

Transforming the Transformation:

A post-intentional phenomenological exploration of Montessori teachers engaging in  
anti-bias and anti-racist teacher self-reflection

A Dissertation

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## Dedication

To Dr. Maria Montessori.

*The history of the moment shows that the same kind of education, though with some adaptations, is applicable to all grades of society and to all nations of the world ... In our day the child has been revealed a driving force that can bring new hope to people engulfed in darkness.*

Dr. Maria Montessori, *The Discovery of the Child*

## Abstract

Montessori teachers often enter the teaching field with a strong sense of a Montessori social identity developed through their transformational teacher education experience (AMI, 2018a; Malm, 2004), uniting them around a shared knowledge and belief system (Fairclough, 1992, 2003). While a social identity can connect individuals and provide security and purpose, it can also limit beliefs and behaviors by producing a prescribed way of being (Foucault, 2010). Research (e.g., Sumison, 2002) has shown that when teachers are confronted with instances that challenge their teacher identity and social practice (Fairclough, 1992), they may experience dilemmas and uncertainty (Cuban, 1992; Lampert, 1985) that call their self and social identification as a teacher into question.

This post-intentional phenomenological study is an attempt to better understand what is produced and provoked (Vagle, 2018) when Montessori teachers engage in anti-bias and anti-racist (ABAR) teacher self-reflection, a critical first step to implementing antiracist teaching practices in an early childhood classroom (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010). Specifically, I explored what is produced and provoked in the Montessori self and social identity as teachers consider ways of being a teacher that possibly differ with the Montessori teacher way of being.

Six Montessori early childhood teachers participated in three workshops on ABAR self-reflection which I developed and facilitated over the course of three and a half months. Participant experiences, including my own, and additional phenomenological material (e.g., Montessori's writing, current initiatives in the Montessori social world) offered important insight into the life and evolution of the

phenomenon. To guide analysis, I used Jackson and Mazzei's (2012) *thinking with theory* and Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) notion of the rhizome to conceptualize the life and growth of the phenomenon.

Findings revealed elements of the Montessori social identity that provide meaning and purpose for teachers working towards dismantling oppression as well as limitations in the form of a regime of truth (Foucault, 1977/2010) that can challenge the development of a dialogic identity. Implications suggest recommendations for Montessori teacher education programs including strategies of incorporating ABAR reflective practices into Montessori teacher development, reevaluating the words and position of an adored leader for relevance as society evolves, and encouraging social activism by disrupting the notion of objectivity and neutrality in teaching.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

### A Reflection

I have had racist thoughts and acted in racist ways. It is with trepidation that I will share a particular personal memory which illustrates my racist behavior. During one of my final years as an early childhood Montessori teacher, a boy was enrolled in my class who did not look nor behave like the rest of the children in the room. He was Black, lived with a single mother, was the only student whose tuition was supported by state assistance, was dropped off at random times throughout the day, and did not connect or engage with the materials and his classmates as the other children did. I perceived him as a disruption toward my goal of creating a calm and peaceful environment. His time at the school did not last long and after only a few months, he and his mother left the school community. I remember now, with shame and embarrassment, a comment I made at that juncture: “Well, I really didn't want a child *like that* in my classroom anyway.”

This is a memory I had tucked away, nearly forgotten, that only recently returned to my attention - just when I was feeling like a well-versed, conscientious, anti-bias and anti-racist (ABAR) teacher educator, and more generally - a well-versed, conscientious, ABAR person. Additional teaching experience I had accumulated over the years was at a school that served a highly diverse demographic of children and families. I had loved that job and had used that experience as a contributing factor to my driving force towards justice and equity oriented work. Sure, I may have been a bit young and naïve back then, but there was no way I was racist!

For several months after it resurfaced I did not share the memory of my comments about the young Black boy with anyone; as if not saying it out loud, would allow me to

simply move on and leave it in the past. *I'm a different person now. I don't think like that anymore. What a mistake, I've learned so much.* But it would not go away and finally one day I shared the memory with a colleague and realized I had no choice but to confront it and admit my racist and bias thinking. This was incredibly difficult because I was, and still am, full of shame for the judgements I made and the words I said. At that time, I would never have attributed my negative attitude towards this young boy as based on race, or social class. Instead, I covered up the racism with a guise of what qualified as unmanageable behavior (he did not engage in work) and poor parenting (he did not come to school on a regular schedule). Today, as I have continued to immerse myself deeply in ABAR work alongside what it means to be a Montessori teacher, I have come to understand how privileged white euro-centric norms infiltrate so much of what we do and think in classrooms, marginalizing those who do not fit the status quo. The reality is that race and other identity markers of difference did in fact have quite a bit to do with the comment I made.

### **Some Personal Background and Context**

In 2007, I entered the teaching profession with my own identities, the majority of them made up of intersections of privilege (e.g., white, middle-class, two-parent family). Despite my liberal upbringing by two educators and artists, I did not bypass benefitting from my whiteness and absorbing its systemic realities. As I learned the tenets of the Montessori method, I easily related to its values, never questioning the possibility of biased expectations, a colorblind approach, or cultural *irrelevancy*. Therefore, I began teaching equipped with some basic beliefs, such as the importance of entering the

classroom on time to fulfill Montessori's three-hour work cycle<sup>1</sup> and that materials designed over 100 years ago unquestionably meet the developmental needs of all children today. In my mind, these were characteristics that made up a good classroom, good teaching, and being a good teacher, privileging one way of being while Othering<sup>2</sup> the rest (Kumashiro, 2002).

Before I go on, I feel it is important to note that Montessori developed her method of education with the pursuit of social justice and peace at its core. Her work was revolutionary, and in several ways it still is. Just because I, a 20-something early childhood teacher, held biases and judgments that I rationalized with beliefs regarding good parenting and good behavior, I do not mean to imply that the entire Montessori theory and curriculum is inherently racist. As is so often true, there is room for interpretation and room for growth. However, the challenge that my memory highlights was that I entered the teaching profession without understanding how *I* contributed to the perpetuation of systemic oppression as a teacher and simply as a white person in the world. While I had a strong understanding of early childhood pedagogy, I did not have a strong understanding of myself and the social context of which I was a part in relation to race and other social markers of difference. The reasons that this young boy was brought to school irregularly were likely many and varied. Because I remember very little about him and his mother, I can only guess possible explanations for such a schedule ranging from limited transportation to his mother juggling multiple responsibilities due to years of

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<sup>1</sup> The optimal time for children to engage in purposeful work and achieve deep concentration (The Montessori uninterrupted work period, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> "Othering" is capitalized as it is in Kumashiro's (2002) work.

being denied the same professional opportunities I received so easily because I am white. Similarly, I remember very little about his actual behavior, only that it did not match that of the other children in my class<sup>3</sup>. But now I wonder how he felt in a classroom that privileged quiet and silence, independent activity, and many materials that reflected a white, upper middle class, euro-centric view of the world. During my time with that young boy I made judgments based on what was familiar to me, but a detriment to him.

Montessori was acutely aware of the possible effects an adult's judgments and assumptions could have on a child's development and behavior. Because her method was so different from the traditional schooling of her time she saw a need to guide and support teachers in making a mental shift regarding their knowledge of children and human development. As such, a unique and highly relevant part of her method of education includes an emphasis on continual and constructive teacher self-reflection, objective observation, and formative self-assessment. A Montessori teacher should "prepare himself *inwardly*. He must examine himself methodically in order to discover certain definite defects that may become obstacles in his relation with the child" (Montessori, 1996/2005, p.107). Helping preservice teachers become comfortable with such critical self-reflective practices is a fundamental part of many Montessori teacher training programs, and it was certainly part of mine. When I started teaching, I regularly observed my classroom environment to identify potential barriers to development and social cohesion and reflected on my actions as a member of the community. I went home at night mentally replaying interactions I had with the children and lessons I had

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<sup>3</sup> The class was quite small as this was a brand new school. The majority of the children were white, but not all. They generally came from the same socio-economic background, two-parent homes, and parents working in mid to high level professions.

presented, imagining ways they could have been done better and planning what to try in the future. I spent my weekends creating new materials that I knew would fill a need for individual children or the class as a whole. I did my best to cultivate “certain aptitudes of moral order” (Montessori, 1996/2005, p. 107) that would make me a true and good Montessori teacher. Yet, I never challenged myself to confront personal biases in regards to race, social class, and gender identity among others, nor did I consider how their existence had affected the educational system, including that of Montessori. It has taken both a re-learning of our society’s racist history as well as critically reflecting on my own past experiences to truly acknowledge biased assumptions and judgments harbored deep within my identity. Without examining where I come from and what has shaped me, it is difficult to progress to who I want to be.

### **Critical Self-Reflection Isn’t Easy**

I chose to begin my dissertation with a personal memory for a few reasons. First, I wanted to emphasize that I am incredibly humbled and honored to have introduced teachers to ABAR self-reflection, and often felt quite unqualified. While I am aware of my racial privilege and how it has affected me, I am just beginning the work of what Hayes and Hartlep (2014) call *unhooking from whiteness*; often, I wonder if I will ever be able to truly detach. But while I am no expert in ABAR teacher education, I am committed to becoming one and am eternally grateful for all the circumstances that have given me this opportunity.

Second, I wanted to let readers know that I recognize that this type of critical self-reflection is tremendously difficult. Facing this memory, among others, was not easy for me, even as someone outwardly committed to promoting social justice. It can be difficult

for me to acknowledge mistakes much less my contributions to systemic oppression. As Gibney (2016) wrote,

[people] love to see the world reflected back to them as they know it to be, and they love to know that there is something and someone else out there who is exactly the opposite of them: bad when they are good, mean when they are nice, irresponsible when they are selfless. If they didn't have this, then what would they have exactly? (p.22).

When I made those comments about the boy in my class, I was not blind to injustice, but I did consider myself a part of the “good side” without much thought. This self-conception came naturally – I was a good person, not too rich, not too poor, believed in equal rights, viewed education as the path to peace, and so on. The realization that *I* have contributed to the perpetuation of an oppressive society has drastically changed my worldview and my understanding of myself – how I have come to be who I am.

Not long ago, I co-taught an upper level undergraduate required course on racism in the United States. Within the first two-weeks of the semester, a young white woman confronted the other professor and me demanding we include discussion about racism towards white people and explicitly refused to engage in continued dialogue revolving around whiteness and systemic privilege. I found this jarring and concerning, yet what I remember the most was the raw emotional reaction:

*Within minutes of the discussion, [she] cried. I could see her lower lip quivering for maybe 30 seconds and then a bit of a gasp, her face turned red, and then tears welled up behind her glasses. She took her glasses off to wipe her eyes and for maybe two-seconds she heaved an almost silent sob. A cry like if I had gone over*

*to hug her she probably would've sobbed uncontrollably.* (Post-Reflection,  
2/18/17)

When I reflected on that meeting, I realized that I had thought such discussions on racism and other forms of bias would be easily, and even eagerly, absorbed by others, such as the students in my class. Yet, if it was difficult for me to admit my racist actions, why did I expect others to welcome this reality into their lives? For some, acknowledging the racism and biases that are rampant in our society and ourselves takes an incredible amount of courage and humility; a task that can be particularly hard for white people who do not experience the same oppressive effects of racism as people of color. This was an important reminder for me as I began the research process and I am thankful to have worked with teachers brave enough to engage in this critical work.

Finally, I shared this memory to illustrate how racism and bias go unnoticed in our thoughts, perceptions and actions – and may continue to be unnoticed and/or forgotten for years – even when we think we are being fair and just. Kumashiro (2002) wrote:

Although curriculum that aims for inclusion may succeed in teaching that the Other is as normal or important as the norm, it does not necessarily change the very definition of 'normal' and ways in which we traditionally see ourselves as such [...] perhaps we desire teaching and learning in ways that affirm and confirm our sense that what we have come to believe is normal or commonsensical in society is really the way things are and are supposed to be. (p. 57)

The day the young boy and his mother left the school, I affirmed my opinions by characterizing his behavior and schedule as outside of the norm; I simply could not

accommodate these divergences while simultaneously maintaining a peaceful and normalized<sup>4</sup> classroom for the rest of the children in my class. A “disruptive” student would lead to a disrupted environment which challenged my ability to exemplify the skills and abilities of a true Montessori teacher. Now, there is nothing in Montessori’s writing that outlines such a belief, nor was I told in my teacher training to make sure my classroom was made up of only well-behaved children from consistent households. In fact, Montessori wrote, “The adult must acquire the sensitivity to recognize all the child’s needs; only thus can he give the child the help that is necessary” (1970/1991, p. 39-40). Montessori sought to create an educational method to meet the needs of children from all cultures. However, I believe my memory reflects how certain theoretical beliefs and ideas have evolved into normed expectations of a Montessori classroom, a Montessori child, and a Montessori teacher; and, how those norms can act as regimes of truth (Foucault, 2003, 1977/2010) that privilege some ways of being while marginalizing others. This is something that I would not be aware of had I not had the opportunity and support to engage in my own critical self-reflection. By doing so, I have come to better understand my identity as a white person, how I contribute to the ongoing cycle of oppression, and most excitingly, how I can disrupt this pattern.

### **Educational Justice in Early Childhood**

Racism, like any deeply embedded system of privilege, won’t be dismantled in one fell swoop. But good people need to take action *continuously*, and I would say *daily*, until it is dismantled. *Because lives are at stake, every day*: on sidewalks, in

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<sup>4</sup> This is a term Montessori used to refer to a high functioning classroom. It is increasingly controversial because of its obvious normalizing discourse. However, it can be argued that the original intent of the term refers to a state of equilibrium rather than normalcy. Much of Montessori’s writing was translated from Italian, so meanings and intent could have been lost or skewed in that process.

doctor's offices, in the waiting room of the bank, and most importantly, in classrooms. (Shin, 2016, p.11, emphasis in original)

Education is social justice work and this is not a new belief to the world of Montessori education – Montessori developed her method in an effort to create a peaceful society. She wrote, “Education today, in this particular social period, is assuming truly unlimited importance. And the increased emphasis on its practical value can be summed up in one sentence: education is the best weapon for peace” (1972, p. 54). To continue to enact the social change Montessori envisioned so many years ago, Montessori teachers need to be given the skills to do so in *today's* classrooms. As I alluded to in the opening section of this paper, a fundamental first step is to engage in ongoing critical self-reflection using an anti-bias and anti-racist lens. Such self-examination is of particular importance as studies have shown that bias and prejudice can manifest in many ways within a classroom environment and often go unnoticed, as I shared from my own experience. Furthermore, current research on early child development has proven that very young children (arguably from the moment of birth) are absorbing the social behavior existent around them and developing an understanding of “gender identity, physical disability, racial differences and similarities, and cultural identity” (Carter & Curtis, 2008, p. 13). Because of this, Derman-Sparks (2008) argued that “early childhood educators have a serious responsibility to find ways to prevent and counter the damage before it becomes too deep” (p. 8). Increasingly there is a need for teachers of very young children to engage in ABAR teacher development and teaching strategies so that they may gain the skills necessary to best support their diverse classrooms.

There has been growing interest in exploring ways in which the Montessori curriculum and theory may need to change and evolve to be an effective ABAR method of education and how Montessori teachers can and should be supported in taking up this important work (e.g., Branch, 2017; Han, 2018; Han & Moquino, 2018; Jewell, 2017; Kitchens, 2018; McCaffery, 2017; Tift, 2017; Trondson, 2016). This research has been increasingly valued among Montessori practitioners and leaders, which is exciting progress. However, currently ABAR work is still only minimally a part of early childhood Montessori teacher education programs. Therefore, teachers, particularly novice Montessori teachers, may experience student behaviors and development that require care and support in ways not explicitly identified and developed during their teacher education. Such an experience can trigger prejudicial assumptions and attitudes towards children (as I described in my memory), be challenging and exhausting as teachers try to manage needs and behaviors with a limited set of strategies, and may even lead to an identity crisis. When teachers feel either unable to do their job and therefore to be a teacher, or are forced to take up strategies outside of the Montessori method, they may jeopardize their self and social identity as an “authentic Montessorian”. Furthermore, without knowledge and skills in ABAR teaching, Montessori teachers may be unable to recognize and repair bias existent in their classroom and themselves, therefore perpetuating social problems created by biased and prejudicial educational experiences (e.g., the achievement gap, the school to prison pipeline).

However, it is important to recognize that becoming and being a Montessori teacher carries with it a deeply personal and social identity – some would even go as far to include a spiritual identity. Many Montessori teachers, such as myself, have found that

becoming a Montessori teacher is also becoming part of something bigger – of a greater social movement. Each part of the method, from the steps of rolling up a working mat to the theory of child development holds value in *being* and *being recognized* as a Montessori teacher. Taking up a teaching strategy that differs or possibly even at times contradicts Montessori’s principles has the potential to challenge the Montessori self and social identity, and one’s sense of belonging. As previously mentioned, these moments of identity crisis can lead to ineffective teaching and result in teachers leaving the profession. This study sought to better understand what it is like for Montessori early childhood teachers to engage in ABAR teacher self-reflection with the hope of identifying ways they can be supported and encouraged to be *both* a Montessori *and* ABAR teachers.

### **Intentions of the Research**

This research explored the phenomenon of Montessori teachers engaging in anti-racist and anti-bias teacher self-reflection. I conducted a post-intentional phenomenological study (Vagle, 2014, 2018) to better understand the many varied intentionalities that contribute to the existence and ongoing productions and provocations of this phenomenon. My research focused on the experience of teachers who wrestled with taking up an ABAR perspective while maintaining their Montessori teacher identity. The premise of this work was to reveal some of the ways in which the Montessori teacher identity, developed during Montessori teacher education, engages and disengages with ABAR perspectives and to use that knowledge to inform Montessori teacher education programs as they strive to include ABAR strategies in their content.

Without an awareness of the current concerns regarding bias and racism in education, a relevant vocabulary, and ABAR teaching skills, the Montessori method is not being used to fulfill its original mission of creating an equitable society through the education of young children. Furthermore, sending teachers who lack the ability to recognize implicit bias, among other social concerns, into classrooms is detrimental to both themselves and the students they teach. It is crucial in this day and age that ABAR discussions and practices are incorporated into Montessori teacher education, and that these practices begin with critical self-reflection and identity development.

## Chapter Two: A Review of the Literature

The following section is a review of literature exploring what it is like to become and to be a teacher. I have included a specific focus on the development of a Montessori teacher identity as Montessori teacher education uniquely incorporates a transformational process into teacher preparation. While there is little research on what it is like to be a Montessori teacher today, a review of literature on teacher identity more broadly is helpful to understand current identity theories and how they might be of use in exploring the phenomenon of Montessori teachers engaging in ABAR teacher self-reflection. Additionally, I have reviewed literature on ABAR teacher development which I argue should be in dialogue with other teacher identities, including that of Montessori.

### Teacher Transformation

“Many people from all over the world have been transformed by the principles founded by Dr. Montessori.” (Cratchit Films, 2009)

“Almost always, at the end of the training, what I see in the trainees is this tremendous happiness, this belief in humanity. So to me, that is real transformation.” (Cratchit Films, 2009)

“Taking the training has been an enormous transformation for me and everyone around me.” (Association Montessori Internationale [AMI], 2018a)

An experience of transformation is a recurrent theme in describing, and promoting, Montessori teacher training. Many, including myself, who have completed the training process and received a Montessori credential agree with that claim; over the course of my Montessori training, my identity, what I believed and valued, was dramatically changed – I was transformed.

The Center for Philosophy of Religion at the University of Notre Dame (2016) described a transformative experience as having both epistemic and personal dimensions. The epistemic dimension unveils new knowledge previously unavailable or unknown by the individual before the transformative experience occurred. Montessori wrote extensively on such an experience when describing the development of a Montessori teacher: “it is not enough to know that this child is called John, that his father is a carpenter; the teacher must know and experience in her daily life the secret of childhood” (Montessori, 1967, p. 282). Child development is presented as a secret through Montessori’s writing, and thus in Montessori teacher education. Becoming a Montessori teacher means discovering the secret of child development, knowledge which was previously hidden. This epistemic dimension is exemplified in the following statement by a pre-service teacher interviewed as part of an Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) teacher training video: “And I just thought, this is what education could be. And at that point I realized that, ok, this is something that I didn't even know education could be. I've never seen anything like this” (AMI, 2018a).

The personal dimension of a transformative experience affects an individual's subjective preferences and transforms the *self*, altering their<sup>5</sup> identity. A personal transformation reorganizes how a person thinks by affecting beliefs, attitudes, personal traits and even emotions; an experience that “substantially alters life as they experience it or live it” (University of Notre Dame, 2016). Many experience a personal transformation during Montessori teacher education; as a Montessori teacher trainer observed of her students, “when I talk with graduates of the course, this is the part they talk about the most: how much it has changed their perspective on life” (MCM, n.d.). The combination of an epistemic and personal transformation a part of Montessori teacher training results in a powerful transformational experience. Montessori herself explained: “When the children show her their real natures, she understands perhaps for the first time, what love really is. And this revelation transforms her also” (Montessori, 1967, p. 282).

A transformative experience of becoming a teacher is not unique to the Montessori world. Research has shown that teachers frequently describe their process of becoming teachers as one of personal transformation (Alsup, 2006; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Friesen & Besley, 2013). Friesen and Besley (2013) argued that “learning to *be* a teacher is as important as learning *how* to teach” (p. 23, emphasis in original). *Being* a teacher is to take on a new or additional identity, one I believe is both personal and social. Barker (2012) defined a selfidentity as made up of self-conceptions and their corresponding emotional identifications whereas social identity is the expectations and opinions others have of us. Similarly, Gee (2014) conceived identity as a performance, in that different identities require people to behave in a certain way to be recognized by

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<sup>5</sup> The singular “they” is used throughout this dissertation following an ABAR perspective on gender identity.

others. Therefore, while becoming and being a teacher may alter an individual's knowledge and beliefs in personal ways, she must also embody and enact that change as it is expected by others.

I began this literature review with a focus on transformation to emphasize the fact that becoming a Montessori teacher is a deeply personal process, one that affects long standing knowledge and beliefs. I know from experience what that transformation is like and I also know what it is like for it to be tested and questioned. Gee (2014) wrote "to enact identities people have to talk the right talk, walk the right walk, behave as if they believe and value the right things, and wear the right things at the right time and place" (p.24). What happens when your talk becomes a controversial discussion? Or when your walk veers or swerves? When one's self identity is so closely intertwined, or even reliant, on a clearly defined social identity these moments of uncertainty can be unsettling and deeply emotional. Yet, while classroom demographics change and student needs shift and evolve, a teacher should be able to perform in a way that serves both her students and her own needs in creative and effective ways.

### **Montessori Spiritual Preparation**

In this section I provide more context on Montessori teacher transformation; I feel there are unique aspects to Montessori teacher education that enhance the transformational experience of becoming a Montessori teacher and contribute to the ongoing production of a Montessori social identity.

Montessori revered children and saw possibilities and potential that had previously been ignored and even stifled by traditional methods of education; going as far as to refer to children as "forgotten citizens" (Montessori, 1972, p. 67). She conducted

countless hours of observation, analyzing children's developmental needs and identifying what was required of adults to foster child development. She came to the conviction that children had been historically underserved based on misguided developmental beliefs, ones which she was determined to change. Because of this, Montessori teacher education includes a transformation of age-old beliefs, assumptions, and judgments about children and their role in society. While this process includes studying alternate theories of child development and curricular materials, Montessori also saw a need for an important personal transformation to change teachers' perspectives on life, a necessity for her method of teaching. This *spiritual preparation* (Montessori, 1967/1972), also referred to as *the preparation of the adult*, continues to be a central part of Montessori teacher training and pivotal in the transformation many trainees experience.

