that books with a clear storyline led to more discussion with young children. For books without a clear storyline, they suggest stopping frequently, rereading pages, and asking children to elaborate with their own images and words. Additionally, it can be helpful to choose books that have themes familiar to the children in the group, for example, celebrating birthdays in the book Happy Birthday, Martin Luther King. Derman-Sparks and Edwards (2010) concur and also encourage choosing books about children from different racial backgrounds who are doing activities familiar to children in your class, such as visiting a doctor or welcoming a new sibling. The teacher can then help children identify similarities and differences between the characters in the story and themselves by asking open-ended questions, for example:

- What is he/she/they doing that you like to do?
- What is different from what you do?
- How is his/her/their family, home, etc. the same or different from yours?
- Does he/she/they have the same color skin, hair, and eyes as you do?
The message here is, “We are all the same, and we are all different, and it’s all good!”

Derman-Sparks and Edwards (2010) also encourage sharing books that depict children experiencing unfair treatment based on their racial identity. Reading and discussing such stories develops children’s empathy and tools to deal with stereotyping by giving them language to put with their feelings and reactions.

While many adults may argue that young children are not capable of grappling with stories and conversations about racism, Fain (2008) found that the first and second graders in her sheltered English immersion class came to literature circles ready and excited to talk about tough issues related to social justice, specifically racism, and linguicism. Similarly, Marsh (1992) documented how through her implementation of anti-bias curriculum, the kindergarteners in her class became increasingly adept at talking about issues of injustice related to immigration, Native Americans, and cultures around the world. Her students even instigated their own anti-bias actions, including a march for more peaceful conflict resolution at their school and in their neighborhood, as well as a demonstration calling attention to the need for more African American crossing guards. As Derman-Sparks and Edwards (2010) clearly state:

> Children grow up surrounded by misinformation about racial identity, confusing racial categories and terms and contradictions between what people say and do […] Teachers can play a critical role in helping children make sense of the confusing and often emotionally charged messages they receive about who they are racially and how the world feels about who they are.

Anti-bias literature small groups are one tool that facilitates such conversations with children.
Summary

It can be concluded that Anti-Bias Education is needed in schools today and that sharing children’s books with anti-bias themes in small groups is one effective way to meet this need. Research shows that literature small groups produce both positive academic outcomes and foster students’ genuine appreciation of literature. Also, contrary to the common adult belief that children should be sheltered from difficult topics in school, studying anti-bias literature, in fact, generates meaningful learning and action among even young children. When selecting children’s literature, teachers must be prepared to exert extra effort to find quality books centered on anti-bias themes due the societal biases reflected in the publishing industry. Teachers should choose anti-bias books that deal with the physicality of difference (e.g., the science of skin color), portray characters with a wide variety of identities in a wide variety of ways (e.g., showing a range of emotions), have clear storylines (as opposed to abstract forms), include themes and activities familiar to the children (e.g., birthdays), and show humans experiencing unfair treatment because of their identities (e.g., being treated poorly because of disability). In facilitating literature small groups, teachers should ensure that discussion is equitable (e.g., all children have the chance to speak), encouraging encourage children to take the lead in discussions (e.g., follow the direction of children’s interests), and ask open-ended questions about human difference and similarity. Finally, even though sharing anti-bias literature may feel risky to teachers, the long-term benefits to children and our society outweigh the potential pitfalls.
Methodology

This action research study had a qualitative design that utilized pre and post interviews with students conducted by the teacher, student reading reflections, and daily teacher observations. All of these data collection tools were designed to determine if implementing anti-bias literature small groups had an effect on children’s perceptions of themselves and their families, their abilities to effectively communicate about human difference and similarity, and who they choose to work and play with at school. The sample studied in this research was a class of 20 children aged six to nine at a private Montessori school located in a small town adjacent to a large Midwestern City. Data was collected over the course of five weeks during the fall semester of the 2019-2020 school year.

For this study, four data collection tools were used to evaluate the effects of the intervention:

- Pre and post one-on-one interviews in which the teacher asked questions orally and took notes to assess children’s views of themselves and their families and their ability to articulate these views (Appendix B)
- Pre and post one-on-one interviews in which the teacher asked questions orally and took notes to assess children’s views of others who are the same and different from themselves and their ability to articulate these views (Appendix C)
- Reading reflection worksheets following literature small group sessions, which children read and filled out with teacher support, to assess children’s ability to articulate the differences and similarities between themselves and their favorite character (Appendix D)
• Daily teacher observations during morning work period and recess to assess children’s selection of work and play partners (Appendix E)

In the first week of the study, the researcher conducted two pre interviews with each child. In the first interview, the child was asked questions about how they perceive themselves and their families. In the second interview, the child was asked to look at a cut-and-paste collage of people of varying identities that the researcher had created (Appendix F). The researcher then asked the child to identify several people that stood out and explain why, as well as identify one person who was different and one person that was the same as themselves and explain why.

In the second, third, and fourth weeks, everyday the researcher facilitated a literature small group in which she read an anti-bias book aloud. Four children were required to come to each session, meaning that each child in the class came to one session per week for a total of three during the research period. Any other interested children were also invited to come, and the average number of children at each session was approximately seven. While reading the book aloud, the researcher paused for questions, comments, and to ask casual discussion questions, such has “Has anyone else had the experience of seeing something unfair happen to someone else? How did it feel?” At the conclusion of the book, the children called to the lesson were required to complete a reading reflection worksheet, which included questions about who their favorite character was, how their favorite character was the same and different from themselves, and how much they would recommend this book to others. Sometimes children who voluntarily came to the lesson also chose to complete the reading reflection.
Also during the second, third, and fourth weeks, the researcher recorded daily observations of self-selected work and play partners. Observed were conducted once during the morning work period (8:30-11:30) and once during afternoon recess (12:30-1:00) and recorded who each child was working with or playing with. Each observation took about five minutes and offered a momentary snapshot of which children chose to associate with each other.

In the fifth and final week, the researcher conducted two post interviews with the same questions as the pre interviews.

Results

The purpose of this action research study was to explore how sharing anti-bias children’s books in literature small groups in a lower elementary Montessori class affects children’s perceptions of themselves, their families, and others with whom they share commonalities and differences. The study had a qualitative design that utilized pre and post student interviews conducted by the teacher, reading reflections written by students, and daily teacher observations. The sample studied was a Montessori class of 20 lower elementary children at a private Montessori school comprised of two primary classes (aged two-and-half to six), one lower elementary class (aged six to nine), and one upper elementary class (aged nine to twelve). The school is located in a small town that is adjacent to a large Midwestern city and is close to a state university, where many of the students’ parents are employed. At the time of the study, the class was made up of eight first-years (aged six to seven), nine second-years (aged seven to eight), and three-third years (aged eight to nine). There were eight girls and twelve boys in the class. One first-year boy was new to the school and, due to a challenging adjustment process, did not participate in any part of the study. Among the remaining 19 students, a few were occasionally
absent from school over the course of the study, meaning they may have missed a component, for example, completing a reading reflection. Finally, the researcher was also absent one day, meaning she collected data for 24, rather than 25, school days.

**Perception of Self and Family**

The first research question this study addressed was: To what extent does reading anti-bias children’s books in literature small groups affect children’s perceptions of themselves and their families? To answer this question, during the first week and the fifth and final week, the researcher conducted one-on-one oral interviews in which she wrote down the responses (Appendix B). Children responded to the following questions:

1. What are some things you like about how you look?
2. What are some things you like about your family?
3. What are some things you like to do?
4. Is there anything else important about yourself you’d like to share?

To analyze the data, the researcher identified key phrases that children used to answer questions one and two and then grouped these into response categories (Tables 1 and 2). The frequency of each response category in weeks one and five was then analyzed (Figures 1 and 2). The responses to questions three and four did not further the research question; therefore, they have not been analyzed.

Question one asked children what they liked about their own appearance. There were 18 children interviewed in both weeks one and five. These children used 28 key phrases to respond to this question, and these were grouped into five response categories.
Table 1

What I like about how I look

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Natural physical characteristics</th>
<th>My style</th>
<th>Positive descriptors</th>
<th>Non sequiturs</th>
<th>Nothing/I don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eyes</td>
<td>My colors</td>
<td>Cute</td>
<td>I'm nice</td>
<td>Nothing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hair</td>
<td>Silly faces</td>
<td>Pretty</td>
<td>I like to play</td>
<td>I don't know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face</td>
<td>Clothes</td>
<td>Handsome</td>
<td>My bug bite</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freckles</td>
<td>Dyed hair</td>
<td>Awesome</td>
<td>Getting loved on</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smile</td>
<td>Hair with hair gel</td>
<td>I look good</td>
<td>How I eat</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheeks get red when happy</td>
<td>Lipstick</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skin</td>
<td>Ponytail</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big muscles for a kid</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everything</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. What I like about how I look
In week one, children used a total of 35 key phrases to respond to the question. In week five, the total was 39, which represents an 11% increase. The frequency of responses fitting into the categories “Natural physical characteristics,” “Style,” and “Positive descriptors” went up, while the frequency of responses fitting into the categories “Non-sequiturs” and “Nothing/I don’t know” went down. Out of the five children who responded with “nothing” or “I don’t know” in week one, three gave the same answer in week five, while one changed their response to “my cool jacket” (grouped into “Style”) and one changed their response to “I have big muscles for a kid” (grouped in “Natural physical characteristics”). This represents a 40% decreased in the number of children who responded “nothing” or “I don’t know.” Also, the response “my skin” (grouped into “Natural physical characteristics”) did not appear in week one but did appear in week five.