### **Virtuous and Moral**

Along with her new method of education came characteristics of "the new teacher" (Standing, 1957, p. 297), one who possessed esteemed virtues, physical grace, and unwavering passion for the work. Spiritual preparation assists in the development of many practical abilities that are deemed essential to fostering a quality Montessori classroom environment such as skills in observation, formative assessment, and refined movement. But it also includes a process of critical self-reflection not to be taken lightly. The following quote exemplifies the passion Montessori felt regarding the new mindset required of her teachers:

The preparation our method demands of the educator is that he should examine himself, and purge himself of his sins of tyranny, he must tear down that ancient complex of pride and anger that unconsciously encrusts his heart; strip himself of

pride and anger and become humble; this first of all; then re-cloths himself in charity. These are the spiritual qualities he has to acquire. This is the central point of balance without which it is impossible to proceed. This is his ‘training’, its starting point, and its goal. (Montessori, 1996/2005, pp. 113-114)

According to Montessori, pride and anger are human defects rampant in adult interactions and relationships, instigating conflict, greed, and even war (Standing, 1957). Montessori, who lived through two world wars, was a passionate social activist and believed in the possibility of a peaceful society; one that would come to fruition through children. She wrote, “society must recognize the importance of the child as the builder of humanity” (Montessori, 1972, p. 66) and continued with “this great task must be the work of education, for this is the only way to build a new world and to bring peace” (pp. 66-67). Therefore, teachers can be seen as instigators of peace, responsible for initiating social change through creating optimal developmental opportunities for future generations.

Pride and anger not only inhibit Montessori’s vision of peace through education but also negatively influence human development. Montessori emphasized the critical role of modeling and nurturing the development of emotions such as joy, confidence, cooperation and independence. To do this, pride and anger must be replaced with what she believed were opposite virtues – humility and patience (Montessori, 1996/2005). It takes an act of humility to abandon preconceived notions about children’s development and behavior and to adhere to principles that not only respect children, but admire their abilities and show reverence for their potential to better the world. Patience is necessary to slow down, see, and appreciate developmental possibilities, and search for ways to best

support that growth. When pride and anger are replaced with patience and humility true and peaceful development can occur.

### **Observing, Reflecting, and Guiding**

Montessori outlined several other mentalities to adhere to such as maintaining faith in the child and the method, a commitment to serving human development, and harboring love for all children at all times (Montessori, 1967). In addition to these conditions, she prescribed specific knowledge and skills necessary to work with children. Observation is perhaps one of the most crucial abilities of the Montessori teacher. Learning how to observe children, with patience and humility, is an assessment tool used in the Montessori method in several important ways. Firstly, to truly see and understand children, an adult must commit to many hours of careful and thoughtful observation of children before her career in teaching even begins. While working in the classroom, observation is used to strengthen and deepen this understanding as well as assess children's learning and behavior, the needs of the classroom community, and characteristics of the physical environment.

Additionally, observation is used to conduct critical self-reflection. As exemplified in the previous quote regarding the work of abandoning pride and anger (Montessori, 1995/2005), the Montessori teacher should be prepared to embark on a continual process of internal critique and self-betterment. Montessori believed that the majority of challenging behavior exhibited by young children evolved out of misunderstandings, miscommunication, and the fact that their unique developmental needs were not being met. Observation combined with self-reflection can help to identify those needs, explore the ways in which adult behavior or beliefs may be inhibiting them,

and brainstorm what could be done to better serve the child (Montessori, 1946/1991, 1967,1967/1972, 1996/2005).

Finally, Montessori saw the adult in the classroom in a position that was, and often is still, a significant shift from more typical conceptions of student and teacher. Common ideas of education position the teacher as the authority in the classroom and the one bestowed with the chosen knowledge to be “deposited” (Freire,1970/2000, p. 72) into the minds of children. The belief “that the teachers know everything and the students know nothing” (Freire, 1970/2000, p. 73) is an oppressive one, forcing children into a submissive state relying on directions and information administered by the adult. Alternatively, the role of the Montessori teacher is grounded in the belief that when given a supportive environment equipped with the necessary tools, children need guidance more often than direct instruction as they grow and develop. For this reason, the Montessori teacher is often referred to as a *guide*. The guide is to act as a link between the child and his or her environment; it is independently working with the materials that true learning and development occurs. Therefore, embodying what it means to guide learning and development instead of teach is fundamental to becoming a Montessori teacher.

### **Physical Grace**

Montessori saw the act of guiding rather than directing as not only a vital mindset and way of teaching, but also as a physical change that included movement and even appearance. The Montessori teacher should,

be attractive, pleasing in appearance, tidy and clean, calm and dignified. These are ideals that each can realize in her own way, but let us always remember, when we

present ourselves before children, that they are “*of the company of the elect*”. The teacher’s appearance is the first step to gaining the child’s confidence and respect. The teacher should study her own movements, to make them as gentle and graceful as possible. (Montessori, 1967, p. 277, emphasis in original)

*Analysis of movement*, a way of moving gracefully and intentionally, is an important concept introduced in Montessori teacher training and embedded in the curriculum. Analysis of movement refers in part to general movement and physical presence in the classroom (e.g. moving through the room quietly and calmly), but it is also discussed regarding handling and presenting the materials and lessons to children (Montessori, 1946/1991). When an adult presents an activity to a child, she should not only model how to handle the materials appropriately and safely, but also use purposeful and deliberate movements that draw attention to the steps necessary for a child to complete the activity independently. Similarly, when giving a lesson the Montessori teacher should be limited and careful in her words so as not to overwhelm the child with instructions or distracting conversation.

### **Montessorian**

Montessori’s explicit directives on how a teacher should look and act are particularly important when conceptualizing the impact of a teacher identity. Becoming and being a Montessori teacher includes not only an epistemic and personal transformation, but also a form of physical transformation that governs how one appears and acts to fulfill a social identity and be seen as such by others (Barker, 2012; Gee, 2014).

In addition to these attributes, the Montessori teacher is trained deeply on

developmental theory, the history and intention of the materials, and of course, how to share them with children. Yet what makes the Montessori training unique is the significant attention to teacher inner preparation; transforming the adult's ways of being and thinking. In a study on Montessori teacher's professional identities, Malm (2004) found that "among Montessori teachers' commitment is not only related to being a teacher, but to being a 'Montessori' teacher, i.e. identifying with/being aware of/adhering to specific educational philosophical principles" (p. 403).

As someone who spent an intensive year in Montessori training, I can speak personally to the existence of an inner transformative experience. Just as Malm (2004) suggested, upon completing my teacher training program, I did not describe myself as a teacher; rather, I had become a *Montessori* teacher, or even further, a *Montessorian*. Becoming and being a Montessorian was, and still is, deeply personal. Through my teacher education, I was subjected to the Montessori teacher ideals that span beyond teaching strategies and curriculum into a world perspective and even physical way of being. I had accumulated a new conception of what I, as a teacher and as a person, should be like and I emotionally identified greatly with those self-descriptions. Yet those internal self-descriptions were also connected to something larger, to a social-identity espoused by many. Montessori developed her method of education because she saw a need for social change and education was the vehicle to ignite that reform. Those who join her mission as educators become part of a vibrant, passionate and dedicated social movement. Being part of such a community has been exciting, comforting and encouraging.

However, a social-identity comes equipped with expectations and opinions others

have of our behavior, knowledge, and beliefs. While such expectations can certainly be important to maintain order, quality, and goals, they can also be harmful and cause negative reactions such as insecurity, guilt, and stress. Such explicit teacher qualities have the potential to evolve into a seemingly inflexible social-identity that may prevent Montessori teachers from exploring and accepting other ways of being in a classroom, and even as a person.

### **Literature on Teacher Identity**

I have chosen some particular elements, theories, and concerns regarding recent research on teacher identity. I found these topics intriguing and helpful when investigating possible effects of the Montessori teacher identity on teachers engaging in ABAR self-reflection.

#### **Born or Made**

In her New York Times bestselling book, *Building a Better Teacher*, Elizabeth Green (2015) began her historical exploration of research on teaching and teacher education by challenging the common narrative of teachers as naturally born; a narrative she referred to as the “Myth of the Natural-Born Teacher” (p. 6). She explained:

The idea of the natural-born teacher is embedded in thousands of studies conducted over dozens of years. Again and again, researchers have sought to explain great teaching through personality and character traits. The most effective teachers, researchers have guessed, must be more extroverted, agreeable, conscientious, open to new experiences, empathetic, socially adjusted, emotionally sensitive, humorous, or all of the above. (p.7)

For many years, teacher identity has been viewed as particular character traits

some are born with, and others without. Green argued that this is a misguided conception of becoming and being a teacher and focused her book on if and in what way individuals can be taught how to teach. Britzman (2003) also discussed cultural myths which have sustained and reproduced the notion of essential teacher qualities – qualities necessary to not simply teach, but to be seen and accepted as a teacher.

Foucault argued that discourses have the potential to be socially accepted, reproduced and function as true (Foucault, 1977/2010a). This *regime of truth* is difficult to not only alter, but can also affect corresponding identities. It is possible that discourse regarding the myth that teachers are born, not made, has created a general social-identity of what it is to be a *true* teacher – an identity that Green (2015) suggested relies on natural personality and character traits, or the “assumption that good teachers know what to do to help their students learn” (p. 13). Similarly, Britzman (2003) wrote, “through these myths, they recognize themselves as a teacher or feel as if they do not possess what it takes to become one” (p.223). If teaching is thought to be an ability individuals are *born* with, what happens to one’s identity as a teacher when that ability is called into question?

Sumsion (2002) followed the career path of an enthusiastic early childhood teacher, a young woman who described her interest in teaching as a dream she had for as long as she could remember, a dream she was born with. As her teaching career progressed she faced increasingly difficult situations, ones that challenged her professionally, and therefore personally. Being a teacher was an identity that had woven together her self, social and professional identities so tightly that the uncertainty and dilemmas she faced in her teaching practice were detrimental. Sumsion (2002) quoted her

research participant on the last days of her career in teaching which came after seven years in the field: “I was still heading along my rainbow path but it was like one of those [strangler] vines, was trampling all over me, choking me. I was getting smaller and smaller under so much pressure” (p. 881).

In conclusion to her report, Sumison (2002) posed questions concerning the progress of early childhood teacher education, several which focus on what teacher educators should consider regarding teacher positionality, emotional preparedness, agency, and self. When overarching teacher identity discourse revolves around the belief that teaching is an innate natural ability possessed by certain individuals, teachers who experience moments that call those natural abilities into question may lack the emotional resilience necessary to overcome such a situation.

### **Alternative Conceptions of Teacher Identity**

**Dialogic.** While the natural born teacher discourse has not disappeared entirely and may continue to influence some conceptions of teacher identity, literature on alternative theories has increased. These most frequently conceptualize teacher identity as dialogic, meaning the ability for an individual to take on multiple identity positions in relation to various social contexts (Hermans, 2001). Hermans (2001) conceived identity as multi-voiced and not merely about identifying outwardly as one type of person or another (e.g. at home, I am a mother; in the classroom I am a teacher). Instead an individual has an unconscious ability to “construe another person or being as a position that [she] can occupy and as a position that creates an alternative perspective on the world and [herself]” (Hermans, 2001, p. 250). Because of this constant shift in perspective, one’s identity positions can disagree, oppose, contradict, question, and judge

one another.

Hermans (2001) noted the importance of both space and time in dialogic identity development. What identity position is taken up and how an individual responds depends in part on the present social context, previous experiences, and cultural and social motivations (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Hermans, 2001). These variables are further complicated through the dialogic relationships among multiple identity positions; some which may interpret and respond to a situation in different ways. Additionally, since one's identity is affected by and relates to the diverse social contexts it encounters, the available positions will expand and construct over time and space. In this view, identity is not fixed and stable, but rather it shifts and evolves as individuals move through the world; identity is continually constructed and deconstructed (Akerman & Meijer, 2011; Flores & Day, 2006; Geijsel & Meijers, 2005).

In contrast to the myth of the natural born teacher, viewing identity as dialogic and ever changing acknowledges the effects of the social and cultural contexts on individual growth through time. When teacher identity is viewed as an ongoing construction, the ability to *learn* to be a teacher is more possible. An individual may acquire a teacher positioned identity through social relations such as teacher education, being a part of a teacher professional community, and of course as a member of a classroom environment (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009).

**Identity and self-conception.** There is a plethora of philosophical, theoretical and research based literature around notions of identity, self, and voice (e.g., Anzaldúa, 2008; Miller, 1994; Palmer, 1998/2007). I am choosing to use the word "identity" to refer to all these important elements, but acknowledge that they possess meanings in their own right

which I will not cover in detail in this dissertation. However, the self, particularly self-conception, is important to recognize in a discussion on teacher transformation and teacher identity.

While identity can be viewed as dialogic and in a continual state of construction, many (e.g., Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Geijsel & Meijers, 2005) still include self-identification as a part of that construction process. In their own review of literature on teacher identity formation, Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) surmised a common opinion that self-understanding is an important aspect of teacher identity development. Geijsel and Meijers (2005) argued that learning to be a teacher is not only “a process of social construction, but also one of individual sense-making” (p. 420). They described identity construction as circular in which experience and self-understanding work closely together. As an individual encounters new situations, she must internally work through her own multiple interpretations and understandings of that experience and respond in her own unique way.

Self-reflection, such as Montessori prescribed, can aid in this sense making process. When teachers engage in self-reflection they gain a fuller understanding of how their teacher-self fits into the larger social contexts (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). This understanding can strengthen their self-identity. Palmer (1998/2007) attributed his own ability to teach not to purely pedagogical knowledge, but “on the degree to which I know and trust my selfhood” (p.10). Cardelle-Elawar and Lizarrage (2010) found that teachers who became aware of their multiple roles as a teacher through self-reflection and self-assessment sought ways to be more effective with their diverse students. They surmised that teachers who had a greater self-awareness knew “who they are and who they want to

become” (p. 207), leading to more intentional teaching choices that enhanced their skills and effectiveness in the profession. Hamman, Gosselin, Romano and Bunuan (2010) took this self-awareness a step further by asking preservice and novice teachers to identify their *possible* teacher selves. This future-oriented practice not only helps teacher education programs gain an understanding of what content is effective and meaningful in their program, but also helps teachers to develop a goal based on their dialogic identity as a teacher (Hamman, et al., 2010). Becoming a teacher is not something that happens *to* an individual, instead it is a transformation that is in part self-constructed.

### **Identity and Emotion**

Barker (2012) eloquently explained, “identity involves an emotional attachment to the narratives of our lives” (p. 136). He defined self-identity as comprised of self-conceptions and their related emotional identifications. Thus, emotions arise out of how our identity interprets and reacts to our lived experiences, interpretations that can be contradictory. As previously discussed, a dialogic identity is made up of potentially conflicting positions and perspectives. A teacher may face discrepancies between different identity positions, causing emotional uneasiness and vulnerability (Hermans, 2001). As a teacher works to interpret, understand and incorporate a social experience into her own identity and its corresponding social expression she may encounter situations that challenge her self-concept and cause emotional contradictions (Britzman, 2003).

Challenges between identity and social context have been referred to as *boundary experiences*. Geijsel and Meijers (2005) defined a boundary experience as a situation “when a person, trying to participate more fully (centrally) in a social practice,

encounters a situation in which one is *unable to function adequately because one cannot fully identify with the new situation and its exigencies*” (p.424, emphasis in original).

Sumison (2002) depicted the emotional breakdown of a dedicated early childhood teacher who faced demands that she could not relate to, navigate through, or emotionally handle. The boundary experience was emotionally draining and affected not only her ability to do her job, but also her identity as a teacher.

Flores and Day (2006) noted the “emotional labor” (p. 221) required of teachers on a daily basis, such as having to perform social niceties regardless of inner feelings (e.g., responding politely to parents even when frustrated) or emotionally coping with the many diverse challenges existent in a classroom and school community. This dichotomy can become emotionally and mentally exhausting. Creating and sustaining parent–teacher relationships, practicing culturally relevant pedagogy, navigating school rules and regulations, and even representing the school for promotion and marketing purposes are just some of the additional demands placed on educators today. Research has suggested that although these duties are crucial for effective early education (Bartik, 2014), their corresponding values and belief systems harbor the potential to create instances of ideational conflicts (Cuban, 1992; Helsing, 2007; Sumsion, 2001), pitting one social-identity against another. Adapting and conforming to a teacher identity can be particularly difficult for new teachers facing unfamiliar professional expectations and challenges (Hamman, et al., 2010). These conflicts can be referred to as *dilemmas*, meaning “conflict-filled situations that require choices because competing, highly prized values cannot be satisfied” (Cuban, 1992, p. 6). The personal nature of dilemmas can cause uncertainty in a teacher’s practice, arising from a variety of educational beliefs and

expectations as well as from the complex social and emotional requirements of teaching (Helsing, 2007; Lampert, 1985). This uncertainty can affect one's teaching practice and even self-identity by instigating emotions and calling their self-conceptions into question. Palmer (1998/2007) wrote eloquently on the vulnerability of being a teacher and stated that so often "to reduce our vulnerability, we disconnect from students, from subjects, and even from ourselves" (p. 18), a reaction that is a detriment to both teachers and students.

Hargreaves and Tucker (1991) posited, "Where researchers talk about pride, commitments, and uncertainty, teachers talk about emotions like anxiety, frustration and guilt" (p.494). While some of these moments of heightened emotion may be related to concrete events or frustrations that are easily verbalized and shared by others, many can affect, or occur because of, identity conflicts. Britzman (2003) analyzed the experience of two teachers caught between pressures of two different teacher identities, one which depicted teaching as authoritarian and the other as flexible and creative. Faced with this discrepancy, the teachers felt an unbearable pressure and even helplessness to choose and perform as if teaching was a single, stable identity. Had they been supported in acknowledging the existence of multiple identities they could have explored "their own contradictory selves in ways that could work through such a dualist identity in order to consider the multiple choices that contradictions offer" (p. 226).

What is more, the stable identity sought for is frequently an image of an ideal teacher, maintained by cultural myths such as the "natural born teacher" possessing essential personality characteristics. This idealistic expectation of what and who a good teacher is has the potential to generate feelings of hopelessness and discouragement when

discrepancies and boundary experiences that challenge that ideology occur (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Chang-Kredl & Kingsley, 2014; Flores & Day, 2006). Giving teachers a single, ideal identity to strive for sets the stage for identity conflicts, discrepancies and boundary experiences derived from unattainable or frequently challenged ideological expectations.

### **Societal Conceptions of Teacher Identity**

The teacher identity can be both helpful and problematic when educators are faced with challenging situations, teaching dilemmas, and uncertainty in their classrooms and schools. While their identity can offer comfort and resources to successfully tackle those moments, it can also become restrictive and isolating when unable to fulfill what often feels like required ways of being. When identity is theorized as a performance (Gee, 2014), behaving out of character can be detrimental.

As Sumsion (2005) described in her research, the pressure to fulfill the image of an ideal teacher can not only be challenging and even impossible, but can also lead to self-doubt, insecurity and disenchantment with the profession. Supporting teachers in a taking up a dialogic teacher identity provides space and breathing room for them to be who they need to be to best serve their students. Of course, fostering dialogic identity development is not solely the job of the individual or even the teacher education program; the societal conception of being a teacher must also expand. The myth of the natural born teacher still exists today, contributing to the larger social pressures of what and who an ideal and true teacher is. Perhaps a better understanding of what it means to teach, and respect for the complexities of the profession – including that of early childhood education – will encourage a societal mindset shift. Becoming and being at teacher

requires sustained flexibility and support, not just defined standards and essential expectations. Such a shift may also be necessary in the Montessori world.

### **ABAR Teacher Self-Reflection and Identity Development**

How a teacher understands her self and social identities and how a teacher enacts those identities is of particular importance when taking up ABAR teaching strategies. As mentioned previously, young children are developing a social understanding of their world and their own self-identities. Early childhood teachers are not only responsible for fostering an awareness and appreciation of diversity through materials and lessons, but are also important role models in all that they do. Instances of bias, privilege and oppression are often so ingrained in social life that they occur unnoticed and unresolved. Yet such behavior lays the foundation for a young child's developing understanding of their world.

In her recent book on anti-bias early childhood education, Katie Kissinger, an early childhood teacher educator and social activist, stated that introducing culturally relevant materials is not enough. Rather,

the heart and soul of this journey is in the work of the human mind and spirit: It is in our day-to-day interactions with each other, adults with children, children with children, adults with adults, and in our responses when bias comes up. (Kissinger, 2017, p. 1)

For this reason, raising one's awareness regarding implicit and explicit bias that manifest in day-to-day actions is a crucial first step to becoming an ABAR early childhood teacher.

### **Bias in the Early Childhood Classroom**

A recent study on early childhood teachers' implicit bias revealed that teachers were significantly more likely to describe a boy's behavior as challenging or requiring attention than that of a girl's. Further, the teachers in the study paid the most attention to the Black boys in the classroom and consistently identified them as disruptive and displaying challenging behavior (Gilliam, Maupin, Reyes, Accavitti & Schic, 2016). In addition to verbal answers, data was collected via eye tracking. When participants were told to observe the classroom video for challenging behavior the eye tracking data revealed that they followed the Black boys more frequently than any of the other children – despite the absence of any qualified challenging behavior in the videos at all. One of the deeply concerning results of this implicit bias is the fact that 47% of preschoolers suspended one or more times are Black boys (Gilliam et al., 2016). Thus, not only are they denied access to early childhood education, other children around them begin to identify their behavior as bad, unacceptable, challenging, and worthy of removal from social situations. Additionally, such a subtle response like eye movement focused on a specific demographic can have a detrimental effect on the development of *all* children's social understanding. Jones and Vagle (2013) included the examination and awareness of body language in regards to social class as an important principle to practice social-class sensitive pedagogy. They wrote,

a raised eyebrow, a widening of the eyes, a turning of the back can all be perceived as performances for harsh judgment or dismissiveness. We might use our bodies this way without awareness, thus inflicting injury without intention and moving on to the next encounter similarly—or behave in a class-sensitive way in the very next interaction. (p. 6)

It is crucial to remember that all adult behavior in the early childhood setting is modeled behavior to young children learning about their world. Identifying and addressing bias expressed through body language is an important part of being an ABAR early childhood teacher.

### **ABAR Teacher Self-Reflection**

To combat implicit, and explicit, bias many scholars (e.g., Ausdale & Feagin, 2002; Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010; Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006; Goldstein, 2001; Hawkins, 2014; hooks, 2003; Husband, 2012; Jones & Vagle, 2013; Kemple, Harris & Lee, 2015; Kissinger, 2016; Kumashiro, 2002) have argued that critical self-examination is a necessary first, and ongoing, step. Early childhood teachers must look inwardly to better understand their own identity, experiences, beliefs, and assumptions in relation to social biases. In their book on how racism develops in early childhood, Ausdale and Feagin (2002) outlined several ways for teachers to address acts of racial prejudice, the first being a call to “deal seriously with your own internalized negative constructions of the children with whom you interact” (p.208). Similarly, Jones and Vagle (2013) included analyzing one’s own experience with and understanding of social class as the first principle in practicing social class-sensitive pedagogy. Husband (2012) argued that social injustice “exists and is furthered through the formal and informal ideologies, policies, practices, and texts implemented in schools” (p. 366). He has encouraged those seeking to take up ABAR education to critique and reflect on such systems and practices in which they are a part. Additionally, Husband emphasized the importance of becoming an active participant in dismantling bias and in the creation and enactment of equitable ABAR teaching practices.