Question two asked children what they liked about their families. The 18 children interviewed used 79 key phrases to respond to this question, and these were grouped into nine response categories.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptors</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Gifts &amp; money</th>
<th>Acts of service</th>
<th>Letting me do things</th>
<th>Family members</th>
<th>Nothing/I don’t know</th>
<th>Physical affection</th>
<th>Miscellaneous</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Loving</td>
<td>Eat together</td>
<td>Ice cream</td>
<td>Make favorite food</td>
<td>Play with friends at his house</td>
<td>Baby doll</td>
<td>I don’t know</td>
<td>Hug together</td>
<td>Dad sleeps a lot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweet</td>
<td>Celebrate birthdays</td>
<td>Go out to eat</td>
<td>Made toy jeep</td>
<td>Take showers by myself</td>
<td>Older brothers</td>
<td>Nothing</td>
<td>Hug and kisses</td>
<td>Brother asks me questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kind</td>
<td>Like doing the same things</td>
<td>Get me presents</td>
<td>Take care of me</td>
<td>Bake my own things</td>
<td>Brother’s long hair</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>How they look</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funny</td>
<td>Go outside</td>
<td>Buy me stuff</td>
<td>Tuck me in at night</td>
<td>Take me places I like to go</td>
<td>Baby cousin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>They are close around me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun</td>
<td>Play with me</td>
<td>Pay money for chores</td>
<td>Buckle me in the car</td>
<td>Go to baseball games</td>
<td>Dad</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I help my dad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playful</td>
<td>Snuggle with my sister</td>
<td>Give candy</td>
<td>Comb my hair</td>
<td>Go to MEMS</td>
<td>Sister</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nice</td>
<td>Mom lets me steer the car</td>
<td>Bought dogs</td>
<td>Help when I’m scared</td>
<td>Sit in a low-back booster</td>
<td>Myself</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crazy</td>
<td>Have fun together</td>
<td>Bought house and pool</td>
<td>Get to stay with mom</td>
<td>Have play dates</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best people in the world</td>
<td>Mom’s friend brings dog</td>
<td>Put a roof over my head</td>
<td>Take me to school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silly</td>
<td>Do thing I want to do</td>
<td>Give toys</td>
<td>They give medicine</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Go on vacation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spend time with me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Take me biking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Read stories</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Play in bathtub</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In week one, children used a total of 54 key phrases to respond to the question, while in week five, the total was 48. This represents an 11% decrease. In week five, each response category was less frequent than in week one, except for “Acts of service,” which remained the same. In week one, children’s responses fit into six categories, while in week five there were three new categories added, which represents a 50% increase.

Question three asked children about things they like to do. Initially, the researcher asked this question following the first two questions. However, it quickly became clear that children were more forthcoming about questions one and two if question three was asked first. Therefore, this question became a helpful “break the ice” exchange before asking children more personal questions about themselves and their families. The responses to question three, however, did not further the research question, and, therefore, have not been analyzed.
Question four asked children if there was anything else they’d like to share. In both weeks one and five, the majority of children responded that they did not have anything else to share. The ones who did answer the question did not give responses that furthered the research question, and, therefore, these have not been analyzed.

**Communicating about Human Difference and Similarity**

The second research question this study addressed the extent to which reading anti-bias book in literature small groups affected children’s abilities to effectively communicate about human difference and similarity. To answer this question, two data collection tools were used. First, in week one and five, the researcher conducted one-on-one interviews in which children were asked to look at a cut-and-paste collage showing a diversity of people and verbally answer several questions while the researcher took notes. Second, in week two, three, and four, following literature small group sessions facilitated by the researcher, children did a written reading reflection about the story.

**Collage interviews.** While looking at the collage, children responded to the following questions (Appendix C):

1. Tell me about one person you notice in this picture. Tell me about another person. Tell me about another person.
2. Who do you notice who is different than you in some way? Different in what way?
3. Who do you notice who is the same as you in some way? Same in what way?

Each individual on the collage was identified with a number and sometimes a letter (if there was more than one person in the same cut-out image). The researcher recorded the number/letter of the individual and what the child said about them for each question. For an image of the collage, see Appendix F. For a brief description of each individual, see Table 3.
### Table 3

*Individuals in collage*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number/letter</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.a.</td>
<td>White boy playing in fountain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.b.</td>
<td>POC* boy playing in fountain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.a.</td>
<td>White man hiking in mountains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.b.</td>
<td>White woman hiking in mountains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>POC girl playing dress-up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>POC boy holding kangaroo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.a.</td>
<td>POC man walking beside boy on bike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.b.</td>
<td>POC boy on bike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>POC girl holding dog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.a.</td>
<td>POC woman standing with friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.b.</td>
<td>POC woman standing with friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.c.</td>
<td>POC woman standing with friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.d.</td>
<td>POC woman standing with friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.a.</td>
<td>White man standing with family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.b.</td>
<td>White woman standing with family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.c.</td>
<td>White boy standing with family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.d.</td>
<td>White boy standing with family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.a.</td>
<td>White girl reading with man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.b.</td>
<td>White man reading with girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>White woman smiling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.a.</td>
<td>White boy jumping into lake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.b.</td>
<td>White girl jumping into lake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.a.</td>
<td>White woman paddleboarding with girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.b.</td>
<td>White girl paddleboarding with woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>White baby getting heart checked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.a.</td>
<td>POC girl looking at tablet with boy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.b.</td>
<td>POC boy looking at tablet with girl</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Question one asked children to name and describe whom they noticed in the collage. To analyze the children’s responses, the researcher identified each individual’s apparent racial identity (white/POC), age (adult/child), and gender (male/female/androgynous) and created a graph for each identity category that compares how frequently individuals of the dominant identity and the marginalized identity were noticed in weeks one and five. For race, see Figure 3; for age, see Figure 4; and for gender, see Figure 5.

![Figure 3. Noticing race](image)

There were 18 children interviewed in both weeks one and five. In both weeks, children noticed white people more than they noticed POC. In week one, white individuals were noticed 44 times, while POC were noticed 29 times, meaning white people were noticed 34% more than POC. In week five, white individuals were noticed 40 times, while POC were noticed 25 times, meaning white people were noticed 38% more than POC. Therefore, by every measure, white people were noticed increasingly more than POC over the course of the study. This might be
partially explained by the fact that the ratio of white people to POC on the collage was 15:12; this imbalance represents an error on the part of the researcher, who created the collage. However, the difference between 15 and 12 is just 20%, which is proportionately less than the frequency at which white people were noticed more than POC in both weeks one and five.

![Bar chart showing noticing age](image)

**Figure 4. Noticing age**

In both weeks one and five, those interviewed noticed children more than they noticed adults. In week one, adults were noticed 17 times, while children were noticed 56 times, meaning children people were noticed 229% more than adults. In week five, adults were noticed 13 times, while children were noticed 52 times, meaning children were noticed 300% more than adults. Therefore, by every measure, children were noticed increasingly more than adults over the course of the study. This might be partially explained by the fact that the ratio of adults to children on the collage was 12:15; again, this imbalance represents an error on the part of the researcher. However, once again, the difference between 12 and 15 is just 20%, which is
proportionately less than the frequency at which children were noticed more than adults in both weeks one and five.

![Graph showing noticing frequency by gender and week.](image)

**Figure 5. Noticing gender**

In both weeks one and five, children noticed women and girls (females) more than they noticed men and boys (males), while the frequency of noticing the androgynous baby stayed constant. In week one, males were noticed 35 times, females were noticed 36 times, and the androgynous baby as noticed 2 times, meaning females were noticed 3% more than males, and the noticing of androgynous individuals was negligible. In week five, males were noticed 30 times, while females were noticed 31 times, meaning females were again noticed 3% more than males. The finding that females were consistently noticed more than males might be partially explained by the fact that the ratio of males to females on the collage was 12:14; again, this imbalance represents an error on the part of the researcher. Unlike with race and age, however, the difference between 12 and 14 is 17%, which is proportionally more than the frequency at
which females were noticed more than males in both weeks. Therefore, in the case of gender, it could be said that the disproportionate number of females vs. males featured on the collage may have skewed the results of this interview question.

In summary, when responding to question one, the noticing of white people, children, and females was consistently more frequent (Table 4).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Noticing race, age, &amp; gender</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Whites noticed 34% more than POC</td>
<td>Children noticed 229% more than adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 5</td>
<td>Whites noticed 38% more than POC</td>
<td>Children noticed 300% more than adults</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Between weeks one and five, the noticing of white people increased 4%, the noticing of children increased 71%, and the noticing of females stayed constant.

Question two asked children to name and describe an individual who was different than them. To analyze the data, the researcher identified key phrases that children used to answer the question and then grouped these into response categories (Table 5). The frequency of each response category in weeks one and five was then compared (Figure 6). There were 44 key phrases that children used to respond to question two, and these were grouped these into 11 response categories.
### Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Noticing difference</th>
<th>Skin</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Hair</th>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Misc.</th>
<th>Possessions</th>
<th>Racial group</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Clothing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>He has black and brown skin</td>
<td>I don't like reading</td>
<td>She has blond hair</td>
<td>He is small</td>
<td>She is different than me</td>
<td>He has a pet</td>
<td>I'm not black</td>
<td>He's a boy</td>
<td>I'm not a baby</td>
<td>She's from a different country</td>
<td>I don't wear those kinds of clothes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He has brown skin</td>
<td>I can't jump that high</td>
<td>He has no hair</td>
<td>She is taller</td>
<td>I'm scared of heights</td>
<td>I don't have a puppy</td>
<td>He is black</td>
<td>I'm not a girl</td>
<td>It's a baby</td>
<td>She looks like she's in China</td>
<td>She has a dress on</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She has dark skin</td>
<td>She likes to jump high</td>
<td>She has curly hair</td>
<td>They have kids</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>His skin is darker</td>
<td>They are climbing a hill</td>
<td>He has short curly hair</td>
<td>Everyone is different than me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He has different skin</td>
<td>I don't dress up often</td>
<td>She is doing something new</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He has darker skin</td>
<td>I don't play at water parks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She has different skin color</td>
<td>I can't ride a bike</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different skin color</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He has tan skin, and I have brown skin</td>
<td>She is doing different stuff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 6. Noticing difference