**Intersectionality.** Broadly speaking, anti-bias curriculums in early childhood are intended to acknowledge the many and varied identity differences that children embody in a classroom and promote acceptance of others by others (Kessler, 2014). For this reason, teachers taking up ABAR reflection and teaching practices must have an understanding of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991, 2016). In her powerful and haunting TED talk, Kimberlé Crenshaw explained how different social categorizations such as race, gender, and social-class can overlap to create multiple layers of oppression (Crenshaw, 2016). For example, the effects of intersectionality can be identified in the study on preschool teacher bias (Gilliam et al., 2016). In that research, the Black boys experienced the prejudicial effects of both being a young boy *and* being Black which when coalesced triggered biased assumptions regarding their behavior, intentions, and social skills in a preschool classroom. These intersectional implicit biases perpetuate the ongoing and pervasive criminalization of Black men; one early example being the frequent suspension and even expulsion of Black boys from early childhood classrooms.

Other forms of intersectionality, such as social-class and family demographics also have an effect on a young child's experience in school. Polakow (2014) described the consequences of "feminized poverty" (p. 271) – meaning being poor, being a woman, and being a mother – which can result in lack of access to high-quality early education for young children as well as other experiences that affect early development. Early childhood teachers must be able to recognize the different social identities children bring into a classroom and the ways in which identities intersect and produce multiple forms of oppression. Furthermore, they must be able to critically reflect on their own normed conceptions of race, class, gender and other social categorizations and intentionally resist

the corresponding oppressive assumptions and biases that overlap (e.g., Black boys will misbehave).

**Self-reflective practices.** As previously mentioned, continual self-reflection is an important part of the Montessori method and is introduced during teacher education. This practice also aligns with several forms of ABAR teacher education. Kemple, Harris and Lee (2015) outlined three activities useful to facilitate preservice teacher's awareness of bias and prejudice in education. All three focus on exploring an individual's own identity through reflection, small group discussions and carefully selected readings. The *Teaching Tolerance Anti-Bias Framework* (2014) includes identity development as the first step in assisting students, of any age, to build an appreciation of diversity and become social justice activists. Similarly, Kissinger (2017) shared two different approaches to identity work as a first step to becoming an anti-bias and anti-oppression early childhood teacher. Both include reflective narratives, either by answering a series of questions regarding identity, or exploring gender, race and culture using creative expression. She takes this practice a step further by encouraging teachers to share their stories in small, safe groups, stating that "I believe that sharing our stories is one of the important steps we must take in reclaiming our full humanity, beginning to heal, and taking action" (p.11). Hooks (2003) also prescribed a process of reflective writing as a requirement to confronting racial bias and white-supremacist thinking present in oneself and society at large and working to dismantle oppression. She too encourages people to share their stories and subsequent awareness and understanding of race and racism: "We need to hear from the individuals who know, because they have lived anti-racist lives, what everyone can do to

decolonize their minds, to maintain awareness, change behavior, and create beloved community” (hooks, 2003, p.40).

### **Supporting ABAR Reflection**

Teachers should be supported in the exploration of their dialogic identity – what those identities are, how they came to be, and the contexts that surround or trigger them. Derman-Sparks and Ramsey (2006) wrote that “the anti-racism identity journey is fluid and more spiral than a ladder” (p. 21) and argued that identity and response to racism is greatly influenced by social contexts and issues that an individual experienced in the world. When confronted by a situation that calls their anti-racist identity into question, feelings of self-blame, discouragement, and even resistance can emerge. Because of this, it is critical to support teachers by listening, guiding and encouraging them while on their ABAR identity journey (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006). Teachers should be provided with the skills and support to recognize how their self and social identities may affect their teaching and the students in their class. Montessori (1967/1972) wrote,

It is not necessary to become ‘perfect’, free from every weakness, in order to become an educator. Indeed, it is possible for those continually concerned with the perfection of their inner life to remain unconscious of the defects that present them from understanding the child. That is why it is necessary to learn, to be guided, to be trained to become educators. (p.108)

### **Dialogic Possibilities**

When identity is viewed as dialogic and a process of continual construction, teachers can be given the space and support to explore their experiences and emotions as a part of who they are as teachers. Expecting teachers, or any individual, to fit into one

identity box constrains and limits their ability to acknowledge, accept, and explore possibilities produced through multiple identity positions. Working in a classroom requires an ability to take up new perspectives and relate to different needs and abilities. While teaching requires flexibility, so too should the understanding of a teacher's identity.

Teacher self-efficacy, agency, and retention are all important topics associated with identity and its related emotional experiences. For this reason, much of the research reviewed called for not only a change in the conceptualization of teacher identity, but also the acknowledgement and support of its development as a part of teacher education. When studies such as Britzman's (2003) and Sumison's (2002) depict conditions that caused negative and highly emotional reactions to being a teacher, it would be wise to further investigate what and why identity discrepancies and boundary experiences occurred. Better understanding teacher identity can help to support teachers through the transformational experience of becoming a teacher and the daily lived experience of being a teacher.

Incorporating ABAR self-reflection into Montessori teacher development is essential, if not urgent, in today's society. However, adhering to a single stable notion of what a Montessori teacher looks and acts like, limits early childhood Montessori educators in their identity development, and therefore teaching practice. Becoming a Montessori teacher can be experienced as such a profound and deeply personal transformation in which secrets are revealed and worldviews are altered and while both ABAR teacher reflection and Montessori pedagogy bring with them a new and justice-oriented perspective on life, they are not synonymous. Combining the two ways of being

and viewing the world has the potential to destabilize, to wobble, the clearly defined Montessori social identity (Fecho, Graham, & Hudson-Ross, 2005).

When identity is conceptualized as multiple and in a constant state of self-construction, teachers are given the opportunity to recognize a dialogic identity, reflect on the experiences and contexts that affected them over time, and become more self-aware of what those identities produce in their practice. Viewing Montessori identity as in dialogue with other ways of teaching, or arguably ways of thinking and being, allows for self-exploration, creativity and innovation as a teacher. It is from there that teaching practices can be critiqued, revised and improved to truly liberate and build a peaceful society.

### Chapter Three: Philosophies and Methodology

The purpose of this research was to better understand how ABAR self-reflection takes shape for Montessori teachers. In particular, I was interested in exploring the ways in which a Montessori teacher identity wobbles when engaging in ABAR teacher identity development through critical self-reflection (Fecho, Graham, & Hudson-Ross, 2005). My overall intent was to generate an initial understanding of this dialogic identity so teacher educators, including myself, are not only aware of that potential shift in balance, but also support teachers through a transformation into becoming both a Montessori teacher *and* an ABAR teacher. Phenomenological inquiry allowed for a rich, experiential study of the productions and provocations of the phenomenon (Vagle, 2014, 2018).

#### Engaging Philosophical Concepts and Ideas

I used post-intentional phenomenology as my guiding methodology to better understand what might be produced and provoked when early childhood Montessori teachers engage in ABAR self-reflection. Ihde (2003) characterized phenomena as shifting, being, and becoming in relation to the body/mind that is also shifting, being, and becoming in relation to the phenomenon. Because this research considered how a Montessori teacher's identity may shift, be and become when engaging with ABAR self-reflection, I felt this was an appropriate framework for my research. Norman Fairclough's theory of critical discourse analysis served as a tool to deeply explore discursive themes within the phenomenological material<sup>6</sup>. Finally, Foucault's characterization of power and the regime of truth offered a theoretical framework for looking at relations, connections

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<sup>6</sup> Denzin and Lincoln (2003) used the term *empirical materials* as their preferred way to refer to what is commonly described as data. Vagle (2018) has taken this a step further by referring specifically to *phenomenological material* used in phenomenological research.

and disconnections at work in the phenomenon. The following section provides an in-depth summary of these guiding concepts and ideas apart of my research.

### **Post-Intentional Phenomenology**

Phenomena become manifest for us through living in the world. Our experiences of phenomena not only affect our next steps, future decisions and life path, but also the ebb and flow of the whole social world. Power, a force that is a part of that flow, produces more social experiences that affect our relations with others (Foucault, 1977/2010a, 1997); this is a cycle that happens repeatedly. While some relations are harmless, and even beneficial, others can be oppressive and inhibitory and can occur in both subtle and obvious ways. Fairclough (2015) wrote, “if we want to understand how the existing social reality works and survives, with a view to changing it, we need to understand [the relation between discourse and other social elements], we need to be able to explain it” (p.35).

Post-intentional phenomenology conceptualizes phenomena as circulating and evolving, rather than stable and static (Vagle, 2014, 2018). Studying how an individual and a phenomenon move through each other can illuminate important characteristics and conditions of the phenomenon. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge, question, and imagine multiple ways that phenomena manifest, appear and produce; life is in a constant state of change, growth and construction – there is always room for multiple possibilities.

**Intentionalities.** An important part of post-intentional phenomenology is how intentional relations are recognized as a part of the phenomenon. The early phenomenologist, Edmund Husserl, used the term *intentionality* to refer to the connection

between things in the world and human consciousness. Intentional relations were the elements that support the process that occurs to generate a consciousness *of* a particular phenomenon (Vagle, 2014). Later, Martin Heidegger reconceived intentional relations as consisting of meanings that are always shifting and changing as humans move and connect *in* the world. In this case, the subject (human) is a part of, or *in*, the object (phenomenon). Because “we always already are submerged in meaning” (van Manen, 2014, p.108) humans are not assumed to be conscious *of* a phenomenon, rather they are *in* the phenomenon (Vagle, 2014, 2018).

Post-intentional phenomenology conceptualizes intentionalities and phenomena as moving with and *through* each other, simultaneously on a path to becoming. A part of this dance are multiple intentional relations that connect the body, the social world and phenomena. In post-intentional phenomenology it is believed that intentionalities cannot be clearly followed from subject to object. When a phenomenon and its intentional relations are *both* experienced *and* affected by the body/mind and social world it is impossible to trace the experience from a stable beginning to a stable end. This lens fit my research well in that I was seeking to understand if and how a Montessori teacher can *both* maintain her Montessori teacher identity *and* engage in ABAR self-reflection that might provide new and alternative teaching perspectives.

Knowledge is not discovered by following a path from one thing to the next - from a tree's root to its branch. Instead “we always enter into the middle of things” (Vagle & Hofsess, 2015, p. 3) which is an existence full of relations and connections intertwined, breaking apart, and regenerating continually over time. Deleuze and

Guttari's (1987) description of the *rhizome*, provides an appropriate image for how I envisioned the effects and possibilities of this teacher-identity exploration.

A rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines [...] There is a rupture in the rhizome whenever segmentary lines explode into a line of flight, but the line of flight is part of the rhizome. These lines always tie back to one another. That is why you can never posit a dualism or a dichotomy, even in the rudimentary forms of the good and the bad. You may make a rupture, draw a line of flight, yet there is still a danger that you will reencounter organizations that restratify everything, formations that restore power to a signifier, attributions that reconstitute a subject – anything you like. (Deleuze & Guttari, 1987, p. 9)

A dialogic teacher-identity is in a constant state of construction, and deconstruction; whereas a Montessori social identity has long strived to be stable and clearly defined. Therefore, paying attention to the rhizomatic lines that can both rupture (i.e., destabilize) and restratify (i.e., bring order to) the phenomenon of Montessori teachers engaging in ABAR self-reflection was an important part of the analytical process. This research sought to understand the shattering and regenerating of the rhizomatic phenomenon of Montessori teacher's engaging in ABAR teacher self-reflection. To do this, conceptualizing phenomena as moving through the world, absorbing historical, social, personal, and political lines along the way, allowed for research that could take a more holistic approach to the unit of study, or, the phenomenon.

**Post-reflexing.** According to Husserl, understanding the essence of an experience, or phenomenon, provided a way to understand the world how it is *truly*

experienced, or how it truly is. To do this, the phenomenon needed to be uncovered and drawn out from its surrounding context so that it could be looked at in its purity. This required an ability to remove phenomena from the everyday world by setting aside one's *natural attitude*, meaning preconceived ideas and understandings, bias and assumptions, and other elements of life that may have an effect on how phenomena are perceived. Husserl referred to this as phenomenological reduction, or what is more commonly known as *bracketing* of preconceived knowledge. By pursuing an understanding of pure experiential consciousness that occurs in lived experience we could get "back to the things themselves" that make up the world.

However, because post-intentional phenomenology views phenomena as in a constant state of construction – as a wild, messy, intertwined theory of existence – bracketing one's pre-understandings is not only difficult, but even impossible. Since the body is both acting and being acted upon, the conscious and corporeal knowledge within it are important parts of understanding intentionalities and the phenomenon. Dahlberg, Dahlberg and Nyström (2008) began the shift away from bracketing to a term they coined *bridling*. When a phenomenologist bridles he or she is acknowledging, instead of removing, pre-understandings of the phenomenon of study while also keeping careful control over their potential effects. The bridled attitude can also be called an open attitude, meaning possessing an "openness to the research situation, the research question, and to oneself" (Dahlberg, Dahlberg, & Nystöm, 2008, p.100). In post-intentional phenomenology, Vagle (2014) has taken this a step further, suggesting that pre-understandings can and should be included in the research process through a process of post-reflexion. Consider, again, the rhizome, in which multiple intended relations are

moving with and through the embodied phenomenon. Because the body is both affecting and being affected by all the intended meanings in relation to the phenomenon, it is important to include those relations in the research process and analysis.

Post-reflexing is a process of continual self-reflection in relation to the research process. It is a process of constantly interrogating pre-understandings that were existent before, during and after material collection. This part of the research felt natural to me, considering the study's focus on critical self-examination. Throughout my research, I journaled, took notes, and brainstormed on my own experience with the phenomenon. This was particularly important as I, the researcher, also took on the role of facilitator and even teacher during the research process. Valuing and collecting material that described my own preunderstandings and evolving understandings of the phenomenon helped to identify intentionalities moving through and away from the rhizome of a Montessori teacher identity.

### **Critical Discourse Analysis**

This research explored phenomena that move through the social world in a politically charged way. I do not mean politically as in related directly to government and traditional politics; rather, I use the term "politically" to refer to social power(s) that exist as part of various social contexts (e.g., ideological expectations of a Montessori teacher). Social contexts bring with them their own unique set of intentional relations that both affect and are affected by social politics and power. These relations are often expressed and identified through discourse. For this reason, I felt that utilizing critical discourse analysis (CDA) within post-intentional phenomenological methodology could help to produce a rich and perhaps even provoking analysis of a phenomenon.

Discourse, broadly speaking, is a form of social practice, one that is both affected and affecting our ways of being in the world. Language is used in social life to connect, represent and produce meaning in all different ways and discourse refers to this active role of language-in-use. Fairclough (1992) suggested “discourse is a practice not just of representing the world, but of signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning” (p. 64). The meaning that is produced through discourse exerts a form of social control, sometimes obvious and sometimes subtle or even hidden from everyday awareness. This gives discourse great power in the progression of society/ies. CDA is the study of this power and control and how it manifests and operates in the world through language.

It is important to note, however, that power should not always be viewed as a negative force, a perspective taken up by Foucault and influential on the development of CDA. Foucault (1977/2010a) wrote,

If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body. (p.61)

CDA can offer insight on that productive network because discourse is a key element in how power is represented and lived out, for better or worse.

**Fairclough's theory of CDA.** I used Fairclough's theory of CDA as a way to analyze the rhizomatic construction (and deconstruction) of the phenomenon of

Montessori teachers engaging in ABAR teacher self-reflection through language in use. Fairclough's theory of CDA uses both a micro and macro lens to assist in exploring the personal and social qualities of a phenomenon. I felt that this was particularly useful to this research because of the many varied intentionalities that contribute to identity development ranging from historical influences (e.g., original Montessori texts) to social politics (e.g., varied Montessori teacher education programs) to curricular classroom experiences (e.g., a curricular interaction that triggers ABAR reflection).

Because discourse encompasses such a broad array of language forms and practices, using an analytical strategy that categorized discursive elements was helpful. Fairclough (1992) outlined three dimensions of analysis: 1. Discursive practice (the resources used to produce the actor's discourse[s]) 2. Text (the micro analysis of how this is done) 3. Social practice (why the discursive practice is the way it is and its relation to broader social practice[s]). Within these three dimensions, Fairclough has suggested several ways to analyze each dimension. He stressed that while these dimensions aid in separating out elements of discourse practices, there is often overlap. Similarly, the dimensions can be worked with creatively to meet the needs of the particular analysis. An important point to consider, particularly when pursuing a form of social change, is what discursive material may provide the most insight into "the actual ways in which people deal with the problematization of practices" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 230). Fairclough referred to this data as "cruces" or "moments of crisis" (p. 230). Within those moments of crisis, social power and control may be revealed and explored, illuminating a possible hegemonic struggle and need for change. By using Fairclough's theory of CDA to explore the intentionalities that contribute to the phenomenon of Montessori teachers

engaging in ABAR self-reflection, I sought to identify these moments of crisis in whatever form they took, a tool I felt helped to uncover specifically what was provoked through this work.

### **Power and the Regime of Truth**

Foucault's theory of power and the regime of truth established a theoretical perspective to inform the analysis as well as push my thought process into spaces I may not have considered. Jackson and Mazzei (2012) have called this *thinking with theory* or *plugging in* a particular theory into the research process.

We characterize this reading-the-data-while-thinking-the-theory as a moment of plugging in, of entering the assemblage, of making new connectives. We began to realize how plugging in creates a different relationship among texts: they *constitute* one another and in doing so create something new. (p.4)

Thinking with theory encourages the opening up and contemplation of phenomenological material, but the material also pushes the theory into spaces it may have not been taken up before. This strategy is helpful in post-intentional phenomenological exploration when intentionalities should “be philosophized—conceptualized, discussed, opened up, and contemplated” (Vagle & Hofsess, 2015, p.3) in multiple ways.

Foucault described the “dazzling effect” (Foucault, 1977/2010a, p. 68) of power and suggested that while power can oppress, it can also liberate and cause pleasure. This theory of power is apparent in Montessori discourse. For example, discourse regarding who a Montessori teacher is and how she behaves (and even looks) has created and sustained a belief in the essential Montessori teacher identity (Malm, 2004). This single, stable and ideal belief has become a social identity made up of expectations and opinions

held by others and imposed *on* others. Foucault used the term *governmentality* to describe this sort of social control (O'Farrell, 2007), a form of control that governs individuals at every level, including elements such as beliefs, behavior and appearance. While this truth has produced a Montessori social order and identity, one that provides many with a sense of comfort, belonging, and commitment to education, it also has the potential to repress or oppress other conflicting identities that should be acknowledged and explored as an ABAR early childhood educator.

The regime of truth has a significant effect on the progression of society, the evolution and acceptance of knowledge, social order, and even individual agency. Truth and power not only act upon us, but also become embodied through our responses and reactions and are reproduced through our own behavior and discourse. However, they are also not forces that individual groups fully command. While certainly some have more access to influencing the ways in which truth is established and power is produced, Foucault theorized these two social elements as forces that run through society beyond our control; power is constantly a part of the lived world and the phenomena we experience. Exploring what is produced and provoked when Montessori teachers engage in ABAR self-reflection may offer insight into moments of crisis between an ideological power and social and personal awareness – and hopefully how that tension can be navigated to grow as a teacher.

## **Research Methodology**

### **Phenomenon and Guiding Research Questions**

My study sought to better understand the phenomenon of early childhood Montessori teachers engaging in ABAR self-reflection. The primary question that guided

my research and analysis was: How might engaging in ABAR teacher self-reflection take shape for early childhood Montessori teachers?

Because of these historical and social intentionalities which I predicated could have a role to play in the provoking of the phenomenon, I developed secondary questions that included the following:

1. What might be produced and provoked when early childhood Montessori teachers engage in ABAR self-reflection?
  - a. What might be produced and provoked in their ongoing identity formation?
  - b. What might be produced and provoked in their teaching practice?
2. What might be produced and provoked through examination of historical influences (e.g., original Montessori texts, biographies)
3. What might be produced and provoked through examination of social politics (e.g., varied Montessori teacher education programs)
4. What might be produced and provoked through examination of curricular classroom experiences (e.g., a curricular interaction that triggers ABAR reflection).

In post-intentional phenomenology, there are seemingly infinite intentionalities that contribute to the ongoing life and production of the phenomenon. This allowance was in part what drew me to the methodology as I feel no one experience can be traced to an identifiable and singular reason for its existence. How life is experienced and how it progresses can be attributed to a never ending number of variables. However, this can make research difficult, opening a research door to everything that may have an effect on

anything a part of the phenomenon of study! Therefore, these questions were helpful during analysis by offering gentle guidance and focus on some key intentionalities I was interested in exploring. This research does not deliver a fully complete and static description of what it is like for Montessori teacher to engage in ABAR self-reflection, but it does provide valuable insight on some important aspects that contribute to its progression through the world.

### **Contextualizing Montessori Social World**

My secondary research questions included inquiry into Montessori social practice that affect the construction of a Montessori teacher identity. Therefore, it is important to understand some particular elements of the Montessori social world that contributed to the development of my research questions and led to further analysis.

Montessori teacher training brings with it a significant amount of historical, social, and emotional intentionalities. As previously described, Montessori discourse includes specific ways of being and looking, opinions about traditional teaching styles, and beliefs about the purpose of education. These examples are all characteristics of Montessori teacher development that are important intentionalities of the phenomenon. Apart of the historical intentionalities includes the time period and cultural context of the birth of the Montessori method. As an example, a frequently noted fact about Montessori herself was that she was one of the first female doctors in Italy. Such facts invoke a host of emotions, beliefs, and stereotypes that have had an effect on the evolution and perception of the Montessori method. Additionally, Montessori lived through two world wars and was exiled to India from her native country of Italy by Mussolini. She witnessed not only the horrors of war, but also the conditions that led up to conflict. She wrote:

Peace is a goal that can be attained only through common accord, and the means to achieve this unity for peace are twofold: first, an immediate effort to resolve conflicts without recourse to violence – in other [words], to prevent war – and second, a long term effort to establish lasting peace among men. Preventing conflicts is the world of politics; establishing peace is the work of education. (Montessori, 1972, p.48)

Montessori's war-torn experiences had a deep effect on her vision of a world made peaceful through education which is evident throughout her writing – the foremost influence on Montessori discourse.