There were six response categories in week one, while in week five, there were 11, which represents an 83% increase in response categories. The response category that showed the greatest change was “Activity,” which went from six in week one to three in week five, representing a 50% decrease. In week one, children used a total of 18 key phrases to respond to the question, while in week five, the total was 26. This change represents a 69% increase in key phrases used. Along with increased verbosity by the end of the study, children showed more nuance in their responses. For example, in week one, one child noticed the white girl (9a) reading with the white man (9b) and said, “She likes reading, and I don’t like reading,” while in week five this same child noticed the POC girl holding a dog (6) and said, “I’m not a girl, I don’t have a puppy, and I’m not black. Is that offensive to say?” Another child noticed the girl jumping in a lake (11b) in week one and said, “She likes to jump high, and I like to jump low,” while in week five, the same child noticed the POC girl playing dress-up (3) and said, “She looks
like she’s from a different country… but she looks like me… and I like to play dress-up, too” (Table 3). Here, children demonstrated more reflectiveness about their language and also increased awareness of the interplay between difference and similarity.

Question three asked children to name and describe an individual who was the same as them in some way. To analyze the data collected, the researcher identified key phrases that children used to answer the question and then grouped these into response categories (Table 6). The frequency of each response category in weeks one and five was then compared (Figure 7). There were 30 key phrases that children used to respond to question three, and these have been grouped into seven response categories.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Skin</th>
<th>Likes</th>
<th>Hair</th>
<th>Clothing</th>
<th>Possessions</th>
<th>General appearance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hanging out with family</td>
<td>Brown skin</td>
<td>Pink stuff</td>
<td>Same hair</td>
<td>Same pants</td>
<td>Pet</td>
<td>Looks like me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swimming</td>
<td>Same skin</td>
<td>Dogs</td>
<td>Black hair</td>
<td>Sweater, tiara, necklace, and tutu</td>
<td>Dog</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jumping</td>
<td>Lighter skin</td>
<td>Animals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going to water parks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going on boats</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snuggling with dog</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Acting like a savage</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Laying in bed</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having fun with sister</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jumping into ponds</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Running</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sitting outside</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holding cat</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My family takes pics like that</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing on iPad</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 7. Noticing similarity

In both weeks one and five, children used 24 key phrases to respond to question three. There were three response categories that only appeared in week one: Clothing, possessions, and general appearance. There was one response category that only appeared in week five: Emotion. The greatest shift came in the “Activity” category, which went from 10 responses in week one to 16 responses in week five, representing a 60% increase. This stands in contrast to question two about noticing difference, which showed a 50% decrease in “Activity” responses between weeks one and five.

As previously stated, the 18 children who completed this interview in weeks one and five used 44 key phrases to describe difference and 30 key phrases to describe similarity, meaning they used 32% more phrases when talking about difference.
Reading Reflections. The second data collection tool used to measure the intervention’s effect on children’s ability to communicate about human difference and similarity was a series of written reading reflections following literature small groups during weeks two, three, and four. Everyday during those three weeks, a group of four children was required to attend a small group session and then complete a written reading reflection worksheet (Appendix D) with the following prompts:

1. My favorite character in the book was…
2. Write a list of ways you are different from this character. Make the list as long as possible!
3. Write a list of ways you are the same as this character. Make the list as long as possible!
4. I recommend this book to others: Rate on a scale of 1-5
5. Is there anyone in our class you really think should read this book? Who?

The purpose of question one was to focus the child’s attention on one character about which they could then answer questions two and three; therefore, responses to question one were not analyzed. To analyze the data collected on questions two and three, the researcher identified key phrases children used then grouped these into response categories (Tables 7 and 8). The frequency of each response category in weeks two, three, and four was then compared (Figures 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13). The responses to questions four and five did not further the research question and, therefore, have not been analyzed.

Question two asked children to articulate how they were different from their favorite character. Because different numbers of reading reflections were completed each week due to schedule and attendance irregularity, the number of key phrases used to answer each question
has been calculated as an average. For example, in week two, 16 children completed reading responses, and a total of 30 key phrases were used to answer question two, meaning that the average number of key phrases used by each child was 1.9. In week three, the average was 2 key phrases, and in week four, the average was 1.7 key phrases. These phrases have been divided into 17 categories (Table 7).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How I'm different</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brown skin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skin color</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black skin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dark skin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gray</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Again, because different numbers of reading reflections were completed each week, the frequency of each response category is measured as a percentage. For example, in week one, there were 30 key phrases used, and three of them were about skin, meaning that the frequency of the “Skin” response category was 10% of all responses. Also, for ease of visual interpretation,
the data has been divided into three graphs: one for categories that appeared in all three weeks (Figure 8), one for categories that appeared in two weeks (Figure 9), and one for categories that appeared in only one week (Figure 10).