Another important intentional relation of the phenomenon are the social implications of different Montessori teacher education programs and their effects on Montessori teacher identity. There are two leading organizations that offer Montessori teacher training, teaching resources, national conferences, workshops, school accreditations and other Montessori educational services: Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) and the American Montessori Society (AMS). AMI and AMS have a long history of disagreement and separation which has produced social rifts within the larger Montessori community itself (Whitescarver & Cossentino, 2008; Debs, 2016b). In brief, AMI was founded by Montessori herself to preserve the details of her method. As such, AMI refers to itself as “the steward of the Montessori educational approach” (AMI, 2018b). AMI has worked hard to stay true to the method by preserving and recreating the materials Montessori designed, concentrating on the content in her original writing (and some from her son, Mario Montessori), and following her instructions on teacher training which includes a focus on practice based teaching, individual written curriculums, and a

deep understanding of Montessori theory. In order to become an AMI teacher trainer (i.e., an AMI certified Montessori teacher educator), an AMI trained Montessorian must meet many qualifications which include a minimum of five years teaching in the classroom, theoretical papers approved by AMI, and years of shadowing an active AMI teacher trainer. In many ways, the requirements are not that unlike those of a PhD or EdD, though they are only recognized by those in the Montessori community.

AMS was developed in an attempt to adapt the Montessori method to perceived needs of American teachers and children. Specifically, Nancy Rambush, the founder of AMS, “sought to design a version of Montessori teacher training that would conform to American professional standards” (Whitescarver & Cossentino, 2008, p. 2586). To many, including Mario Montessori, this was an abomination – an attempt to Americanize a method of education that many Montessorians believed had been proven to work with children of any demographic. While AMS allowed for the incorporation of materials beyond what Montessori dictated and a significantly more lenient expectation of who can be a Montessori teacher educator, AMI has kept Montessori authenticity and integrity at the forefront.

In their historical review of the development and separation of AMI and AMS, Whitescarver and Cossentino (2008) declared, “AMI and AMS share more in common with one another than either does with mainstream educational culture, and we maintain that the Americanization of Montessori was a legacy not of a single leader but of the tensions themselves” (p.2589). Today, both AMI and AMS leaders are calling for union. The Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education (MACTE), founded in 1995, acts as an accreditation and quality assurance program for Montessori teacher

education programs of all types. Stemming from MACTE came the Montessori Leaders Collaborative (MLC) which is made up of Montessorians who “have demonstrated willingness and capacity to work collaboratively across organizational boundaries” (Trust for Learning, 2018). The Montessori Public Policy Initiative (MPPI) emerged as a collaborative organization specifically between AMI and AMS. Today, AMI and AMS Montessorians, as well as other Montessori teachers from lesser known programs, are working together in schools, advocacy initiatives, and grassroots organizations such as Montessori for Social Justice. The future looks bright for Montessorians of all types, with increased collaboration on the road ahead. However, the defined separation between the two programs has not altogether vanished, and the historical value of authenticity is still strong in AMI programs. Exploring the evolution of these Montessori social sub-systems and their hierarchies can also contribute to a better understanding of the movement of power and truth and its impact on Montessori teacher identity development.

### **Participant Selection**

As I developed my research proposal, I spent a significant amount of time thinking deeply about who I would ask to join me in this work and settled on the following three participant characteristics:

1. Participants needed to be practicing teachers or assistant teachers in early childhood (a.k.a. “primary”) Montessori classrooms.
2. They had undergone AMI teacher education.
3. They had undergone the AMI teacher education within the past three years.

I chose the above criteria for several reasons with the first being that my own background was as an AMI primary Montessori teacher. I have focused my teaching

career on working with children aged 2.5 to 6 and am committed to supporting the progress of early childhood education at large. Because my teaching experience was largely the same as my participants, there were some mutual understandings regarding the materials, curriculum and general experiences of working with young children. Since I looked for Montessori teachers new to the profession, I knew that they may have assistant roles in the classroom rather than being a lead teacher. This is not unusual post-training, nor is the role any less valued in the Montessori community. My expectation was that participants engage in a form of self-reflection while in a classroom with young children which both a lead teacher or assistant could do.

After much thought I decided to work with only teachers who experienced an AMI teacher training. Again, this is partially because I had the same experience of becoming a teacher and was able to understand that of my participants' on a more intrinsic level. Additionally, AMI teacher training is also known for tightly (even rigidly) adhering to Montessori's own teaching practices at both the early childhood and teacher education levels. While a commitment to historical authenticity has resulted in preserving many important tenets of Montessori pedagogy, it can also limit the incorporation of new and modern teaching strategies. Exploring the experience of engaging with ABAR self-reflection after having been indoctrinated with the value and commitment to maintaining the purity of age-old practices within Montessori curriculum felt rich with intentionalities and important tensions. Furthermore, my intention as a teacher educator is not to "water down" or eliminate what AMI teacher education values; rather, I hope to build on what AMI has maintained over so many years – sparking

evolution and progress, not an overhaul and rejection of the educational revolution Montessori began 100 years ago.

Finally, I chose to work with participants who were relatively novice Montessori teachers and went through AMI teacher training at or around the same time. I had several reasons for this decision. AMI teacher training is widely known as an experience of personal transformation, an experience shared by and with others apart of a cohort. My hope was to work with a group that either all went through that transformation together or was made up of sub-groups of individuals who had trained together, creating a level of camaraderie and a comfortable space for personal conversations. To support the relevance of my research, I wanted to work with teachers who had recently been through a training program and had experienced the most current content of AMI approved teacher education programming. Additionally, I felt that individuals who had recently been transformed into Montessori teachers would be able to more easily recall, feel, and speak to the transformative experience and its effect(s) on their identity.

### **Participant Recruitment**

I identified ten potential participants in my region who met the selection criteria, each of whom I had met previously. Each individual was sent an e-mail explaining the purpose and requirements of the study. The consent form was attached to the e mail to provide more in-depth information about their potential role in the research. I was available to answer any questions potential participants had before committing to being part of the project. Out of the ten individuals e-mailed, two did not respond. The next and perhaps most difficult step to participant recruitment was coordinating a time to conduct the first workshop. While I originally had eight interested participants, two of them were

unable to make the workshop date resulting in six participants who were a part of the study. Final questions and consent forms were conducted on the day of the first workshop, before the activities and phenomenological material collection began.

### **Participant Demographics**

I felt incredibly fortunate to have been able to work with a group of participants who met all my selection criteria and who brought a diverse array of perspectives to our conversations. Out of the six participants, three of them had completed their Montessori training together one year prior and two had just graduated from the same program that spring. One had taken her AMI training at a different training center and also recently graduated. I had met each participant personally prior to the study, and several of them who had not trained together had met each other through classroom observations, conferences, or other workshops.

Each participant worked at a different school ranging from preschools to schools that included elementary and even junior high Montessori programs. The schools were all private programs, though each varied in cost depending on whether it was a preschool, part of a larger school program, or a school that offered significant financial assistance through grants and state funding. The schools served a range of demographics from children and families living in urban poverty to families in the urban and suburban upper class. Three of the schools intentionally sought to serve specific demographics (e.g., Native families, Latinx families, immigrants and refugees) though none of the schools were exclusive. One of the schools was a dual language program with Spanish and English, and another was a trilingual program with English, Ojibwa, and Lakota spoken

throughout the day. One of the participants spoke Spanish with the lead guide in her classroom though her school was not specifically a language immersion program.

Each participant brought her own invaluable perspectives and experiences to the conversations. The following section includes a brief identity description written by each participant with only minor edits I made for clarity. While identifying descriptive information is accurate, participants chose their own pseudonym to preserve confidentiality and anonymity.

**Lola** is a 24-year old female Montessori guide and is an enrolled tribe member from the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa in North Dakota. She identifies as straight, middle-class and Native American. Lola is in her first year of her working career but as a student has been very involved with youth work and social justice issues. She is dedicated to serving her community, the work of women, and educating American Indian children through the Montessori method which she believes is a good tool to deliver high-quality and culturally-relevant education.

**Lauren** identifies as a straight, white, middle-class, female in her 30s. She has been involved in education for the last ten years and in Montessori for the past five. She is an active listener in the conversations on combating racism and bias specifically in education.

**Beth** is a 29-year-old white, upper middle-class queer woman. She has worked in Montessori schools for several years as an assistant in an elementary classroom and as a trained primary assistant for the last two years. She describes herself as a tender and justice-oriented teacher and person. She has been, and continues to be, actively engaged in ABAR teaching and discussions.

**Esperanza** is a Latinx, working class, heterosexual female in her early 40s. She is a Montessori Guide in a Primary environment serving children between the ages of 2 1/2 - 6 years. She describes herself as engaged and committed to the ABAR Journey since the beginning and has continued to seek equity. She is also a mother and nature enthusiast, encouraging community members to explore their roles in environmental justice.

**Sally** is a Caucasian, middle class straight female in her very early 30s. She holds Montessori education in the highest regard through which she wants to give young, developing children (including and especially ones facing challenges) the chance to learn, grow, and experience for themselves, without feeling the negative feelings often associated with school, with growing up, and with the trial and error of human development. She sees herself as beginning her ABAR journey, knows she makes mistakes every single day, needs a lot of spiritual and self-preparation and reflection, and is constantly learning and growing.

**Katherine** is a white, female, Montessori teacher in her thirties. She believes the Montessori method is complimentary to her ABAR journey, in which she is an engaged beginner. Seeing the child as an individual, one to be respected, deserving of only the best, and worthy of a sense of dignity is what drew her to the method. This, along with Montessori being an education that cultivates peace in the classroom, and in turn into the world, is what continues to inspire her on her ABAR journey. As a lifelong learner, she looks to find ways to connect the two, but also to gain more knowledge in both.

**Me as a Participant**

I too am an AMI trained Montessori early childhood teacher engaging in ABAR teacher self-reflection and in this research I have included myself, the researcher, as a participant. By using post-intentional phenomenological methodology, I have been able to include my own lived experiences with the phenomenon recorded through post-reflexions as valuable phenomenological material. Recordings of my own experience doing this work has been particularly important as I took on multiple roles throughout the course of this study: as an early childhood Montessori teacher engaging in ABAR self-reflection, as an instructor and facilitator of ABAR workshops, and as a phenomenological material gatherer and researcher. The ways in which my own identities (those listed above as well as race, gender, social class etc.) were produced and provoked through engaging in ABAR reflection is an additional perspective useful to better understanding the phenomenon.

Throughout the entire research process, including the time developing my research plan, I kept a post-reflexion journal. The journal included a broad array of notes and reflections related to the phenomenon – from workshop brainstorming, to notetaking as an attendee at other ABAR oriented workshops, to journal entries on my own anti-racist journey as an educator, mother, and person living in the world. While journaling was generally sporadic and taken up on an as-needed basis, I was intentional about post-reflexing before and/or after each workshop and round of interviews. As phenomenological analysis progressed I post-reflexed on a more consistent schedule - recording notes and reflections during each phase of analysis work. My contributions to workshop discussions and interviews are also included as participant phenomenological material.

### **Gathering of Phenomenological Material**

Participant phenomenological material was gathered through audio recordings of ABAR workshops and interviews. Interviews were typically unstructured, guided by only one or two questions, and occasionally included follow-up questions such as “what was it like when ...?” and “what was that like for you?” to prompt more experiential descriptions. This material offered insight into the lived experience of engaging in ABAR self-reflection. Lived experiences are important access points to better understanding how a phenomenon exists and evolves in life. The experiences my participants and I shared helped me to identify moments of crisis and the ways in which we dealt with the problemization of their practice and identity formation (Fairclough, 1992).

Additional phenomenological material included workshop artifacts, such as schedules (including printed copies that I had marked up before and during the workshop), handouts, and quotes shared with the group by myself and others. Historical material such as Montessori’s writing, biographies, current Montessori research, and Montessori organization position statements provided important insight into the establishment and development of a Montessori social identity and how the phenomenon of engaging in ABAR reflection could be experienced today. This material is incorporated throughout the following chapters of analysis.

#### **ABAR Workshops and Interviews**

Over the course of three months I facilitated one six-hour ABAR workshop and two three-hour ABAR workshops. I also conducted three small group one-hour interviews and six individual 20 to 40 minute final interviews. While the content of each workshop was different, there were some similarities and some routines formed a part of

all three. Each workshop included an opening and closing reflection in the form of a quote I found meaningful and connected to the day's activities. The quotes came from philosophers such as bell hooks to poets such as Naomi Shihad Nye. Throughout all the workshops I read Montessori excerpts relevant to our discussions and activities. I intentionally included these quotes to maintain an ongoing focus on Montessori education and our shared identity as Montessori teachers, even when conversations strayed into other topics. After the opening reflection, each workshop included a review of the four agreements of Courageous Conversations: 1) Stay engaged; 2) Expect to experience discomfort; 3) Speak your truth; and 4) Expect and accept a lack of closure (Singleton & Hayes, n.d.). As a group we added a fifth agreement which was to maintain anonymity when referring to our work together with others. Each workshop included beverages, snacks, and a catered lunch. I intentionally ordered lunch from minority-run and/or social justice oriented restaurants.

In the following section, I provide an overview of each workshop, small group interviews, and individual interviews in chronological order.

### **Workshop 1: Introduction to ABAR Self-Reflection, 8/15/17**

Just before the beginning of the school year, I facilitated an introductory workshop on ABAR self-reflection (Appendix A). Unique to this workshop, before reading an opening quote, I offered my own reflection, a tribute to the First Nation's people who have experienced extreme injustice across the United States, including in Minnesota. I gave a lot of thought to opening the workshop, and ultimately the entire project, in this way. I had attended workshops that included such a beginning and found it to be sobering and powerful. Additionally, my own experience of re-learning America's

history of oppression and injustice has been critical to my increased understanding of current systemic biases, my own experience growing up and living within such systems, and identifying where and how I can work for social change. However, out of all the workshops and meetings I facilitated, this was the part I was the most nervous about:

*I guess [the colonization and genocide of First Nations' people] just feels like such a sensitive subject – something so fragile – and horrible – I don't know how to address it. How do I acknowledge a genocide my race instigated? It feels so painful, guilt ridden, shameful. (Post-Reflexion, 08/12/17)*

Despite my nervousness, I felt committed, if not obligated, to beginning the workshop in this way. I sought advice from two academic colleagues, one who had experienced similar opening reflections and another who identifies as Native. Both encouraged me to include this reflection, particularly given the content of the work. I then created a relatively detailed script to follow to ensure I relayed accurate information (I referred to the mass execution of 38 Dakota warriors in Mankato). I practiced it several times prior to the workshop.

After my opening reflection, I read a quote from Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) book, *The Borderlands* which referenced the ways in which identities intersect and the importance of self-reflection and self-awareness. Activities in the initial workshop included familiarizing participants with different identity categories (e.g., race, gender, ableness), reflecting on their own experiences of identifying – consciously or unconsciously – in a certain way, discussion on key terms (e.g., bigotry, prejudice, racism), current concerns regarding bias in early childhood education, and some critical

reflection on Montessori writing and theory. The workshop closed with a Montessori quote on teacher transformation.

After the opening workshop, participants were asked to keep ABAR work in mind over the course of the study through self-reflection. There was not an expectation to explicitly *do* certain things in their classroom or change their daily teaching practices. The emphasis was on thinking, reflecting, seeing, acting and/or embodying ABAR ideas as each participant felt comfortable. To support this process, participants were asked to maintain a reflective journal intended to keep the concepts alive and active in their lives. I provided participants with a notebook to record their thoughts and experience taking up ABAR self-reflection and shared reflection prompts to use as a guide if necessary (Appendix B). These reflections could be in the form of pictures, journaling, creative writing, or even include their own found artifacts. Participants were not asked to share their journal with others, including myself, but they were asked to construct a final reflection project of their own choosing to present to the group at our last workshop in December. Additionally, I gave each participant the book *A Good Time for the Truth* (Shin, 2016). *A Good Time for the Truth* is a compilation of narrative reflections on race by writers of color living in Minnesota. While the book does not include a direct focus on education (several chapters refer to experiences in schools), it sheds light on how race, and other intersections of identities, affects a Minnesotan of color's daily experiences. I hoped that this would add important context and relevance to the purpose and relevancy of ABAR reflection. Participants were encouraged, but not required, to read the book. One participant had previously read it a part of her school community.

**Small Group Interviews, 9/26/17, 9/30/17, 10/11/17**

Approximately four weeks after the initial workshop, I held small group interviews via Google Hangout. These were scheduled based on participant availability. At these meetings I opened with the question: What is it like to incorporate ABAR reflection into your life and teaching? Occasionally I asked a clarifying question, but generally let the conversations progress organically. Because all but one of the participants met in small groups, they engaged each other quite a bit through questions and responsive comments which helped deepen the conversations. At these meetings I shared two documents via e-mail, one on levels of activism as described by Kissinger (2017, p.2) and a copy of the continuum of becoming an anti-racist organization (Appendix C). I introduced these documents as guides to consider and reflect on a part of their ongoing ABAR self-reflection, and posed questions such as: Do you feel you are at one of these levels? Do you want to advance? What might you do to achieve a new level?

### **Workshop 2: Reflection and Historical Timeline, 10/28/17**

In October, I held another workshop to reflect on experiences thus far, revisit self-identities in conjunction with the concepts of privilege and marginalization, and take a deeper dive into the history of education in the United States (Appendix D). I opened the session with a quote by John Dewey (1902). This is mildly significant because it is generally known that there was animosity between Montessori, Dewey, and Dewey's academic partner, Kilpatrick. Despite pedagogical similarities, Dewey's work was not read during my AMI Montessori teacher education program. Yet, as exemplified in the quote I shared, he saw hope and possibility through education of young children just as Montessori did.

In addition to providing time and space to reconnect and reflect with one another on their experience taking up ABAR self-reflection, the October workshop included a reflection on historical events apart of the American education system, spanning from early childhood programs to colleges and universities. I compiled a list of 70 significant events related to the US education system such as supreme court cases, education laws, demographic statistics and social trends that had occurred between 1700 to present day (Appendix E). Each event was named and briefly described on a piece of 8.5 by 11-inch paper. Together, the participants organized the events in chronological order and arranged them in a long line in a hallway. We then took a silent journey through the timeline, slowly and silently reading about each event in history – many which prevented, or fought against the prevention of, children from attending or succeeding in school because of their perceived identity.

After completing the silent journey, I had planned to facilitate a reflective circle process, using a Native talking stick I had received as a gift. As I introduced the activity I immediately felt uncomfortable with the glaring cultural appropriation I was committing. I had considered this fact prior to conducting the workshop and thought with a respectful introduction acknowledging the Native history and influence on circle process practices, the activity would be acceptable. This assumption was wrong. I asked Lola if she was comfortable with the activity and while she responded graciously, I knew that my choice was inappropriate. This was a huge learning experience for me. I had thought that as a knowledgeable ABAR facilitator I could essentially talk my way through anything, an attitude likely linked to my whiteness and privilege. What I recognized was that there are sacred traditions that I am not, nor likely ever will be, in a position to use, and that

awareness and respect is part of being an ABAR activist. I share this experience because not sharing it would not be ignoring an important piece of the research experience and a moment that contributed to the growth of my own ABAR identity. I am thankful that I was in the company of women who allowed me the space to learn and grow alongside them.

Because I was able to recognize the inappropriateness of the talking stick I had introduced, I made my best effort to simply emphasize a process of respectful turn taking and allowance for communal silence. Fortunately, despite my mistake, the process proceeded in a seemingly effective way with each participant engaged and reflective. I shared the following three questions to guide our group reflection:

1. When I reflect on the history of race, racism, and other forms of oppression as part of the education system in the United States, I think about....
2. Take a minute to reflect on your identity and how you have been privileged and/or marginalized. What connections or disconnections can you make with this historical reflection – in particular to your educational experience?
3. What are you doing to change, or evolve, the system to be inclusive and equitable?

The purpose of this historical reflection was to illuminate the systemic oppression a part of the education system – historical oppression of groups of people based on their identities, and oppression that we had all experienced through our own marginalization and/or privilege simply by growing up and living within it. I ended the workshop by sharing a list of resources, primarily books that I have read and found helpful in my own ABAR journey, and read a quote by bell hooks (1996) and Montessori (1967/1972).

### **Workshop 3: Action and Final Reflections, 12/2/17**

The final workshop took place in early December (Appendix F). The primary purpose of this workshop was for participants to share their final reflections with the group. However, I conducted a short activity on social justice action during the first half of the meeting. The workshop opened with a quote by Audre Lorde from her essay *The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action* in which she states “for it is not difference which immobilizes us, but silence, and there are so many silences to be broken” (Lorde, 2014, p. 282). I shared Hietzeg’s (2014) steps toward social justice which I had compiled into a one-page handout (Appendix G). Hietzeg outlined four main steps to acting *against* injustice and *working for* justice:

1. Reflection on Experience
2. Social Analysis
3. Moral Judgement
4. Action Plan

As a group we discussed how we might each take these steps, with extra attention to the idea of neutrality in relation to moral judgment, discussed further in Chapter 6.

During the last half of the workshop each participant shared a final reflection on her experience taking up ABAR self-reflection. After the reflections, I gave each participant a small wallet-sized booklet I had made for them to write down any ideas, thoughts, facts, etc. that they wanted to have on hand as they continued their own ABAR journey. I shared a video of the poet Naomi Shihad Nye (Wisdom Ways, 2017) reading *Gate A4*, a poem that beautifully depicts her own experience of finding connection and

community in an unlikely place. Finally, I ended the workshop with the following Montessori quote:

It is difficult to understand a complicated society, organized by oppressed men whose natures are distorted from the moment they are born, whose lives are condemned at their very roots. What has the Child taught us? When a child lives in an atmosphere congenial to his vital needs, he proves to have character traits quite different from those we usually consider him having. He provides living proof that mankind can change and improve from its very origin. But the world of adults must change. We must unite; we must reach out to the child, have faith in him, construct the proper climate for him and change our very selves.

(Montessori, 1972, p.138)

### **Final Interviews**

Lived-experience material gathering concluded with brief individual interviews held over a span of four-weeks post-workshop. I asked the following two questions: What has the experience of engaging in ABAR work been like for you? Can you describe your identity today as a Montessori teacher? I also answered any questions each participant had for me in regards to the next research steps and dissemination of the findings. These interviews were held over google hangout and lasted between 20 to 40 minutes.

### **Analysis of Phenomenological Material**

The following section describes my approach to phenomenological material analysis. Theorizing phenomena as moving through the world, in a constant state of evolution, required a fluid and responsive analytical approach (Vagle, 2014, 2018). To do this, I applied Jackson and Mazzei's (2012) directives for *thinking with theory* and

Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) conception of the rhizome to guide my analysis process. Next, I describe in detail the ways in which I utilized these ideas within post-intentional methodology.

### **Thinking With Theory**

My approach to phenomenological analysis was guided by Jackson and Mazzei's (2012) *thinking with theory* and *plugging in* method of material analysis. Jackson and Mazzei outlined three "maneuvers" (p. 5) that can produce valuable insight into understanding the phenomenon:

- 1) disrupting the theory/practice binary by decentering each and instead showing how they *constitute or make one another*, 2) allowing analytical questions that are used to think with to *emerge in the middle* of plugging in; and 3) showing the *suppleness of both theory and data when plugged in*. (p. 9-10, emphasis in original)

In the following section, I explain why thinking with theory was an appropriate and productive analytical method in my research.

**Disrupting the theory/practice binary.** In post-intentional phenomenology, phenomena are constantly moving through the contextual world, at times constituting a lived experience and at times pushing and influencing experience into other phenomena to be lived through. Furthermore, phenomena take shape and can be seen and understood differently through the use of different perspectives – theoretical, social, methodological. Therefore, context includes not only more tangible characteristics like time, location, and demographics but also the theoretical context in which the phenomenon is studied. Foucault stated that society is raced, classed, and gendered (among others) which affects

the construction and productions of an individual's identity in the social world through contextual lived experiences. As such, social theories play an important role in the development and life of the phenomenon of identity, in this case Montessori identity. Understanding identity as a phenomenon requires an intermingling with theory. Because much of the focus of this research was on teachers' self and social identities, particularly the construction of those identities and what it is *to be* that identity when taking up two different self-reflective approaches, I needed to merge theory and practice to immerse myself in the phenomenon and better understand what it produced and provoked.

**Emerging in the middle.** I cannot imagine approaching this process without engaging with the questions that emerged while plugging theory into the phenomenological material (and vice versa). This is an inherent part of post-intentional phenomenological research which, as mentioned previously, sees the researcher as entering into the middle of the life and evolution of a phenomenon (Vagle & Hofess, 2015). The teachers who participated in this research each came to the work with their own set of ABAR and Montessori related experiences and their unique identities which influenced their experience. The phenomenon of engaging in ABAR self-reflection not only spanned a four-month recorded period, but has continued in each of our lives regardless of whether my study is deemed active or inactive. Therefore, being aware of, acknowledging, valuing, and even seeking to answer questions that arose throughout the entire research process, including analysis, was required of this research as the phenomenon was never stable – rather in a constant evolution.

During my analytical process at times I felt mentally, and emotionally, bombarded with questions that grew out of the engagement of theory and

phenomenological material. As I explored the phenomenon through historical narratives of Montessori, participant comments, and my own post-reflexions alongside Foucault's regime of truth and Fairclough's writing on discourse and social change questions regarding leadership, heroism, and naturalization, I was called to pursue further, deeper exploration of the phenomenon. To answer my research questions, it was critical that I was able to follow the phenomenon's lead.

**Suppleness of theory and data/material.** Thinking with theory while exploring the phenomenon required constant shifting, moving, rearranging, and melding. I engaged in this process in a variety of ways: through conversations (many with my patient husband), note taking, and quite literally sketching out, erasing, rearranging and connecting theoretical ideas with phenomenological material. Each move, twist, and turn deepened my relationship with the phenomenon. Some connections shifted in one day, while others moved slowly, like tectonic plates, until settling in their final positions. That being said, I would not claim that my analysis is the end-point or definitive state of the phenomenon, nor does this analysis provide the phenomenon's conclusive relationship with theory. As the phenomenon of Montessori teachers engaging in ABAR self-reflection moves and evolves through time, so too will the way theory is plugged in.

Jackson and Mazzei (2012) have stated that this approach to analysis,

incites the provocations to be found in a plugging in of theory into data into theory. It also evokes a folding – not just of data into theory and *vice versa* – but also of ourselves as researchers into the texts and into the theoretical threshold. (p.

10)

Each act of folding reworked and repositioned theories in relation to the phenomenological materials opening up new opportunities for understanding. This felt particularly useful when exploring the productions and provocations of the phenomenon of Montessori teachers engaging in ABAR teacher self-reflection. Not only was I seeking to understand what possibilities were generated and produced by bringing together Montessori identity and ABAR self-reflective practices, but I was also looking to see what, if any, moments of crisis (Fairclough, 1992), or provocations, occurred by the meeting of the two. Furthermore, because post-intentional phenomenology values the lived-experience and positionality of the researcher, folding myself into the process was a necessary methodological step.

### **My Process**

Prior to engaging with theory, I spent significant time listening to audio recordings of the ABAR workshops and participant interviews. I took casual notes on words, comments, or discussion topics that caught my attention. Although not a significant part of the later analysis, taking these notes helped me to be an engaged listener during 17 hours of recordings and successfully immersed me into the research.

I began thinking with theory by reviewing Fairclough's theory of critical discourse analysis and Foucault's writing on power, truth, and knowledge. While rereading their authored texts, past papers I had written that incorporated their theories and perspectives, and notes on their ideas, I immediately began to draw connections and wonderings between their theories and my phenomenological material. This led me to my own process of *folding and flattening* (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012) in which I began to fold phenomenological materials into theoretical ideas on a large piece of paper (Figure 1).

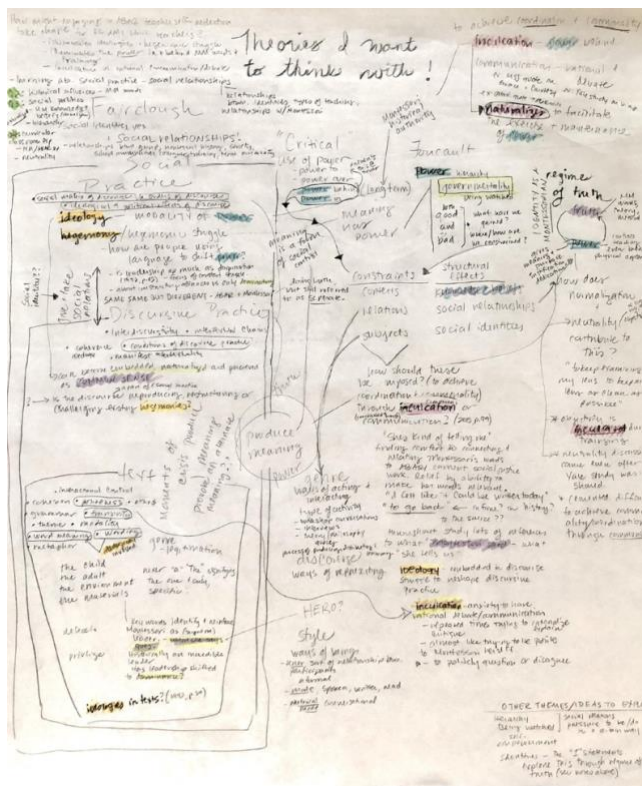


Figure 1. Initial Theories I Thought With

This was a rhizomatic process and production. My paper filled up with key words (e.g., ideology, inculcation, hegemony), ideas (e.g., the regime of truth, power to/over/in/behind), excerpts from participant comments, my own post reflexions, and other Montessori historical and social materials. I visualized the connections with lines (not always straight), arrows, and eventually colors. More lines were drawn linking ideas to emerging questions. Sometimes the lines created a complete circle while others stopped on a word, a quote, a question, and very occasionally an attempted answer. Thus, thinking about the experience of Montessori teachers engaging in ABAR teacher self-reflection with Fairclough and Foucauldian theories created a rhizome containing “lines of segmentarity according to which [the rhizome] is stratified, territorialized,

organized, signified, attributed, etc., as well as lines of deterritorialization down which it constantly flees” (Deleuze & Guttari, 1987, p. 9).

As I continued to fold phenomenological materials into theory (and vice versa), I paid special attention to lines of possible deterritorialization<sup>7</sup> – questions, ideas and words that suggested a shift in power dynamics, the Montessori knowledge and belief

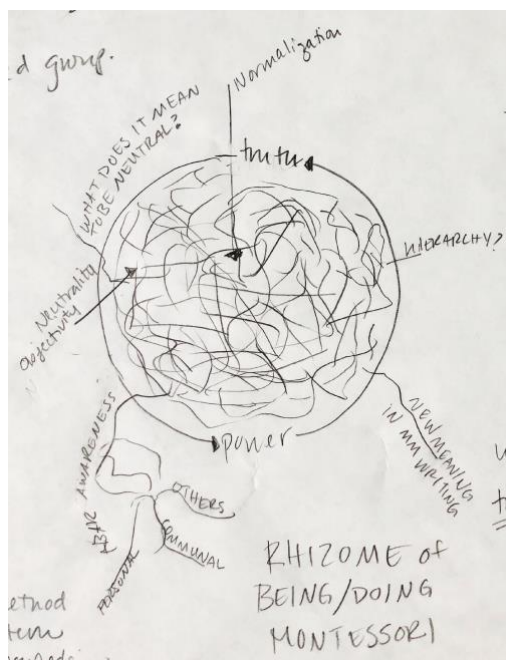


Figure 2a. Initial sketch of Montessori rhizome

system, or possible hegemonic struggles (Figure 2a).

While this process differed from the more traditional thematic approach to phenomenological analysis, noticing when phenomenological material was amplified and/or contradicted by other material (including theory) as directed by Smith, Flowers

<sup>7</sup> Deleuze and Guttari (1987) explained that there are “no points or positions in a rhizome, such as those found in a structure, tree or root. There are only lines” (p.8). The intertwined mess of lines moves away from a binary conception of experience (Y happened because of X) into an experience of multiplicity, where the lines grow, twist, connect and disconnect amongst each other. Lines of deterritorialization move the rhizome into new territory - growing the rhizome, as well as creating opportunity for new ideas and experiences to emerge – new productions and provocations.

and Larkin (2009) contributed to the development of the rhizome and identification of lines of deterritorialization.

While looking at what was on either end of the lines of deterritorialization was important, it was what happened in the middle, on the way to point B from point A, that questions emerged. Jackson and Mazzei (2010) call this in-between space *the threshold*:

a threshold is in the middle of things. It exists as a passageway. A threshold has no function, purpose, or meaning until it is connected to other spaces. That is, a threshold does not become a passageway until it is attached to other things different from itself. Thresholds contain both entries and exits; they are both/and.  
(p.6)

The passageway between a theoretical concept and phenomenological material became exceptionally important and allowed for the ability to “read between the lines”, so-to-speak. For example, there were several instances where a participant reference about the meaning and intent of Montessori’s writing lead to connections with Foucault’s regime of truth. By plugging in additional theory, such as Fairclough’s conceptions of power in and behind discourse, the threshold became an active passageway to explore the relationship between Montessori’s individual identity, conceptions of leadership, and social identity. The threshold was where productions and provocations of the phenomenon were instigated. In this space, lines of deterritorialization burst forth calling me to respond either by simply acknowledging their presence, or following them into uncharted territory. For example, as you will read in Chapter 4, studying the power in Montessori’s words led to an exploration of who she was as a woman in Italy during the 1900s, both based on historical fact as well as the historical narratives that have been reproduced over

time. Well there was little to no mention of Montessori's personal life in the ABAR workshops, merging theories of power with Montessori's writing required a closer look at who she was, and who she continues to be, to better understand what makes and upholds the Montessori social identity.

Working in the threshold became the basis for my analysis, and a perfect fit when working with a rhizomatic conception of phenomena. Deleuze and Guatrai (1987) wrote "a rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle" (p.25). In post-intentional phenomenology, phenomena are never stable and secure, they are always moving through and between experience – in the middle of a constant state of evolution. What happens in the in-between is what is important, particularly when studying ways identities develop, transform, and change. Using these theoretical concepts and ideas I thought, drew, reflected, read, and wrote my way through the phenomenological material in a thoughtful and responsive manner (Vagle, 2014).

I close this chapter with a final passage from Deleuze and Guattari (1987), an excerpt I read about half-way through my analytical process:

The middle is by no means an average; on the contrary, it is where things pick up speed. *Between* things does not designate a localizable relation going from one thing to the other and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal of movement that sweeps one *and* the other away, a stream without beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle. (p.25)

Not only do I feel this quote supports my rhizomatic-phenomenological-thinking-with-theory-in-the-middle approach, but it also depicts feelings I had throughout the writing process. I had several experiences of feeling caught in a rushing stream of emotions

specifically regarding the content of my analysis – doubt, frustration, excitement, fear, inspiration, anger, and hope. There were times when I felt I was going too far, or not far enough down deterritorialized lines. However, as Vagle (2014) instructed, “the job of the post-intentional phenomenologist’s primary job is to not shy away from these potential explosions” (p. 118). I did not simply give up and submit to the rushing stream, I worked to keep my head up and stay mentally afloat throughout the process. But I did follow the current, even when I was uncomfortable. I share this because exploring the ways in which the Montessori identity is shaped, constrained, and transformed was deeply personal.

The first two chapters of analysis explore Montessori’s positionality in the Montessori social world and the way power is maintained and used to uphold the system of knowledge and beliefs. The third analysis chapter explores one provocation of the phenomenon in particular – teacher neutrality. Because my analysis merged theory, methodology, and phenomenological materials into one rhizomatic process, I discuss concomitantly both my thinking with theory and subsequent findings regarding Maria Montessori’s continued role in the Montessori social world jointly (Christensen, 2016; Vagle, 2014).

## Chapter 4: The Great Woman

To better understand Montessori teachers' individual experiences of engaging in ABAR reflection, it was necessary to first investigate the ways in which the Montessori social identity has evolved, is maintained, and is experienced by Montessorians. To do this, I sought guidance from Fairclough's (1992) third level of discourse, social practice, in this case the social practice of Montessori. Social practice specifically focuses on the ways in which power, ideology and hegemony occur through discourse – creating a “mode of action, one form in which people may act upon the world and especially upon each other, as well as a mode of representation” (Fairclough, 1992, p.63). Therefore, understanding elements of social practice is helpful in understanding lived experiences and ways of being in the world.

Included in Fairclough's analytical approach is the creation of a “social matrix of discourse” (1992, p.237). This matrix aids in drawing out the hegemonic relations, structures, and their potential effects on the social practice of study. While thinking with theory, I repeatedly drew connections between participant references to Montessori, the person, and hegemonic terminology such as leadership, ideology, governmentality, and inculcation.

The Montessori social practice has had significant ideological and political effects on the development of a Montessori social order and identity. To study the ideological and political effects of discourse a part of social practice, Fairclough (1992) listed three foci to examine: social relations, social identities, and systems of knowledge and belief. The following analysis explores the ways in which Montessori social practice has been established and reproduced over time. The phenomenological material I used in this

exploration included participants' comments, post-reflexions, Montessori excerpts, two biographies of Montessori, and several theories of leadership and power.

This analysis was initially instigated by the fact that it appeared to not simply be Montessori's words (texts that have continued to be read long after her death) that have had an effect on the development of the social practice – at times it is actually *her* – a notion which will be exemplified in the following pages. What became clear was that Montessori as a social leader has gained considerable power that manifests during moments of uncertainty and creates the impression that she is listening and offering insight and guidance. Included in this discussion are the ways in which social relations, between leaders and their followers, contribute to the vitality and strength of the perception of Montessori and the ongoing existence of her social system.

I preface the following analysis by reminding readers, and myself, that an explorative critique of Montessori social practice and identity is simply an important part in the process of making effective and appropriate change to meet the needs of today's children. I asked my participants to engage in deep self-reflection to better understand their identities and social experiences in an effort to become aware of the possible assumptions, expectations, and biases that they bring with them into the classroom. During this experience, they each expressed ways in which they, as individuals and as Montessorians, intended to grow and develop as educators. Similarly, it is important to look deeply and critically at the Montessori social identity at large when attempting to make change – it is hard to know how to change something that you do not fully understand.

Foucault (2010) explained:

...it seems to me that this historico-critical attitude must also be an experimental one. I mean that this work done at the limits of ourselves must, on the one hand, open up a realm of historical inquiry and, on the other, put itself to the test of reality, of contemporary reality, both to grasp the points where change is possible and desirable, and to determine the precise form this change should take. (p. 46)

The intent of this research was to deeply explore how ABAR reflection works with the Montessori teacher identity so as to make thoughtful and meaningful decisions when it comes to future teacher education. This is meant to try to avoid making rushed decisions or employing a “top down” approach where professors tell teachers what to do without sufficient support and understanding of what it means in practice, and in their lives.

During my initial rhizomatic analysis I identified productions and provocations connected to social theory. However, I found writing the analysis to be self-provoking in its own right. Looking at Montessori with a critical eye is not an approach I have been trained to do and I certainly tested the limits of my Montessori identity. Studying a phenomenon that I am so closely intertwined with has been challenging, but as Foucault explained, it has been a challenge necessary to confront to best make change.

### **Invocations**

*I asked, ‘What is my responsibility?’*

*And she’s [Montessori] kind of telling me. (Workshop 3, 12/2/17).*

Sally spoke these words during her final reflection as part of our last ABAR workshop. She began by recounting a moment when she started to think more critically about her own values and virtues as a teacher of young children and, more specifically,

when and in what ways she would step in during a moment of injustice in the classroom and beyond. She proceeded by reading excerpts from several Montessori texts which described Montessori's vision of a new form of education, one that spanned beyond the mere transferring of academic knowledge, to an educational system grounded in a holistic and value-laden view of early development. Included in the excerpts Sally read were descriptions of the teacher as a servant and witness to this profound development. Montessori grandly stated that such an education would lead to "the emergence of the new man who will no longer be the victim of events but thanks to his clarity of vision will become able to direct and to mold the future of mankind" (Montessori, 1967, p.9). It was after this reading that Sally asked rhetorically, "What is *my* responsibility?" and again only shortly later in which she enquired, "I have a responsibility, but what is my proper spiritual preparation?" In both cases, Sally found that Montessori responded with an answer through her written words.

The act of Sally looking to Montessori for guidance reveals how Montessori herself can be invoked during times of dilemmas and uncertainty to offer assurance and direction. And this was not the only time it occurred. I too invoked Montessori during the initial ABAR workshop when leading and engaging in an activity in which we analyzed an excerpt of Montessori's writing on the prepared adult. After questioning her use of the term "prepared" I justified my criticism by invoking Montessori and including her in the conversation: "if Maria were here she'd be like Yeah! Let's add this! Perfect! She'd be, like, so into this conversation!" (Workshop 1, 8/15/17). My comment was met with agreeing laughter by the rest of the group.

The ability to look to Montessori for help – either by asking her directly or by imagining what she would do or say in regard to a particular situation – depicts the immense power in not only the writing that she left behind, but also in her image as a leader. As I folded together participant reflections, Montessori’s writing, and historical accounts of Montessori, I began to ask not who *was* Montessori – what was her influence, what did she do, how did she lead - but rather, who *is* Montessori – what *is* her influence today? How *is* she leading us now? In fact, I found myself stuck in the threshold between Montessori as a person and the Montessori knowledge and belief system for quite some time, trying to put my finger on what I was being called to pursue.

Jackson and Mazzei (2012) eloquently described their own experience working in the threshold: “the threshold, then, for us became the site of diffraction – an opening that spread out thoughts and questions in unpredictable patterns of waves and intensities” (p. 138). The intensity of Montessori’s power as a social leader grew stronger and stronger as I continued to fold phenomenological material into theories of social practice, ideology and naturalization. It is not particularly difficult to see and accept the power produced in her writing, but the act of *invoking her into being* to answer and provide guidance moved the power beyond the written page and into a more existential realm. Montessori has taken on the form of a guiding spirit, one who has left all the answers, we simply need to listen.

### **Development of a Great Woman**

In her biography of Montessori, Kramer (1988) prefaced her book as an attempt to depict Montessori as “more complicated and interesting than the plaster saint her devoted followers have made her into” (p.9). Kramer’s stance was met with some criticism and all

out resistance by many Montessorians. However, the suggestion that Montessori has become glorified, if not sanctified by some, is worthy of consideration. Just as a Catholic might look to a Saint for guidance, Sally, and the rest of us, sought out Montessori for help when faced with uncertainty regarding how to act and respond to moments of injustice. Yet, Montessori never claimed to be a Saint, and as Kramer described in her book, she was not one. Still, the commonly held narrative regarding Montessori's life and work holds her in incredibly high esteem, such that her spirit remains ever-present and continues to affect the Montessori social world today. The power in Montessori's words come from her power as a social leader.

One early theory of leadership and heroism seemed especially fitting to begin the exploration of how Montessori has and continues to be revered and influential well beyond her time. In 1840, Thomas Carlyle introduced the *Great Man Theory*, suggesting that certain men possessed such admirable qualities they became profoundly instrumental on the direction of society and thus, the history of mankind. The Great Men Carlyle referred to ranged from Shakespeare to Napoleon, men who had lived long before him, yet had left stories, narratives, and artifacts behind that continued to be celebrated and influential over time. For Carlyle, such Great Men were quite literally gifts from God, positioning them as people to look up to, revere, and follow:

For as I take it, Universal History, the history of what man has accomplished in this world, is at bottom the History of Great Men who have worked here. They were leaders of men, these great ones: the modellers, patterns, and in a wide sense creators, of whatsoever the general mass of men contrived to do or to attain; all things that we see standing accomplished in the world are properly the outer

materials result, the practical realization and embodiment, of Thoughts that dwell in the Great Men sent into the world: the soul of the whole world's history, it may justly be considered, were the history of these. (Carlyle, 1888, p.1)

While this specific excerpt from Carlyle's lecture *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (1888), refers to Great Men broadly, the reverence and indebtedness one should feel toward such individual historical figures is made clear. Great Men or even more specifically, Great Men's profound thoughts, are responsible for humankind's accomplishments.

Modern leadership studies tend to focus more on specific character traits and context and the *Great Man Theory* has evolved into what is more frequently referred to as hero or celebrity worship (Bligh, Kohles, & Pillai, 2011; Spector, 2015). While it is not uncommon today for people to celebrate and honor certain historical individuals for their contributions to society (Ball, 2011; Woodman, 2006), the worship, or adornment, of a historical figure carries with it particular relational qualities. Schindler, Zink, Windrich and Winfried (2013) described how adoration typically includes the perception of the adored other as sacred or holy. They explained that "the development of adoration as a dispositional attitude towards another rests on somehow having benefitted in the past from the other's superhumanity or sacredness in the past and also hoping for future benefits" (p. 97). This aligns with Carlyle's *Great Man Theory* considering he explicitly described Great Men as sent to Earth by God and having bestowed gifts toward the positive progress of civilization.

The decidedly gendered perspective of the Great Man Theory is reflective of the time it was developed, as well as the hundreds of years that came before it. Women were

experiencing multiple forms of oppression in the late 1800s, such as receiving little to no education, exclusion from any political interactions, and limited professional opportunities (if any). Yet, there was also change brewing through social movements advocating for gender equality. In Italy specifically, education reform that included public schooling for boys and girls was growing, even if slowly. Montessori was born right in the middle of this era, and as Kramer explained (1988), “while [Montessori] was not born into a world that expected her to assert herself, to strive to fulfill herself in ways that were not considered appropriate for females, it was a world that no longer made it impossible to do so” (p. 29). Montessori took, and often fought for, every opportunity she could to pursue her dreams as a doctor, educator, and social leader. As the first woman in Italy to receive a degree of Doctor in Medicine from the University of Rome, she became not only an inspiration to teachers, but to women experiencing injustice around the world. The narrative of Montessori as a woman living during a time that viewed women and girls as inferior has greatly contributed to her image as a courageous and even superhuman leader who paved a path for woman everywhere to follow.

There is little doubt that Montessori was an important leader in history, particularly that of education and women’s rights. While many people may acknowledge and respect her accomplishments, many others *adore* her giving her the aura of a Great Man, or more appropriately, a Great Woman. This is exemplified in the following excerpt from the preface of an early Montessori biography written E.M. Standing (1957), a required text for all AMI teacher trainees:

With Dr. Maria Montessori there came into the sphere of education a new and vital impulse. There is not a civilized country which has not in some measure felt

the impact of her vivifying principles [...] More than a generation has passed since the year (1907) when the name Montessori flashed like a comet across the sphere of education, and the world read with astonishment of the almost incredible doings of those small slum children in the first Casa dei Bambini in Rome. Yet notwithstanding this considerable passage of time – a period in which two world wars took place – we find the Montessori principle as powerful today as it ever was. Indeed more powerful, for every year it continues to make fresh developments and new conquests. (p. xvii)

In this excerpt, Montessori is described as otherworldly, *a comet*, and even transcending a physical form as a *vital impulse*. In this sense, her temporal being gifted the world with her vivifying principles, or system of knowledge and belief. This ethereal presence is responsible for the creation of an astonishing form of education. Here, Standing (1957) highlights Montessori's accomplishments with the education of children living in poverty, one she has become commonly known for and is certainly worthy of respect. Yet the combination of describing her as a person emanating a unique and inspiring principle and someone who was tasked with helping the poor undoubtedly resembles that of a Saint, and certainly a Great Woman by Carlyle's standards.