![Graph showing frequency by percent of different response categories across weeks.](image)

**Figure 8.** How I’m different: Appeared in three weeks

Of these response categories, children were most likely to write about differences in hair with an average of 16% of responses fitting into the “Hair” category. All categories showed variation between the three weeks but revealed no discernable pattern.
Of these response categories, children were most likely to write that they were different than their favorite character because this character was an animal or had animal characteristics. In weeks three and four, an average of 30% of responses fit into the “Animal” category. In week two, the researcher did not read any books featuring anthropomorphized animals, which likely explains why there were no animal-related responses that week. All categories showed variation between the two weeks but revealed no discernable pattern.
Figure 10. How I’m different: Appeared in one week

Of these response categories, other than “Miscellaneous,” children were most likely to indicate that they were different from their favorite character related to special needs. In week four, 6% of responses fit into the “Special Needs” category. The fact that this response category appeared in just week four is likely because this was the only week in which the researcher read a book that featured a child with special needs.

Question three asked children to articulate how they were the same as their favorite character. In week two, children used an average of 1.4 key phrases to answer the question; in week three, an average of 1.6 key phrases; and in week four, an average of 1.4 key phrases. These have been divided into 14 response categories (Table 8).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skin</th>
<th>Eyes</th>
<th>Hair</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Clothing</th>
<th>Likes</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Possessions</th>
<th>Racial group</th>
<th>Basic body</th>
<th>Miscellany</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Character</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dark skin</td>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>Hair</td>
<td>Can do</td>
<td>Wearing</td>
<td>Likes blue</td>
<td>Has mom</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>Has photo album</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Head</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Kid</td>
<td>Honest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skin</td>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>Hair</td>
<td>Likes to find stuff</td>
<td>Pink shirt</td>
<td>Likes cats</td>
<td>Has dad</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>Has backpack</td>
<td>Human</td>
<td>Has best friend</td>
<td>Stand up of others</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>Honest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freckles</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Hair</td>
<td>Likes drawing</td>
<td>T-shirt</td>
<td>Likes Japanese maples</td>
<td>Has twin</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Nice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black skin</td>
<td>Long hair</td>
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<td>Likes imagining</td>
<td>Wearing red</td>
<td>Likes pink</td>
<td>Misses mom</td>
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<td>Feet</td>
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<td>Brown skin</td>
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<td>Likes reading</td>
<td>Clothes</td>
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<td>Nose</td>
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<tr>
<td>White skin</td>
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<td>Reading</td>
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Again, the frequency of each response category is given as a percentage, and the data has been divided into three graphs.
Figure 11. How I’m the same: Appeared in three weeks

Of the response categories that appeared in weeks two, three, and four, children were most likely to write about basic body parts, for example, “We both have eyes and ears.” Over the course of the three weeks, an average of 29% of all responses fit into the “Basic Body” category, giving the category highest average frequency. All categories showed variation between the three weeks but revealed no discernable pattern.
Figure 12. How I’m the same: Appeared in two weeks

Of the response categories appearing in two weeks, all showed variation but did not reveal any discernible pattern.
There were three response categories that appeared either in week one or week three.

There were no response categories that only appeared in week four.

As previously stated, the average number of key phrases used to describe difference was consistently higher than the average number of key phrases used to describe similarity (Table 9).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 9</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average number key phrases used</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Week</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 4</td>
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</table>

*Figure 13. How I’m the same: Appeared in one week*
The average number of key phrases used to describe difference over the course of the three weeks as 1.9, while the average number of key phrases used to describe similarity was 1.5, meaning children used, on average, 21% more phrases to talk about difference.

**Work and Play Partners**

The third research question this study addressed to extent to which reading literature with anti-bias themes to children affects who they choose to work and play with. To answer this question, in weeks two, three, and four, the researcher conducted daily observations during morning work period and afternoon recess, recording with whom each child was choosing to associate (Appendix E).

While analyzing this data, the researcher came to realize two things: (1) it takes longer than 15 days for humans’ perceptions of—and consequently, behavior toward—each other to change, and (2) analysis of the data gathered about work and play partners was beyond the scope of this project. Therefore, the researcher was not able to answer the third research question satisfactorily. The experience of gathering data in this area did, however, lead the researcher to conclude that there is a need for future research about the impact of anti-bias literature on social patterns at school, specifically in a Montessori environment.