Also notable in this excerpt is the shift in meaning of the word "Montessori". In the beginning, "Montessori" is simply included in the full name, Dr. Maria Montessori. Next, it is used in reference to a comet, the force that shone its light on society and sparked a movement. Finally, the word evolves into the name of a powerful singular principle – or fundamental doctrine – that has endured war and strife, proving its value and worthiness. Such a variance in the meaning of a word is what Fairclough (1992)

defined as “meaning potential” (p.186). Meaning potential refers to word meanings that shift and evolve based on context, usage, and even strategy. Meaning may fall within the three dimensions of meaning: 1) content, 2) relations and 3) subjects (Fairclough, 2015). Within this opening preface, Standing effectively reaches each dimension by identifying Montessori as a person (i.e., subject), connecting her name to the world of education reform (i.e., relations) and using the name as a reference to a knowledge and belief system – a principle (i.e., contents).

Change in meaning can lead to contestation and the clarity of the actual word. More specifically, Fairclough (1992) explained that these contestations can be attributed to whether the relationships between potential meanings “is indeed one of complimentary or, rather, a hierarchical one, and, if the latter, around specific relations of dominance and subordination between meanings” (p. 186). Standing (1957) has structured and restructured the meaning of “Montessori”, shifting the meaning from a person (low hierarchy) to a principle of life (high hierarchy). The dominant meaning potential is made even more clear when Standing described “it”, or the Montessori principle, as making “new conquests” throughout civilization – the Montessori system of knowledge and belief is a powerful force, overcoming obstacles and infiltrating systems, one society at a time.

Furthermore, meanings that are categorized in the contents dimension of meaning typically include an ideological representation of the world which then influences the vocabulary related to its social world. By using Montessori’s name interchangeably with a way of life she is no longer constrained to a physical form, but transcends into an ideological way of life. It could even be argued that it is the Montessori *principle* that

becomes personified by *Montessori*, the person. This restructuring of a word from a subordinate meaning to a dominant one is what Fairclough (1992) referred to as a hegemonic model of word meaning. Montessori as a leader and Montessori as a way of life become one in the same, consolidating power, leadership, and revered status as a Great Woman, at least in part, through the varied use of one word.

At the same time, Montessori is not always depicted in such a heroic and superhuman manner. Kramer (1988) directly addressed “the hagiography that has passed for a biography” (p.9) in her biography’s preface and claimed to write a biography that went “beyond a narrow cultist view” (p.9) of Montessori’s life and work. However, Standing’s (1957) biography (or as Kramer suggested, hagiography) is commonly used as the introductory text in AMI teacher training. Thus, AMI Montessori preservice teachers are introduced to Montessori only in a heroic way, whereas other training programs include both Standing’s and Kramer’s biographies as a required read. Interestingly, Kramer’s is not even listed in the AMI online bookstore; I did not even know another biography existed until three or four years ago.

While Standing’s biography is not the only text that is part of AMI teacher training, it certainly lays the framework for how Montessori is to be viewed by those that join in her work. Given that all the participants in this study, including myself, had received an AMI teacher education, it is more than possible that we unconsciously adopted the Great Woman perspective toward Montessori in which she is adored and revered for her contributions to society. Consequently, Montessori’s followers tend to look to her to provide direction and affirmation when faced with dilemmas and uncertainty in their work (Bligh, Kohles, & Pillai, 2011; Schlenker, Weigold, &

Schlenker, 2008). This was made evident in both my invoking of Montessori during our critical examination of her work and by Sally looking to her for answers in regards to how to best serve children in an ABAR way.

### **Meaning and Hope**

The social relation of followers, Montessorians, looking to their leader, Montessori, for guidance was also exemplified in Katherine's final reflection. For her closing remarks, Katherine read several Montessori excerpts. She began by telling us, "Coming back to this [writing], when I read this, I felt like it could be written today" (Workshop 3, 12/2/17). She continued, describing her reactions to re-reading some of Montessori's work, "And so feeling that hopefulness with working with children, but then it's so easy to get caught up in the negative parts of a lot of things that are going on and have been going on" (Workshop 3, 12/2/17). Important to note is that the ABAR workshops occurred in the midst of what all of us felt was a time of frightening political and social chaos. In addition to engaging in ABAR self-reflection workshops which were comprised of conversations regarding kindergarten racial bias, police in schools, and the school to prison pipeline, several traumatic events had occurred throughout the country. These included, but are not limited to: the not-guilty verdict of Jeronimo Yanez, the Las Vegas mass shooting, white Supremacist rallies, the repeal of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals policy (DACA), and devastating hurricanes in Houston and Puerto Rico. It was easy to feel overwhelmed and fearful, as evident in many of my post-reflexions; one which I wrote the day the president announced the repeal of DACA: *I will say, with the current events going on, I think it would be hard to completely forget about being anti-racist. More of a panic* (Post-Reflexion, 9/5/17). My thoughts continued

on, expressing concern for future leadership, the riots and murder in Charlottesville, VA., and my children's future. Despite not being in an early childhood classroom on a daily basis, I still struggled (and continue to struggle) with how to relay the discrimination and violence happening in the world to my own young children. I wrote,

*[A friend] asked me if I told [my daughter] about Charlottesville. I don't think I really did. What would I say? I don't want to scare her, and quite honestly, I don't want to expose her to that level of horribleness. I don't want her to know that people that awful really do exist...I want her to know the world – to know right from wrong – but I guess I'm not ready for her to truly know how horrible it can be for people. (Post-Reflexion, 9/5/17)*

The last paragraph of the post-reflexion began with the simple statement: I wish this world wasn't so scary (Post-Reflexion, 9/5/17). While my post-reflexions and Katherine's final ABAR reflection are not necessarily in reference to the exact same fears and emotions, I feel comfortable assuming they had some inherent mutual connections.

The fall of 2017 was a scary time in which many of us sought hope and guidance.

As she continued sharing her final thoughts during our last workshop, Katherine read two Montessori excerpts, including the following:

Bringing up the subject of an education for peace in such critical times as these, when society is continually threatened by the possibility of war, may appear to be a most naïve kind of idealism. I nonetheless believe that laying the foundations for peace through education is the most effective and constructive way of opposing war. (Montessori, 1972, p.67)

The subsequent Montessori excerpts Katherine read included a focus on reverence for children, the frequent dysfunction of humanity, and hope for the future through education. As she ended her reflection, Katherine stated,

And so I'm just going through that [Montessori's writing] and thinking about it in parallel with our time today, or what's going on in the world today, and the personal work I've been doing...so I thought it was helpful to go back to this and I think even though there's a lot that could be worked on, there's a lot of material here and there's a lot of material for me to use in the classroom through this and through this [ABAR] work as well. And I think it's a good reminder for me.

(Workshop 3, 12/2/17)

In this case, Montessori not only provided guidance by offering Katherine material she could use in her classroom, but also meaning, hope, and sense-making in a chaotic world.

### **A Communal Commitment**

Montessori as a Great Woman, or sacred influential being, plays an important meaning making role in the social identity formation of those that follow her. Schindler, Zink, Windrich and Menninghaus (2013) explained that “the adored other embodies an ideal conception of being or a framework of meaning rather than just a few isolated ideals and values. This way, the other becomes a *meaning maker* for his or her adherents” (p.99). Montessori, as a principle of life, produces such a framework of meaning to those that strive to follow in her footsteps. Additionally, while Montessori never claimed to fulfill her ideal conception of being a teacher, she wrote extensively on her self-described admirable and almost martyr-like experiences in the field. In *The Discovery of the Child*, Montessori reflected on the events that led her to the educational profession, beginning

with her work as a doctor of children with disabilities. As she grew increasingly critical of traditional methods of education, she felt called to deepen her own knowledge of educational philosophy. Upon enrolling at a University, Montessori described herself as,

animated with a deep faith. Although I did not know if I would ever be able to test the truth of my conviction, I gave up every other occupation in order to deepen it. It was almost as if I was preparing myself for an unknown mission. (Montessori, 1967/1986, p.23)

A few pages later she shared, “my mind was deeply struck by the immense importance of a work which could potentially bring about a reform in the schools and in the whole concept of education” (p.31). The messages of her personal impassioned commitment, self-sacrifice, and perseverance provide followers, in this case - teachers, with a Saint-like “ideal conception of being” (Schindler, et al., 2013, p. 99) to look to for direction and to accompany on an unknown peace-driven mission.

As a leader in education reform, Montessori created a belief in the importance education and defined what it means to be a teacher. Her mission and vision has provided individuals with purpose and meaning and connected those who follow the same belief together in community. In my own previous reflections prior to this research, I recounted my “induction” to the Montessori social world as a process of enlightenment to a new knowledge and belief system – an epistemic and personal transformation – that resulted in tight-knit communal bonds, such that I even referred to being part of “an elite force”. These shared messages serve as a source of affinity between individuals, resulting in a communal bond and social identity led by a single unifying person and/or idea (Ball, 2010; Schindler, et al., 2013; Steffens, Haslam & Reicher, 2013).

In some cases, such as that of Montessori, social identities can be powerful sources of security and reassurance, as alluded to in both Sally and Katherine's final reflections. This is particularly true in regards to a social identity that includes a meaning making leader at the forefront. Adherents to the leader become united by a common cause which not only provides purpose, but also mutual support in achieving agreed upon goals (Ball, 2010; Schindler, et al., 2013; Steffens, Haslam & Reicher, 2013). The Montessori principles imparted during my training produced a profound sense of purpose and security for me as I embarked on my new profession. This was produced by both offering meaning and clarity, and by the feeling of being part of something bigger – a powerful change-making community.

However, while social identities can work to unify, they can also segregate. In 2000, Margaret Howard Loeffler, a Montessorian honored as an AMS Living Legacy, spoke about this segregation in an exceptionally bold way:

The unwillingness to enter into a meaningful dialogue with others by Montessori and her followers has led to a perception of Montessori education as a cult like movement, begun with a charismatic leader, now dead, who has left a legacy of didactic artifacts whose purpose and use can only be discerned by those who have been initiated into the secret society of her followers. (Loeffler, 2000, p.24)

Loeffler acknowledged that not all modern-day Montessori teachers carry an entitled or superior attitude that some have had in the past; but, because of the knowledge and belief system still tightly controlled by Montessori, the social identity has remained fixed and continues to harbor a feeling of exclusivity. As Malm (2004) noted in her research, Montessori teachers often do not refer to themselves simply as teachers, rather they are

*Montessori* teachers or *Montessorians*, sequestering themselves from others in essentially the same line of work. This exclusivity of such a tightly formed social identity was provoked during the second ABAR workshop. After reviewing the historical timeline of education, Beth shared that she pursued Montessori because of the intentional and consistent respect for children inherent throughout all aspects of the educational method. This tenet, she believed, would lead to a domino effect of modeling respect and confidence from one generation to the next. Yet, she pointed out, “that’s not the way most children are educated...in our country” (Workshop 2, 10/28/17). Because of the lack of accessibility to a Montessori education for many children and because of Beth’s choice to be part of the Montessori social world, she felt cut off from making the impact that she hoped for:

I sought out Montessori because of that [reverence for children], but it’s also like isolating yourself into this community of like, well ... I’m not saying that every Montessori school is created equal or that every teacher’s created equal, but like, hopefully some of that [reverence and respect] is communicated no matter what classroom you’re in...But you know, I like self-segregated, you know? I was like, well, I’m gonna put my effort into this because I believe in it but then...you know, you think about the wider system of education, which was mostly what that timeline was about, in public school...and, to me I just feel like, man that’s so ugly, I mean I don’t know how else to put it, it feels ugly to me, but ... how am I, I’ve ... chosen to remove myself from it, so I guess I’m trying to figure out, like man well what’s my responsibility if I see that? What’s my

responsibility to it? And at the same time I chose to remove myself, I didn't choose to ... put myself in it to change it. (Workshop 2, 10/28/17)

Engaging in ABAR self-reflection, in this case reflecting on the history of oppression a part of the education system, tested the strength of Beth's Montessori identity. While becoming a Montessori teacher connected Beth to an educational method based in social reform, it also inhibited her ability to affect change by segregating her from those in real need.

At the 2018 annual conference held by AMI (i.e., The AMI Refresher Course), Gretchen Hall, the AMI USA Board President, delivered a powerful and provoking keynote address. Hall described an overprotective nature of AMI that has resulted in social exclusivity:

At the core of AMI's mission is to preserve the legacy of Dr. Maria Montessori. We have worked hard to preserve that legacy and today we enjoy a reputation of quality implementation and high standards. Yet we have paid a price for this recognition. In preserving, we became protective. We fervently held onto the past and protected it from those who threatened it. Just as a mother protects her baby, the protection originated from a source of love and devotion. But as we know, too much protection is an obstacle to growth and over time we got in our own way. We became exclusive and were critical and judgmental of those who thought differently. (Hall, 2018, para 4)

The Montessori social identity, particularly that of an AMI Montessorian, *has* become exclusive, just as Loeffler (2000) pointed out 18 years ago. This exclusivity has divided Montessori teachers from educators teaching in more traditional settings, from

Montessorians trained (or educated) by different organizations, and from Montessori schools recognized or not recognized by various accrediting bodies. Perhaps most importantly, the solidified Montessori social identity has disconnected some teachers from accomplishing Montessori's original mission to liberate the oppressed. While there are many Montessori schools working to increase access to quality early childhood education and diversify the demographics they serve, forms of segregation between Montessori and mainstream education still exists across the United States, limiting the influence Montessori has on the greater education system. Separation between mainstream and Montessori education can range from seeking alternative pathways to earn state licensure, requiring exclusive forms of professional development, using educational terms unique to Montessori (Loeffler, 2000, 2001), and/or explicitly comparing and advertising developmental gains of children in Montessori versus traditional school programming. These actions are not necessarily meant as forms of criticism toward the mainstream education system, and often exist to support Montessori teachers, advocate for the needs of children, and provide quality educational programming. However, they do have the tendency to segregate Montessorians from larger educational conversations by emanating an entitled attitude or simply separating Montessori teachers from other teachers active in the field – both physically and/or pedagogically.

I have had several experiences that have caused me to become more aware of the effects of my AMI Montessori social identity. One early experience was while observing elementary education practicum students in a variety of public schools. There was one classroom in particular that brought the effects of self-segregation to my attention. Each

time I entered the public school classroom (I think it was first grade), a student would leave whatever they were doing, regardless of whether it was an individual or whole class activity, to welcome me into their room, introduce themselves, and explain what they were doing at that moment. This resembled a lesson I learned in my training a part of the lessons of Grace and Courtesy in which we teach manners and forms of respectful behavior. *How to Greet a Visitor* was included in this repertoire. I distinctly remember the realization I had after visiting this classroom several times and always experiencing the same welcome: *Wow, I thought only Montessori teachers did that?! My Montessori social identity included expectations, and even prejudice, I had toward other teachers – Montessori or otherwise (Spears, Greenwood, Lemus, & Sweetman, 2010). Thus, it affected my assumptions of what non-Montessori teachers were capable of doing, and ultimately valuing.*

The adamant commitment to an authentic Montessori social identity has led to the possibility of a self-righteous attitude that not only to self-segregates, but deters any conversations across pedagogical lines. Hall (2018) explained:

In protecting the past, we put the present and the future in jeopardy and we created chasms. A culture of “them” vs “us” evolved, a sentiment which is disturbingly reflected in our politics today. We began to measure others on how “Montessori” they are and we used the term “Montesomething” to discredit and devalue others. (para 4)

The development of a Montessori social identity that is so adamantly committed to the original beliefs held by Montessori herself has led to an Othering of individuals who may even dabble outside of the expected ways of being and believing, exemplified in the early

separation between AMI and AMS. Furthermore, Beth's, Hall's, and my own reflection depicts a moment of crisis (Fairclough, 1992) in which the rigid faithfulness to a leader actually prevents fulfilling the leader's mission. Montessori intended to revolutionize education for all children as well as transform teachers into individuals free of judgment. Yet, as Beth described, she struggled with feeling that she was having the social impact she had hoped for through her teaching, and as Hall and I described, the belief in *only* Montessori education led to judgment of others. Of course, this is not to say that Beth was not positively affecting the lives of the students with whom she worked. The school in which she was a part of served a highly diverse demographic, offered substantial tuition assistance, maintained a diverse staff, and her classroom was loosely bilingual – children, families, and staff alike had found security, hope, and opportunity from the school community. Esperanza, Lauren, Sally, Lola, and Katherine are also teachers committed to meeting the needs of their students and families, inspired by the mission and vision of Montessori. And of course, I have conducted this research because I love Montessori and want it included in the important conversations being had about offering equitable and liberatory education for all children. However, as Hall (2018) announced only a few months ago,

We must continue to open our minds and our hearts to the future. We must drop our individual roles, identities, badges and acronyms. We must not be self-serving, but united in our service to children. We must build bridges between the chasms we have created. We must stand beside all who work for social justice and on behalf of children. That is our legacy and our mission. (para 7)

Neither Hall, Loeffler, nor I, would suggest that we abandon the Montessori social identity all together, dismantle the key tenets of the Montessori method, or throw out the meticulously designed developmental materials. However, it is important to recall the benefits of a dialogic teacher identity – one that allows for a teacher to be Montessori *and* ABAR. When the Montessori social identity becomes one that values similarities rather than differences, respects other forms of teaching, and is willing and able to bridge divides, those a part of the Montessori world may truly become Montessorians *and* educators. As Hall pointed out, there are many teachers who work for social justice on behalf of children – it is time to work together.

### **Conclusion**

There can be much to gain from embodying a specific social identity and following the principles of a great leader. In his research on leadership, particularly that of the Great Man Theory, Spector (2016) pointed out that, “people seek a narrative structure that bring legitimacy to the abstractions, offers coherence in response to apparent chaos, and asserts human agency in the face of seemingly unmanageable complexity” (p. 258). This analysis has provided examples of ways in which Montessori’s leadership offers assurance and purpose during moments of crisis. When engaging with ABAR self-reflection, participants were able to find new meaning in Montessori’s words that not only provided relevant and constructive guidance in their work with children, but also meaning and clarity in a chaotic world. The Montessori social identity has worked to adhere followers to their leader, as well as unite Montessori teachers around a common belief in a more just world made possible through Montessori education. Yet, that social identity has also prevented some from connecting with the

larger world of education, isolating those who teach, and attend, Montessori schools even further.

The purpose of this analysis is not to discredit the Montessori social practice, of which I am proud to be a part. But it is important to consider the ways in which the social identity is established and maintained, and how it affects the ways Montessori teachers see themselves and participate in the world. This is particularly needed when studying topics regarding self-identity, self-awareness, and implicit bias. The following chapter takes a deeper look at the Montessori system of knowledge and belief. This includes a further examination of the ways in which power and truth have been established and reproduced over time – instigating productions and provocations in the phenomenon of Montessori teachers engaging in ABAR self-reflection.

## Chapter 5: Montessori Truth and Power

In Chapter 4, I explored Montessori's position as a Great Woman, the illusive meaning of the term Montessori, and the development of the Montessori social identity – all examples of aspects of a social practice that give meaning and power to a social system. The circular relationship between the principle of Montessori and the subsequent social identities and practices Montessorians adhere to is an example of Foucault's regime of truth. As a result, a system of knowledge and belief has been well established within Montessori social practice. With full commitment to the Montessori principle, one behaves, believes, and identifies others based on those guiding values, as discussed in the previous chapter. Who and what is considered to be true, real, or authentic Montessori is then reinforced through the “circular relation with systems of power which reproduce and sustain it, and to effects of power which induces and which extends it” (Foucault, 1977/2010a, p. 74). Foucault described the reality of this regime system, noting that the creation of truth is simply “a thing of this world” (p.72), as is the flow of power. He explained:

Each society has its regime of truth, its “general politics” of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanism and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in that acquisitions of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (Foucault, 1997/2010a, p.73)

Montessori, positioned as a Great Woman and even a truth in itself, has earned incredibly high status in the Montessori social system. She is the leading and most powerful voice on dictating what is true.

Montessori's status is depicted through my own statement during the first ABAR workshop in which I suggested that "if Maria were here" she would be in agreement with our constructive criticism (Workshop 1, 8/15/17). I, a follower of Montessori among other Montessorians, was not in the position to suggest new knowledge and truth to be included in the Montessori knowledge and belief system; that is a job reserved solely for Montessori and makes the incorporation of today's ABAR strategies into Montessori pedagogy challenging. However, it is possible to consult with her - by imagining what she would say, how she might respond, or where her thought process would be today - when engaging in discussion regarding her educational method and its key tenets.

The "What would Montessori do?" question as a precursor to any discussion on the evolution of current Montessori practices is not unusual in the Montessori social world. At the 2018 Teacher Education Section Annual Meeting and Professional Development Day hosted by the AMS annual conference, Dr. Angeline Stoll Lillard, a leader in Montessori research, delivered a keynote on the value of authentic Montessori materials. Her research and lecture highlighted the developmental benefits of Montessori materials and advocated for including primarily only materials created and described by Montessori (and on occasion, Montessori's son, Mario) in classrooms (Lillard, 2016, 2018). After Lillard's lecture, a question from the audience arose: *Would Montessori be developing and incorporating new materials into classrooms today? What would they be?* Lillard (2011) grappled with this issue when compiling the list of materials deemed

“classical Montessori materials” which she then used in her research on their developmental benefits (Lillard, 2016). In her 2011 article *What Belongs in a Montessori Classroom*, Lillard recognized that new materials may be necessary to meet the needs of children today. Yet, Montessori remains the leader of this charge – we, her followers, are tasked with imagining what she would say, what she would do, and even what she would create – as opposed to being independent agents of change. Lillard wrote:

In discussing Montessori’s ideas of what the Primary [early childhood] materials are, one faces a task that is perhaps not unlike those of justices attempting to interpret the Constitution: the world is different today, and we do not know what modern tools [Montessori] would have used in the classroom (Whiteboards? Tape recorders?). We can only surmise based on reasoning about materials that did exist [...] in going back to her books, one is asserting that her voice is paramount. (Lillard, 2011, p. 26)

Because Montessori is positioned as the leader and truth guider of the Montessori social world, it can be difficult for any one Montessorian to confidently develop a new Montessori material, much less for the larger Montessori community to agree on whether or not it is considered appropriate. This too contributes to the provocation of the phenomenon of Montessori teachers engaging in ABAR self-reflection. Lillard (2011) developed the list of classical Montessori materials through the combination of a survey to AMI and AMS teacher trainers and referencing Montessori’s writing. Materials included in this list range from classic Montessori language materials (e.g., vocabulary cards) to only two universally agreed upon Art materials. While some of these materials can be hand-made by teachers and may incorporate vocabulary and imagery relevant to

their community, there are no materials included in this list that specifically refer to cultural relevancy or as having an ABAR purpose. Thus, a tension exists not only between what ABAR strategies respectfully compliment Montessori pedagogy but also what materials can be created and utilized to meet the diverse needs of children today while still being recognized as a part of the Montessori social practice. This further exemplifies how the regime of truth has established boundaries regarding what knowledge and ideas can be included in the Montessori social world. Because Montessori never explicitly wrote about different types of culturally relevant materials necessary today, incorporating ABAR focused activities has the potential to wobble the normed social identity and Montessori practice, throwing the regime of truth off balance.

Imagining what Montessori would do, and even asking her for advice, can be considered a parasocial interaction, meaning “imaginary interactions with others whom one cannot interact with in actuality” (Schindler, et al., 2013, p. 102). Such interactions solidify the parasocial relationship between an adored other and her adherents. These exchanges between living and non-living, or reality and non-reality, are generally made in an attempt to affiliate with a leader and gain and retain membership to a social group. In addition, they reify the position of the adored other as the leader of the system of knowledge and belief. Even well past her death Montessori has continued to dominate conversations regarding what is considered true and authentic.

### **Commodification and Constraints**

The power-laden relationship between Montessori and her followers is established in several ways. By detailing the ways in which to teach and to be a teacher, Montessori commodified the profession. This occurred in a unique manner. Fairclough (1992)

described how educational discourse has a tendency to commodify its end result – the students. However, in Montessori philosophy, children are capable of their own self-discovery and need only gentle guidance and support on their path to independence. What Montessori discourse does commodify is the Montessori teacher, or even more obviously – the Montessorian. Commodification is made evident through the frequent AMI reference to Montessori *training*, rather than teacher education. This highlights the fact that Montessori teachers are *trained*, taught particular skills and behaviors, to be Montessori. Thus, Montessori discourse,

is dominated by a vocabulary of skills, including not only the word ‘skill’, and related words like ‘competence’, but a whole wording of the process of learning and teaching based upon concepts of skill, skill training, use of skills transfer of skills, and so forth. (Fairclough, 1992, p. 209)

Being a Montessori teacher is based upon Montessori’s conception of what skills were necessary to become that person. Thus, her role as the originator of the commodity of a Montessori teacher contributes to her established role as the social leader and charged with deciding what is included as an essential Montessori skill.

The Montessori system of knowledge and belief is further solidified through the ways in which constraints are established on those who have been commodified into the Montessori social world. Fairclough (2015) stated that “power in discourse is to do with powerful participants *controlling and constraining the contributions of non-powerful participants*” (p. 75-76, emphasis in original). Constraints occur in three forms:

- 1) constraints on contents (what can be said or done),
- 2) constraints on relations (social relations people enter into in discourse), and

3) constraints on subjects (the positions people occupy) (Fairclough, 2015, p.76).

These constraints can be seen in the relationship between the participants, including myself, and Montessori in several ways and are outlined in the following two sections.

### **Constraints on Contents**

As mentioned previously in this dissertation, Montessori explicitly described the ways in which a teacher should act, speak, and move. It is important to understand that these descriptions are not mere suggestions, they are more similar to required directives. For example, when listing characteristics of a “normalized”, ideal Montessori environment during the initial ABAR workshop, participants included adult behavior such as speaking in indoor voices, never speaking across the room, making direct movements, and avoiding unnecessary movements (Workshop 1, 8/15/17). Physical requirements such as these are included in the commodified skill set of the Montessori identity. Therefore, to be considered a Montessori teacher one must work within these constraints. This is not to imply that no such constraints should exist and that teachers should be free to yell and holler in the environment or that they should move wildly about a classroom! Montessori’s directives are heavily weighted with purpose and meaning in support of the development of children, particularly that of their independence. It is simply important to recognize the ways in which such clearly defined physical behaviors govern a social identity, especially when it comes to engaging in other ways of thinking about teaching such as ABAR teacher reflection and diverse student identities.

Additionally, while passionately describing concerns with the traditional education of her time and her vision of a just and peaceful future, Montessori delved into the spiritual, mental, and emotional requirements of a teacher – traits which are necessary

to achieve her mission and vision of a peaceful world. An example of this charge is heard in her closing lecture of the Sixth International Montessori Congress, themed *Educate for Peace*, in which she stated “the first and most important step is for each of us to examine his own conscience, realize his own shortcomings and defects, and seek to remedy them” (Montessori, 1972, p.115). She continued by calling out the ongoing injustice toward children, an injustice that is detrimental to society but can be remedied by those willing to confront it. Finally, Montessori clearly places the responsibility to liberate children, the future generation of mankind, on adult educators:

All our efforts will come to nothing until we remedy the great injustice done to the child, and remedy it by cooperating with him. If we are among the men of good will who yearn for peace, we must lay the foundation for peace ourselves, by working for the social world of the child. (Montessori, 1972, p.116).

As such, her words constrain teachers to become not only a particular physical image of a teacher, but to submit to a full way of being and believing in the world. Not being a teacher in this image jeopardizes a teacher’s ability to truly and fully support the holistic development of a child, as well as the potential for peace made possible through education.

### **Constraints on Relations and Subjects**

Montessori discourse identifies teachers as servants, an instance of this was included the excerpt that Sally read in her final reflection. Denoting teachers as servants firmly places them in a subordinate position, even if for a noble cause. Because of Montessori’s deep respect for the development and potential of the young child, she often referred to children as makers of men, a new world force, and simply, phenomena

(Montessori, 1967, 1967/1972). While teachers play a critical role in fostering children's development and protecting them from harmful influences, the teacher position is one of passive support. Montessori portrayed this role in much of her writing by utilizing extreme imagery of a servant/master relationship:

Although the relationship between child and teacher is in the spiritual field, the teacher can find a very good model for her behavior in the way a good valet looks after his master. He keeps his master's dressing table tidy, puts brushes in place, but he does not tell his master when to use the brushes; he serves his meals, but he does not oblige his master to eat; having served everything nicely, without a word, he discreetly disappears. So we must behave when the child's spirit is being forged. The master whom the teacher serves is the child's spirit; when it shows its needs she must hasten to respond to them. (Montessori, 1967, p.281)

With such a description as this one, there is no argument as to where the teacher falls in the hierarchy of the Montessori social order. Montessori's respect for children was revolutionary for her time and the child-centered mindset shift she pioneered shaped much of education, particularly that of early childhood. In other texts, she clarified that the teacher should not be responsible for duties such as feeding and dressing a young child, rather they should serve a child's development by helping "the child to act for himself, will for himself, think for himself" (Montessori, 1946/1991, p. 96). However, it is important to consider the consequences of such powerful discourse that constrains teachers to a highly subordinate and non-powerful position. Teacher agency, empowerment, and even innovation are in direct conflict to a position of servitude. When faced with uncertainty in teaching, such as how to address biased and prejudicial

behavior, who does a servant turn to for guidance? Of course, children, the masters, can often surprise us with their insight! But in reality, young children cannot be relied on to always have the answer (nor should they be).

The servant/master metaphor is particularly problematic when it comes to teaching teachers how to teach and what it means to be a teacher. While the explicit connections to servitude are arguably a product of Montessori's time, mitigating them based on historical context does not make them any less powerful or damaging. I cringe at the thought of teaching perspective teachers of color that to be a teacher means to serve their master, a metaphor made even worse by the fact that it has typically meant serving middle to upper class white children. This narrative metaphor is particularly challenging when working to dismantle institutionalized racist and classist policies – a primary goal of ABAR teaching. Just as Montessori required her teachers to identify and relinquish themselves of their potential for bias and prejudice, so too should we do of her writing. However, this is made difficult by her position as an adored leader, meaning maker, and revered status in the regime of truth.

Fairclough (1992, 2003) and Lakoff and Johnson (1980) have argued that metaphors are not merely poetic references. Rather, metaphors “structure the way we think and the way we act, and our systems of knowledge and belief” (Fairclough, 1992, p 194). In their discussion of the metaphorical concept *argument is war*, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) claimed that “metaphor is not merely in the words we use – it is in our very concept of an argument” (p. 5). As such, the metaphor of teachers as servants and children as masters needs to be understood as not simply a creative (and outlandish) description of teaching, rather it shapes the very understanding and embodiment of what

it means to be a teacher - *teaching is servitude*. While conceptualizing education as a form of service to others certainly has some value, the servant/master narrative has an undeniable reference to a form of bondage, subjugation, compulsory labor, or worse.

Furthermore, “the acceptance of the metaphor, which forces us to focus *only* on those aspects of our experience that it highlights, leads us to view the entailments of the metaphor as being *true*” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p.157). Categorizing teachers as servants does highlight the fact that children are greatly revered in Montessori pedagogy, but it downplays the role of a teacher to an extreme extent. The teacher, in this case, exists only to serve, not to lead. While Montessori reimaged what it means to educate and be a teacher in many ground breaking ways (e.g., child-directed learning, mixed age groupings, and peer modeling), “focusing on one set of properties shifts our attention away from others” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p.163). Conceptualizing teachers as passive servants neglects their role as *activists*. This exists in direct contrast to tenets of ABAR teaching. The Teaching for Change website, based off of the work of Louise Derman-Sparks – a leader in the development of early childhood ABAR curricula – states that anti-bias pedagogy supports “respecting and embracing differences and *acting against* bias and unfairness” (Teaching for change, 2018, emphasis added). The metaphorical concept of teaching as servitude and the positioning of children as the masters or leaders, constrains teachers’ ability to act directly and/or immediately in the face of injustice. This presents a bit of a dichotomy when teachers are expected to believe in Montessori’s vision of peace made possible through education, but discouraged from taking up justice-oriented leadership qualities through metaphor that promotes a mindset of servitude.

This tension between ABAR teaching and that of Montessori emerged in the threshold between taking up ABAR self-reflective practices and staying true to the *teacher as servant* metaphor. In Sally's final interview she restated her commitment to dignifying the individuality of each child with whom she worked. This, she realized, may mean that she had to make adjustments to her teaching which could be met with criticism and put her Montessori social identity into question:

You know [the comment] "*well that's not Montessori*", but ... I heard Julie<sup>8</sup> [AMI trainer] state once in our training and I was like "*right on Julie!*", it was like "if you're doing what is going to best serve this child than that is Montessori". (Final Interview, 12/7/17)

Here, Sally was able to use the servant/master metaphor to justify not only her future decisions but also her shifting perspective on teaching while still maintaining her identity as a Montessori teacher. This application offers important insight to future Montessori teacher educators as a possible opening to incorporate more active ABAR strategies into Montessori pedagogy. Being an active member of the classroom community in regards to social justice *is* serving the child, as well as the social community. Still, Sally continued by further describing how she had come to feel comfortable embodying these two attitudes. She explained:

Taking that with me, that side of it, like that [ABAR] truth, along with ... this is the truth of the method and of the training and kind of, how can I meld those two together to really serve the whole child. (Final Interview, 12/7/17)

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<sup>8</sup> Pseudonym given to protect anonymity

Sally described an emerging dialogic identity in which she was becoming both a Montessori teacher *and* an ABAR teacher by taking up the truths of each. Comments regarding “doing ABAR and Montessori” as two different teaching entities to utilize were made by other participants as well over the course of our time together. While Sally and others were developing a dialogic ABAR/Montessori identity, it is important to recognize that they still referred to ABAR and Montessori teaching as disparate, not exactly the same and at times possibly conflicting with one another - so much so that Sally was prepared for other Montessorians to even question her practices and her identity as a Montessorian. This exemplifies a way in which the constraints on the role of the teacher can inhibit and cause uncertainty when considering other perspectives of teaching.

### **Governmentality**

Schlenker, Weigold, and Schlenker (2008) clarified that “personal commitment links the self-system to the ethical principles, producing and accompanying sense of obligation to perform consistently with those principles and sense of responsibility for relevant actions” (p. 324). The obligation to fulfill the physical, professional, and even spiritual requirements of a Montessori social identity is intensified with the added responsibility of being this way for the good of children and the future of the world. This regulation of the ways in which an individual should and should not be is the definition of governmentality. Barker (2012) explained that “the concept of governmentality stresses that processes of social regulation do not so much stand over and against the individual, but are constitutive of self-reflective modes of conduct, ethical competencies and social movements” (p. 482). The Montessori knowledge and belief system has created a social practice fully equipped with specified modes of conduct and ethics all revolving around a

social movement. Furthermore, self-reflection is an inherent element of being and being seen as a Montessori teacher. As such, Montessori teachers are essentially commodified to self-govern their behavior, as well as that of others.

Foucault wrote extensively on the concept of governmentality and surveillance. In *Discipline and Punish*, he explained at length the ways in which bodies become subjugated to reinforce various regimes of power (Foucault, 1977/2010b); this occurs through governmentality and hierarchical surveillance. Foucault identified the rise of disciplines as a primary mechanism of this form of control. He claimed the disciplines “made possible the meticulous control of the operations of the body, which assured the constant subjugation of its forces and imposed on them a relation of docile-utility” (p.181). Power became channeled through the disciplines within society, subversively affecting bodies to inflict a form of control and subjugation:

The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down, and rearranges it. A “political anatomy” which was also a “mechanics of power” was being born; it defined how one may have a hold over others’ bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed, and the efficiency that one determines. Thus discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, “docile” bodies. (Foucault, 1977/2010b, p. 182)

Power can control the ways in which others act in society, particularly within their profession. This governmentality occurs through social ideologies and surveillance from those with hierarchical power.

Foucault's theories stemmed from his study of the production of soldiers and prison architecture. While I am drawing on elements of this work, I am using the concept and effects of governmentality and surveillance more moderately. However, it is worth considering ways in which governmentality and surveillance occurs, perhaps in a slightly less aggressive form, within Montessori social practice. When a Montessorian is asked to engage in a teaching practice other than Montessori's such as ABAR reflection and teaching, there is the potential of direct conflict with the ways in which the Montessori social identity is governed and surveyed by the larger community. Sally eluded to this regulation when she referred to a "well that's not Montessori" potential attitude regarding her taking up of ABAR teaching perspectives (Final Interview, 12/7/17).

In October, Beth and Katherine described the pressure they felt from being observed by Montessori trainees and AMI consultants to perform appropriately, if not exceptionally (Workshop 2, 10/28/17). This was intensified with their growing commitment to ABAR work. The week prior to our second workshop, Beth's classroom had hosted a Montessori trainee completing her first week of observation. Trainees are expected to observe quietly and as unobtrusively as possible, familiarizing themselves with the workings of a Montessori classroom. In this case, both the trainee and Beth were governed by specific ways of being. Beth shared,

I mean, [the trainee] did exactly what she was supposed to do. She was very quiet [laughter], so we didn't notice her at all that much. But I don't know. Something about having this extra pair of eyes on me really— I was struggling. (Workshop 2, 10/28/17)

Interestingly, Beth went on to share that it was not only the pressure to embody the Montessori ways of being, but also to exhibit her commitment to ABAR work: “What does [the trainee] think about what I’m doing in this realm of education? Besides the Montessori stuff. Is it evident at all in the classrooms enough that somebody who doesn’t know would notice?” (Workshop 2, 10/28/17). In this case, the surveillance by a Montessori trainee not only governed Beth’s Montessori behavior, but inflicted an additional layer of more self-induced pressure to relay her commitment to social justice and ABAR teaching. Katherine contributed to this discussion, stating:

I would say it is – it’s not hard, but it’s tricky having an extra set of eyes on you. And I think with the biases that you might have or it might seem like you have, and how you respond. Maybe responding a certain way, or not responding a certain way, and then thinking how that looks to someone else. (Workshop 2, 10/28/17)

Balancing the requirements of the Montessori social identity with a growing understanding of implicit bias and diverse needs of the children was not a seamless task. Merging an explicitly defined way of being with a new justice oriented self and social awareness provoked a reflection on how Beth and Katherine’s social identities were being seen by others.

Esperanza, who had taken a temporary role as the lead guide while the former lead teacher was on maternity leave, described the sense of responsibility she felt in the position, “I have reached out to [the former lead teacher] because I hope that I’m doing a good job. And it has made me feel very vulnerable and very responsible” (Workshop 2, 10/28/17). Of course, caring for a class of young children is absolutely a huge

responsibility, and being new to the job can be very challenging and overwhelming, Montessori or otherwise. Striving to be a good teacher and seeking support from a colleague during a moment of crisis in teaching makes a lot of sense. However, in these moments of dilemmas and uncertainty, it is important to consider the added pressure of fulfilling the Montessori ways of being as observed by others, a pressure that may make the dilemma even more straining, or could even be the reason for the dilemma in the first place. Schlenker, Weigold, and Schlenker (2008) pointed out that what is produced out of a commitment to such a principle way of being “is then greater difficulty explaining inconsistent conduct and less perceived flexibility to pursue unprincipled alternatives” (p. 324). When faced with a moment of crisis, Montessori teachers may be limited in their flexibility to take up alternative teaching practices through a form of self-governance. Furthermore, Schindler, Zink, Windrich and Menninghaus (2013) explained that “adored others represent various ideals, some of which the ordinary person cannot hope to ever actualize” (p. 98). Looking to an adored leader during moments of uncertainty may offer the support and guidance to persevere, but also has the potential to make such instances worse by presenting unachievable ideals. In addition, it further solidifies the social order in which Montessori is seen as a “the greatest education genius since Froebel” (Standing, 1962). A social system governed by a regime of truth with a single *genius* at the forefront further solidifies who harbors the knowledge and abilities that shape the social identity. Conceptualizing Montessori as a Great Woman implies that she harbors unique talents which are impossible for others to gain yet included in the image of an authentic, ideal Montessori teacher. A Montessorian may improve their practice to become a wonderful and effective teacher, but could never achieve the genius status reserved solely for

Montessori herself - doing so would suggest that a follower could achieve the same status as Montessori, toppling the hierarchal Montessori social order. Therefore, the regime of truth governs the knowledge, beliefs, and even appearance of a Montessori teacher as well as maintains an immobile positionality.

However, just as Foucault theorized power as both a force of good and bad, perhaps surveillance has a similar effect – one that governs and controls ways of being, but also one that pushes individuals to challenge themselves and grow in their teaching. After Beth, Katherine, and Esperanza reflected on their recent experiences of being observed and striving to look and be the best ABAR Montessorian they could be in the classroom, Lauren shared her own perspective and feelings on what it is like to be watched:

The action of being watched makes you take another ... it can be an influence in-and-of-itself, right, it can be like ... when you invite somebody else to, say, read your work, or look at something personal you've reflected on you become almost hypersensitive to that and realize where you want to make changes. (Workshop 2, 10/28/17)

Lauren described the pressure that can arise from being observed, but she also identified a way in which that pressure could enhance a form of critical reflection and even lead to more thought-out and intentional teaching choices. Additionally, her comments focus on the inner and personal effects of being watched, rather than on an outward focus on how the teaching – actions, words, appearance – looks to someone else.

When developing my research plan I intentionally chose to not observe my participants. Because our work together was grounded in self-reflection, it did not seem

appropriate nor possible for me to enter their classrooms and attempt to watch a participant's self-awareness in relation to bias and privilege. Had the research focused on more tangible applications of ABAR teaching (e.g., critical literacy practices, culturally relevant materials) observational material would have been necessary. Montessori teachers engaging in ABAR self-reflection is a process that I feel is deeply personal and during our time together was not performance based. This is not to suggest that there was no form of governmentality that manifested through our ABAR workshops; as noted in Beth and Katherine's reflection, they were increasingly conscious of their responses and hoping to appear anti-bias to other classroom observers. I simply did not want to carry with me an added level of surveillance into a deeply personal experience.

### **Conclusion**

No social system is perfect nor is any leader. The purpose of this analysis is not to undermine the mission and vision Montessori developed over 100 years ago. However, thinking with theories regarding social practice, leadership, and power when exploring the phenomenon of Montessori teachers engaging in ABAR self-reflection has highlighted some important elements of the Montessori social world that Montessori teacher educators should consider. Because of Montessori's status as a Great Woman she has remained at the forefront of the social movement. This hierarchy is made even more severe by positioning teachers as subordinates through the commodifying and constraining discourse. While the Montessori social identity has created a community around a shared vision and energized an educational movement, it also has the potential to govern and limit teachers to a single way of being, hindering the ability to merge with other ways of teaching and what can be considered "true Montessori".

## Chapter 6: Neutrality

The Montessori regime of truth has created an explicit teacher identity. Such an identity influences that ways in which teachers act, move, respond, and react in the classroom – their ways of being a teacher are commodified and constrained by the revered knowledge and belief system. Foucault (1977/2010a) wrote that truth “is produced only by virtue of multiple constraints” (p. 72). Montessori truth is produced and kept alive through the longstanding adherence to the constraints placed on the non-powerful participants in the Montessori social order. The constraints on what it means to be a Montessori teacher and how to authentically navigate the teacher-child relationship was provoked when discussing when and how to address bias and social justice with young children. A line of deterritorialization emerged stemming from the Montessori belief in social justice and teachers as passive in the classroom setting.

Teacher passivity regarding social justice issues is not unique to Montessori educators. Elliot (2008) examined the existence of ideology on social matters such as race and culture within novice teachers’ beliefs about teaching and learning. Elliot’s early findings showed that “many of [the teachers] neither viewed schools in a sociopolitical context nor understood the dynamics of oppression in classroom decisions about what was important to know and do” (p.224). Thus, encouragement and support were necessary to instigate critical reflection regarding their teaching, school policies, and educational practices. Similarly, Shapira-Lishchinsky (2011) found that teachers frequently avoid reflection on dilemmas regarding values, rules, and social norms and do not enter the profession with a strong sense of ethical guidelines. Other research has found similar results supporting the claim that teachers often begin their career (or

veteran teachers in Crawford's (2008) research) with a particular ideology of teaching as a means to impart knowledge and support development rather than a form of social activism (Bartolomé, 2008; Gonsalves, 2008; Kroll, 2012; Martin, 2008).

Montessori, on the other hand, did view education as an essential component of achieving justice and peace – an element a part of the Montessori knowledge and belief system made abundantly apparent within minutes of Montessori teacher training programs. However, the peaceful society she envisioned is made possible through the future lives of the children developing in a Montessori classroom, not necessarily through the direct actions of the teacher. For example, in the book *Child, Society and The World* (2008), Montessori eloquently described “society by cohesion” (p. 22) in which children, whose behavior has become normalized through a well-prepared environment and the passive guidance of the teacher, naturally exercise patience, respect, and harmony. While it is vital that teachers create a safe and developmentally appropriate space for children to work together in community, their role is to observe and guide, not to interfere in the child's self and social discoveries (Montessori, 2008).

### **Social Cohesion and Protection**

Montessori's descriptions of social cohesion, which she theorized and developed through decades of intense scientifically driven observations, are important perspectives on social-emotional learning. As a teacher I have witnessed young children in a Montessori classroom help and care for one another in exceptionally genuine ways. At the elementary level, I have heard accounts from school leaders on incredibly noble social justice initiatives led solely by children. On a personal note, my first-grade daughter has currently taken the lead on educating others in her school on plastic

pollution and strategies to reducing plastic use - an interest that led to calling local representatives and a trip to the state capital (and two very proud parents!). In all cases, teachers have acted as supports and facilitators rather than project directors or lead informants.