**Action Plan**

**Conclusions**

The purpose of this action research study was to explore how sharing anti-bias children’s books in literature small groups in a lower elementary Montessori class affects children’s perceptions of and ability to communicate about themselves, their families, and others, as well as which classmates they choose to associate with. Specifically, the study asked: To what extent does reading anti-bias books in literature small groups affect:
• Children’s perceptions of themselves and their families?
• Children’s abilities to effectively communicate about human difference and similarity?
• Who children choose to work and play with at school?

Analysis of data indicates that the intervention improved children’s perception of themselves, as well as their ability to communicate about human difference. It yielded mixed results related to children’s perceptions of their families. It did not improve children’s ability to communicate about human similarity. Finally, the study was inconclusive related to its impact on children’s choice of work and play partners.

The intervention specifically addressed Derman-Sparks and Edwards’ (2010) ABE Goal 1: *Each child will demonstrate self-awareness, confidence, family pride, and positive social identities.* The intervention successfully met this goal in terms of self-awareness, confidence, and positive social identities. Children’s perception of their own physical appearance improved, as evidenced by these findings:

• Children used 11% more key phrases to describe what they liked about how they looked.
• Children were 40% less likely to respond with “nothing” or “I don’t know.”

Further study is needed in terms how to cultivate family pride. There were mixed results related to children’s receptions of their families, as evidenced by these findings:

• The number of key phrases used decreased by 11%.
• The number of response categories increased by 50%.

The intervention also specifically addressed Derman-Sparks and Edwards’ (2010) ABE Goal 2: *Each child will express comfort and joy with human diversity; accurate language for human differences; and deep, caring human connections.* The intervention
was successful with this goal in terms of improving accurate language for human differences. Children’s ability to effectively communicate about human difference improved, as evidenced by these findings:

- When looking at the collage, the number of key phrases children used to describe difference increased by 69%.
- When looking at the collage, the number of response categories increased by 83%.
- When looking at the collage, children’s responses indicated a more nuanced view of difference.

The intervention also measured the converse of communicating about human difference: communicating about human similarity. Children’s ability to effectively communicate about human similarity appears to have diminished or remained constant, as evidenced by these findings:

- When looking at the collage, the number of key phrases children used to describe similarity remained constant.
- When looking at the collage, the number of response categories decreased by 25%.
- When completing reading responses, children consistently used fewer key phrases to describe similarity, compared to difference. There was not a consistent increase or decrease in the number of phrases used to describe similarity and difference over the course of the study; however, the average number of phrases used to describe similarity was 21% less than the average number of phrases used to describe difference.

Again related to ABE Goal 2, the intervention attempted to increase comfort and joy with human diversity and create deep, caring human connections by diversifying children’s choice of work and play partners. However, the impact of the intervention on
who children chose to associate with could not be measured due to the relatively short intervention period and because the data gathered was beyond the scope of this project.

One final finding was that the children were most likely to pay attention to images of other children. When looking at the collage, in both weeks one and five, the contrast between the frequency with which the children noticed adults vs. children was much greater than the contrast between the frequency with which they noticed white people vs. POC or males vs. females. On average in weeks one and five, children noticed white people 36% more than POC, and they noticed females 3% more than males. However, on average, they noticed children 265% more than adults.

It is important to acknowledge that data collected in this study may have been skewed by several factors:

- The researcher conducted all individual interviews and small read-aloud sessions in the classroom in the midst of the work period, meaning that uninvited children sometimes observed or joined in conversation with those actively participating in the study. While this arrangement is in line with Montessori pedagogy, if precise data is the goal, isolating participants would be advisable.

- As previously stated, in making the collage, the researcher failed to create even ratios of white people/POC, males/female, and adults/children, which likely affected who children noticed. In the future, ratios along these lines of identity and others should be made even.

- For the interviews about self and family and about the collage, there were 18 children interviewed in both weeks one and five; however, due to absences, there were two children who were only interviewed once--one in week one and the other in week five. In
the future, more effort should be made to maintain consistency in pre and post assessments.

- In choosing the read-aloud books, the researcher was somewhat inconsistent in the sorts of characters featured, for example, there was only one book featuring a character with special needs in all three weeks. In the future, it would be better to evenly distribute anti-bias themes throughout the study.

**Recommendations**

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- Anti-bias literature should be shared with children in order to increase the esteem they have for themselves, as well as their ability to communicate effectively about this. Literature small groups are an effective way to do this. Discussion as the book as its being read and a concluding written reading reflections help to solidify understanding, which in turn, impacts children’s views of themselves and others.

- Anti-bias literature should be shared with children in order to improve their ability to effectively communicate about human difference. Hearing and discussing the accurate, respectful, and nuanced ways authors articulate human difference gives children the linguistic tools to do the same.

- More emphasis needs to be placed on developing children’s abilities to identify and articulate human similarity. Perhaps challenging children to name an equal number of similarities and differences about the same character in a story would heighten their sensitivity to similarity, as well as deepen their understanding that similarity and difference always coexist when comparing any two human beings.
• A longer intervention and a refined data collection tool are needed in order to measure
the impact of anti-bias literature on children’s choice of work and play partners. A study
that spanned the course of a semester or entire school year would likely reveal more
significant social shifts. Also, soliciting demographic data from parents would be
necessary, for example, racial identification of the child, gender identification of the
child, household income, family composition, etc. This would make it possible for the
researcher to accurately track how the intervention is impacting different children with
different identities and how they choose to association with each other.

Final Reflections

As the researcher, conducting literature small groups centered on anti-bias books with
was a truly joyful experience for me and, I believe, for my students as well. In almost every
session, uninvited children chose to listen to the story and complete reading reflections.
There were many instances in which I observed children in the small group enthralled by a story
that either reflected their own life experience or exposed them to a way of being what was
previously unknown. As Bishop (1990) says, these anti-bias books served as windows, mirrors,
and sliding glass doors.

One session particularly stands out to me—not because it produced particularly
spectacular data, but because of the human connections it ignited within the small group. One
third grade boy’s father has been incarcerated for much of the last three years, which has been
devastating to him and his family. I asked this boy ahead of time if he would like to be part of the
group that read a story about parental incarceration, and he said yes. As I read the story aloud,
we paused often for the boy to share about his personal experience of visiting his father in prison.
It was apparent that he relished his role as the “expert” in the group, and the other children
listened with full respect. For the boy, this book was a rare mirror, and for his peers, it was a window into their friend’s personal experience. Based on the learning gained in this study, I will certainly be implementing literature small groups and sharing anti-bias children’s in my classroom in the future, and I encourage all educators to consider doing the same.
References


Cooperative Children’s Book Center. Children’s Books by and about People of Color and First/Native Nations Received by the CCBC. (2019). Retrieved from https://ccbc.education.wisc.edu/books/pcstats.asp.


Crossroads Antiracism Organizing and Training (2017, May). *Understanding and analyzing systemic racism.* City Garden Montessori School, St. Louis.


Appendix A

The Gender Unicorn

- **Gender Identity**
  - Female/Woman/Girl
  - Male/Man/Boy
  - Other Gender(s)

- **Gender Expression**
  - Feminine
  - Masculine
  - Other

- **Sex Assigned at Birth**
  - Female
  - Male
  - Other/Intersex

- **Physically Attracted to**
  - Women
  - Men
  - Other Gender(s)

- **Emotionally Attracted to**
  - Women
  - Men
  - Other Gender(s)

To learn more, go to:
www.transstudent.org/gender

Design by Landyn Pan and Anna Moore
Appendix B

Name: 

Date: 

Week 1 / 5

1. What are some things you like about how you look?

2. What are some things you like about your family?

3. What are some things you like about where you live?

4. What is your gender? What are some things you like about being this gender?

5. What are some things you like to do?

6. Is there anything else important about yourself you’d like to share?
Appendix C

Name: ___________________________ Date: ___________________________ Week 1 / 5

1. Tell me what you notice about one of the people in this picture. Tell me about another person. Tell me about another person.

2. Who do you notice is different than you in some way? Different in what ways?

3. Who do you notice is the same as you in some way? Same in what ways?
Appendix D

Reading Reflection

Name: ____________________________________  Week:   2  3  4

1. My favorite character in the book was

______________________________________________________________

2. Write a list of ways you are different from this character. Make the list as
long as possible!

3. Write a list of ways your are the same as this character. Make the list as long
as possible!
4. I recommend this book to others:

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<th>4</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>A little</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Very much! ☺</td>
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</table>

5. Is there anyone in our class you really think should read this book? Who?
Appendix E

Daily Work & Play Observations

Date:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class list</th>
<th>Working with</th>
<th>Playing with</th>
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<tbody>
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Appendix F
Appendix G

Book List

Books are divided into anti-bias themes categories, acknowledging that each book, in fact, features the intersection of multiple categories.

Ability
- *All My Stripes: A Story for Children with Autism* by Shaina Rudolph and Danielle Royer

Families
- *Emily's Blue Period* by Cathleen Daly & Lisa Brown
- *Home at Last* by Vera B. Williams and Chris Raschka
- *Tell Me Again About the Night I Was Born* by Jamie Lee Curtis
- *Visiting Day* by Jacqueline Woodson

Gender
- *Julián Is a Mermaid* by Jessica Love
- *Want to Play Trucks?* by Ann Stott

Immigration/Citizenship
- *Mama's Nightingale: A Story of Immigration and Separation* by Edwidge Danticat
- *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote: A Migrant's Tale* by Duncan Tonatiuh

Race
- *Jojo's Flying Side Kick* by J Brian Pinkney
- *Mrs. Katz and Tush* by Patricia Polocco
- *My Hair is a Garden* by Cozbi A. Cabrera
- *Something Happened in our Town: A Child's Story about Racial Injustice* by Marianne Celano, Marietta Collins, Ann Hazzard

Socioeconomic Status
- *Those Shoes* by Maribeth Boelts