However, while the Montessori method of education offers invaluable opportunities for child-led justice work, Montessori did not describe ways to address micro or macro aggressions that may happen in the classroom, particularly at the early childhood level. Rather, she described characteristics of a successful school environment such as: “These children adapt easily to everything, to work and to contact with others” (2008, p. 22). Today, we know there is much to consider regarding a child’s adaptation to a new environment ranging from historical trauma, to family lifestyle, to individual self-identities. Not only do teachers need to take into account the ways they can support and connect with each unique child, but they should also be aware of the ways in which broader social norms infiltrate classroom experiences, both implicitly and explicitly, marginalizing and privileging certain ways of being. It is worth noting that Montessori died in 1952 in Amsterdam, two years before the lengthy process of desegregating American schools had even begun. Furthermore, the majority of her work with children occurred in relatively homogenous countries – Italy and India. While she championed the education of children in poverty and children with learning disabilities, the school communities in which she worked were typically culturally and racially uniform. Social adaptation then was different that it is now.

Navigating the tension between acting as a neutral agent in the classroom and speaking up in the face of injustice was discussed several times during the course of the

study: during the October small group interview with Esperanza, Lola and Lauren, during the second and third ABAR workshops, and was referred to in final interviews. During our small group interview, Lola brought up social cohesion specifically:

I like this whole idea of social cohesion, you know... you can come into a space, no matter what age you are or what your background is and everybody in that space is cohesive towards the same goal. Like if it was yoga and everybody was doing yoga, you know, there's kind of a goal in mind that we've come here to do this yoga we're not coming here to judge each other, were not coming here to, you know, to have these kind of talks that we're having, facilitated talks of bias and racism... So I like those spaces ... in our Montessori classroom I think it's a good space for kids to come and learn. This kind of was my next question... obviously bias and racism does affect [children] even though they're four and three, obviously ... it affects them in a way, but they have no idea yet, they have no understanding ... we don't have to use the words white or Black or Native ... in our classroom. We don't have to talk about these things at all because that's not what were here for. Or that's not what they're there for yet, at that age. (Small Group Interview, 9/30/17)

This quote came on the heels of a previous discussion regarding the importance of community to instigate liberation. Esperanza had suggested that the more connected one felt with their community<sup>9</sup> through a shared goal or purpose, the easier it may be for them to connect with others and bridge divides. This led to Lola bringing up the characteristics

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<sup>9</sup> The type of community being referred to was not explicitly defined, though there was a general reference to culturally based communities.

and values of an early childhood Montessori community. She identified the purpose of a Montessori classroom as a space with the shared goal of learning in community – a place in which she felt racism and bias did not need to be brought up specifically. While Lola did recognize that these forms of oppression and bias have an effect on young children, she was not sure how to address them in a classroom space that was designed to celebrate unity, and even sameness, more than address difference:

I guess my question is then, we have that social cohesion, but then at what point do we start educating about these things [bias and racism] ... that they're affected by? Cuz we're still, you know, protecting their innocence at this time, you know, these things are hitting them at home and we see them in their parents ... whose parents are becoming homeless, or ... one of our kids has jumped from home to home to home. And we have to find a different bus route for her almost every day. So, they're obviously affected by all these things, but we try to keep that social cohesion in our classroom very strong. And I really like that idea of what you [Esperanza] said – you know coming together for a goal or whatever, it is... So I like that cohesion, but at the same time how do we begin to educate so that we can all talk like we [the ABAR group] are talking about these things?

(Lola, Small Group Interview, 9/30/17)

Lola acknowledged a need to address social experiences faced by the children in her classroom, such as homelessness and poverty. But her quote exemplifies a struggle between explicitly recognizing these realities, many which were likely the result of racism, classism, and sexism among others, as a classroom community versus protecting

the perceived innocence of young children new to the world. Unfortunately, research shows that children internalize social messaging regarding race, gender, and other identity categories at an early age (Baron & Banaji, 2015; Lee, Quinn, & Pascalis, 2017; Monteiro, de França & Rodrigues, 2009). Specifically, children as young as three-months of age show racial preference (Katz, 2003; Kelly, et al., 2005). The innocence many once attributed to children is far more short lived than many would like to think.

Montessori's writing also alludes to this dichotomy between valuing early educational experiences and protecting children from harsh realities. Montessori was a relentless advocate for early education – not only at the preschool age, but from the moment of birth. She knew that profound development occurred during the first months, weeks, and days of life. Yet she observed how this development was often negatively affected by oppressive acts from adults. Montessori wrote extensively on the repressive experiences had by children which stifled their independence, creativity, and ultimately prevented them from reaching their true potential (e.g., Montessori, 1956/1991, 1967/1972, 2008). As such, she developed her method of education to not only better support early childhood development, but also to offer children reprieve from an oppressive society. Montessori explained:

A more just and charitable approach towards the child would be to create an “adaptive” environment different from the repressive one in which he operates and which has already formed his character. The implementation of any educational system ought to begin with the creation of an environment that protects the child from the difficult and dangerous obstacles that threaten him in the adult world. The shelter from the storm, the oasis in the desert, the place of

spiritual rest ought to be created in the world precisely to assure the healthy development of the child. (Montessori, 1956/1991, p. 5)

As Lola described, Montessori is a method of early education with the intent to provide children with a space to essentially *be children* – to uninhibitedly fulfill their individual needs, to learn and develop in a healthy, safe, natural, and communal way. Along with this perspective came an intensely protective attitude regarding exposure to social realities and inequity.

As a parent, I can instinctively relate to the protective nature of the Montessori method. This was exemplified in my previously shared post-reflexion in which I described the tentativeness I felt towards telling my daughter about the atrocities in Charlottesville and public resurgence of white supremacy. However, what I also acknowledged in this same post-reflexion was the fact that my, and my daughter's, white privilege, made avoiding these issues possible:

*I realize that's probably my privilege perspective. On how lucky I am that my children can live life a little bit longer without experiencing true horror, pain, fear, and sadness. Yes, that's a privilege in the world, but I don't think protecting my child, to a point, is such a bad thing. I think what's bad is that being able to protect my child is a privilege in the first place. All parents want that – safety and protection for their children. Why should only some of us be able to make that happen? (Post-Reflexion, 9/5/17)*

It is both a social privilege and a detriment to be able to avoid conversations on race, class, and other marginalized identities – and one I have admittedly taken advantage of as a white teacher, parent, and person. However, while avoiding issues of bias,

prejudice, and discrimination may give the impression that children, including white children, are able to retain their innocence, the reality is that they are acutely aware of social messaging all around them. Ignoring race, class, culture, gender, among others is practicing all forms of identity-blindness – a perspective on life that only further represses those without privilege.

What is important to note is that Lola identified as a Native woman, and worked in a school that served a Native population. While Lola did acknowledge whiteness as a part of her identity (Small Group Interview, 9/30/17), protecting children from discussions on inequity and injustice was not, perhaps, coming directly from a place of white privilege. The instinct to shield children from harm – mental, emotional, and physical – is not unusual for any adult to feel and act upon. However, what is worth considering is the way in which Montessori, a white upper-middle class woman, emphasized the purpose of her educational method as a place of shelter from the adult world and her positioning of the teacher as a passive protector. She developed her method from a place of privilege and we, Montessorians, are reproducing that perspective and strategy today, regardless of the realities that many children may face.

### **Bracketing Biases**

To better understand the way that teacher neutrality takes shape in a Montessori classroom, it is helpful to consider some important historical background. As a scientist in the early 1900s, Montessori exhibited many characteristics similar to other researchers of her time. In fact, many of her approaches to observation align with Husserl's method of phenomenological inquiry, particularly his conception of bracketing preconceived knowledge to be able to understand a phenomenon in its purity. As a reminder,

bracketing requires an ability to remove phenomena from the everyday world by setting aside one's "natural attitude", meaning preconceived ideas and understandings, bias and assumptions, and other elements of life that may have an effect on how phenomena are perceived. Unlike post-intentional phenomenology in which phenomena and experience are believed to be moving and evolving *through* one another, Husserlian phenomenology commits to the study *of* a phenomenon made possible by suspending pre understanding and knowledge.

Similarly, Montessori described her own research process which included intense observation of a phenomenon that she referred to interchangeably as "facts":

a new phenomenon is an initial discovery of facts, previously unknown and therefore unsuspected, that is to say, that were as if they did not exist. A fact is always objective and therefore cannot depend on an intuition. When it is the case of proving the existence of a new fact, it must be proved that it exists of itself, that is, it must be isolated. (Montessori, 1996/2005, p. 117)

Montessori developed much of her method of education through a manner of observation that I read as decidedly Husserlian. Drawing the phenomenon out of everyday life in an effort to study it in its purity, without outside influences, was not only part of her research approach, but also became part of the method of education. This occurs in two ways. First, Montessori frequently referred to the need for teachers to "see" children, and childhood in general, in a new, pure, and true way. For example, she explained, "it is as though a storm were hindering the child's soul from coming forth from its secret hiding place, to show itself in the outer world" (Montessori, 1996/2005, p.105). This quote depicts how Montessori saw children and childhood as phenomena in

themselves. When these phenomena were studied in their purity – removed from everyday life, previous knowledge of child development, and inhibitions present in the adult world – teachers gained new knowledge, and ultimately a new perspective on life itself. Montessori continued, explaining “there is a hidden man, a hidden child, a buried living being who must be *liberated*. Here is the first urgent task of education: liberation in this sense means knowledge, or indeed discovery of the unknown” (Montessori, 1996/2005, p. 106, emphasis in original). A part of Montessori teacher training includes not only the introduction to Montessori’s theories of child development, teaching and learning, but also significant training in phenomenological-like observation – observation which includes a bracketing, objective, approach.

This form of bracketing is the second way her scientific method of observation influenced her instructions on teacher development. This is particularly important in the productions and provocations of the phenomenon of Montessori teachers engaging in ABAR self-reflection. While Montessori directed teachers to “free [themselves] from all preconceived ideas concerning the levels at which the children may be” (Montessori, 1967, p. 276), ABAR teaching approaches, in general, prioritize the acknowledgment and critical exploration of personal prejudice and bias (Derman-Sparks, 2008; Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010; Kissinger, 2017). This does not mean merely becoming aware of one’s self-identity, accepting personal biases, and simply moving on. Teachers should constantly be engaged in critical self-reflection and self-betterment to best meet the diverse needs of their students. It does, however, include emphasis on self-discovery as well as recognition of the ways in which societal norms effect, or move *through*, a phenomenon such as childhood. Preconceptions cannot be set aside as they are not static

objects to hold and remove, notwithstanding the fact that each of us harbor conceptions and judgements deeply hidden within our conscience and are difficult to identify.

Arguably, such a perspective leans toward a colorblind approach in which teachers believe they can remove, or ignore, their perceptions of race and other identity markers in their work with children.

### **Dilemmas in Bracketing**

During Workshop 2 in October, discussion arose regarding the possibilities and challenges to removing judgments and taking a neutral stance in the classroom. Several conversations developed concerning the role of the teacher during moments of bias and prejudice in the classroom – intentional or unintentional. Lauren struggled with the difference between identifying personal bias and bringing a neutral perspective to the classroom – specifically to a situation with a child viewed as challenging by other staff members.

When you think you kind of know what's going on, you can look for resources, but also feeling like the neutrality brings about, like a nebulous nature too, like where you don't really know where to go to get to the next step, because it could be...if it's nothing then could it be everything? So like, if I'm supposed to be neutral towards this situation and I'm not supposed to pass a judgment then couldn't the solution to this be so vast that it would be so difficult to decide which thing to use to support and help this child? (Workshop 2, 10/28/17)

Lauren articulated a feeling of being stuck between a rock and a hard place, so-to-speak, in that she was making every effort to avoid being judgmental towards a child, but then felt unable to come to a conclusion on how to best support him. Additionally, she

claimed that because she was relatively new to the classroom, she was bringing in a fresh perspective to the situation and expressed a newly heightened concern regarding other staff members bias and opinions that were influencing their decisions. Engaging in ABAR self-reflection alongside Montessori's method of identifying and removing personal biases brought a moment of crisis and uncertainty to Lauren's conception of teaching. Her reflections can be described as an *ethical dilemma* in teaching in which she found herself faced with "a choice between two or more courses of action, when obstacles on each side hinder the decision as to which course to pursue" (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2011, p. 648). One obvious obstacle Lauren faced was the lack of authority her position as an assistant gave her and the fact she had less experience working in the school. However, a more phenomenological ethical dilemma added an additional layer to Lauren's uncertainty. The push and pull between acknowledging and working *through* biases versus bracketing them to the point of having no opinion and ignoring any "gut feeling" left her uncertain as to how to move forward in this situation, and others in the future.

### **Moral Judgement in the Classroom**

Both Lola's and Lauren's reflections and questions on when and how to address bias are examples of ways in which Montessori teachers engaging in ABAR self-reflection experienced dilemmas and uncertainty in their teaching (Cuban, 1992; Lampert, 1985). The topic of neutrality and specifically being a neutral presence in the classroom was addressed head-on in our final ABAR workshop. That day, I introduced Heitzeg's (2014) steps to moving toward social justice (Appendix G). The third step in this process is titled *Moral Judgement*. Heitzeg, and I, introduced this step by sharing the

famous quote by Eli Wiesel: “We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages this tormentor, never the tormented” (as cited in Heitzeg, 2014). Heitzeg explained that committing to a set of morals and values when working for justice is an important evaluative step that directs social action: “in the face of experience and evidence, we must evaluate. Our values guide our understanding of our experiences, the larger social analysis, and our actions” (Heitzeg, 2014, p.567).

After sharing this step on Heitzeg’s path toward justice I asked the participants if and how they might translate this idea to their work with young children. Lola expressed familiarity and agreement with the Wiesel quote, highlighting her identity as a Native woman who had experienced oppression. Katherine shared that she felt staying neutral is easier but not always best, and described a recent personal experience she had finding the courage to speak up to a family member. It was Sally who made the first connection to the role of a Montessori teacher. She recounted a moment in which she struggled with whether or not to interject in a conversation between children regarding same-sex marriage. While she portrayed the conversation as a calm and respectful dialogue, she wondered whether or not she should have stepped in and if so what she should have said (Workshop 3, 12/2/17).

### **Critical Incidents**

At that time in the classroom, Sally did what she instinctively felt was appropriate as a Montessori teacher and did not get involved in the conversation. While she became aware of the ethical dilemma she faced during our group discussion, the actual classroom experience she had can be considered a *critical incident* in teaching (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2011; Woods, 1993; Zygmunt & Clark, 2016). Such incidents are moments

that occur in a teacher's practice in which they are faced with a dilemma and must make a quick decision to move forward. Repeated experience of a similar critical incident can lead to a repeated reaction from the teacher that becomes habit and normed (Griffin & Scherr, 2010; Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2011). Because such moments are brief, teachers may not even be fully aware of the decision making process that is occurring, especially as they gain more repeated experience. This is problematic as normed behavior can harbor forms of implicit bias and perpetuate inequity in classrooms and society. Therefore, it is important to provide teachers with direction and support on critical teacher self-reflection (Griffin, 2010; Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2011) and opportunities to attend various forms of professional development (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2011; Wood, 1993) so that they may recognize critical incidents and consider alternate ways of responding. Zygmunt and Clark (2016) have used critical incident reflection as a tool to specifically support teacher candidates develop their understanding of and skills in culturally relevant pedagogy. Sally's engagement in ABAR self-reflection, particularly our discussion on neutrality, produced an opportunity for her to not only recognize and share a critical incident she had experienced with fellow Montessorians, but also seek help from the group on how to act in such a moment.

It was difficult to settle on a clear and simple answer to Sally's broader question of if and when to interject personal and/or social morals and values in children's conversations – both during the workshop and while conducting this analysis. During my analytical exploration I found myself caught between agreeing with many of the participant comments while also harboring an intense an urgent feeling that it was critical for them, and all Montessorians, to be more assertive. Once again, I found myself in a

dark, or at least very dimly lit, threshold between what it means to be a Montessori teacher and what it means to act against injustice (or *for* social justice) in teaching. While the two truths shared some obvious similarities (e.g., education as a means to peace, respect for young children) the connection between them felt a bit rocky. While the participants (including myself) exhibited a commitment to bringing ABAR philosophy into their teaching, there was uncertainty regarding what that meant, and could mean, as a Montessori teacher.

### **Moral Development<sup>10</sup>**

Revisiting child developmental a part of the Montessori knowledge and belief system shed light on why, at least in part, this uncertainty existed. Montessori's theory of the moral development between the ages of three to six focuses on the development of the will and self-control. To support this process, the teacher must create an environment equipped with materials that support independence, scaffold skill development, elicit concentration, and require patience (Montessori, 1946/1991, 1967/1972). The physical environment is a teacher in-and-of-itself and plays a vital role in both the social and moral development of young children. For example, Montessori wrote that "as guardian and custodian of the environment the teacher concentrates on this, instead of being preoccupied by the difficulties of the problem child, knowing that from the environment the cure will come" (Montessori, 1946/1991, p. 94). It is not the job of the teacher to

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<sup>10</sup> In *Education for a New World* (1946/1991), Montessori wrote about moral development interchangeably with phrases such as "character training", "the development of character" and "the development of the will". These expressions all generally referred to a child's growing understanding of right and wrong as well as their ability to control behavior, cooperate with others, and care for themselves. Today Montessori's "moral development" aligns more closely to ideas regarding social-emotional development, a sense of tolerance, empathy, and a commitment to values.

reprimand and direct children in the classroom, at least not until all other options have been exhausted. Rather, children who have been united in a safe and protected environment and come together in social cohesion have the ability to develop their own understanding of right and wrong and exhibit acceptance and empathy for others.

I am not a child psychologist, but based on my experience working with young children, I do agree with elements of this theory. I have seen children benefit socially and personally from the freedom to be independent, materials that are enticing, and opportunities to practice self-control. However, what is important to note is that Montessori also stated that “only after six years can children benefit from moral *teaching*” (Montessori, 1946/1991, p.87, emphasis added). According to Montessori, during the first six years of life, moral development is child-driven and is fostered primarily through experiences with the environment (e.g., materials, opportunities for independence) and peers (Montessori, 1946/1991; Haines, 2000). This is problematic considering what is known today about the early development of bias and prejudice, as well as the fact that children may be experiencing and/or witnessing intersectional oppressions outside of their classroom. Once again, by not outwardly addressing injustice and macro and micro aggressions and offering alternative perspectives, early childhood moral development is tainted by implicit biases and systemic oppression existent in society. By practicing objectivity and neutrality, teachers not only miss an opportunity to instill in children the values and morals that are so needed today, but they may also perpetuate an inequitable system.

The existence of implicit biases, the effects bias has on children in early childhood, and several broad discussions on systemic oppression and privilege were part of the first and second ABAR workshops as well as the October small group interviews. Each participant exhibited authentic engagement and commitment to acknowledging this reality and working toward social change. Yet when confronted with Wiesel's<sup>11</sup> quote, the rhizome of what it means and be a Montessori teacher (Figure 2b) was provoked. The combination of protecting children from the realities of the adult world, or simply society, bracketing biases in teaching, and trusting that moral development will come

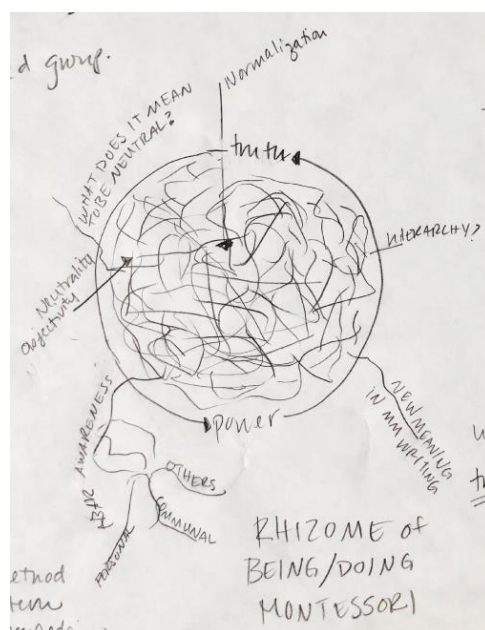


Figure 2b. Initial sketch of Montessori rhizome

naturally and equally to each child without adult intervention ignores the effects of ingrained oppression. This is particularly concerning as the early childhood years lay the foundation for the rest of life – a fact Montessori was acutely aware of.

## Workshop Discussion

<sup>11</sup> “We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages this tormentor, never the tormented.” (as cited in Heitzeg, 2014)

As an initial answer to Sally's question on when to step in on the conversation she overheard regarding same-sex marriage, Beth stated that she found the idea of neutrality and objectivity to be "bogus" (Workshop 3, 12/2/17) and further explained,

in some ways I think aiming for neutrality or aiming for objectivity like they try to tell us to be in training is more harmful than it is helpful because it's not possible, nor is it even desirable really if you think about it, you know, like why would you want to strip yourself of your humanity when looking at children? (Workshop 3, 12/2/17)

Later in the conversation, Beth stated that she would be willing to yell across the room to clarify any debate regarding the legality and acceptability of same-sex marriage. However, she also pointed out that this was both a personal commitment of hers, as well as the fact that same-sex marriages *are* legal. Clarifying that to children could be seen as less to do with morals and values and more to do with providing children with knowledge of a basic social reality.

Leaders in anti-bias education have called for an assertive approach to conversations and knowledge building on social issues in early childhood education. In the National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) book on anti-bias education, authored by Derman-Sparks and Edwards (2010), the first chapter opens with a list of example conversations and statements children and teachers have made regarding various identity markers of difference<sup>12</sup>. Derman-Sparks and Edwards (2010)

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<sup>12</sup> The following excerpts are two examples included in the Derman-Sparks & Edwards (2010) text: " 'I don't want to!' defiantly states a 4-year-old from a single-mom family when the teacher announces they are making cards for Father's Day" and " 'You can't be the princess! Princesses have blond hair!' announces a white 4-year-old to an African American friend". (p. 1)

point out how seemingly innocent statements, such as the debate Sally overheard on whether girls could marry girls, have the potential to send a negative message about self-worth and family pride among others. In these moments, allowing children to sort the issue out themselves may lead to acceptance of incorrect information, marginalization, and possibly no resolution at all. In their guide to anti-bias teaching, Derman-Sparks and Edwards (2010) explicitly stated: “In an anti-bias classroom, teachers intervene with immediate and follow-up activities to counter the cumulative, hurtful effects of these messages” (p. 1). While Montessori positioned teachers as passive servants and protectors of children’s independent moral development and knowledge-building, anti-bias education places significant responsibility on the teachers to directly interject during moments of explicit and implicit bias.

### **Neutrality and Social Politics**

During the span of time my participants and I engaged in ABAR work together the blurred line between morals, values, and opinions was increasingly difficult to delineate as politics had become centered around social issues and was extremely divisive. Lauren shared an example of a teacher who referred to the president in a derogatory way in class, mostly by making fun of his name. This led to further discussion of how a teacher should respond to conversations regarding the current president and administration without ostracizing children who may come from homes that think otherwise, as well as the vital role a teacher plays in modeling appropriate and respectful behavior. Esperanza shared her thoughts on imparting such personal opinions with young children,

I think, I don't know what the term is, but we're acting as oppressor as adults on children by saying, that's a way of saying, like, this is my thinking and I'm sort of going to impose it on you. Where they're at that point where they get to, they're developing their own way of thinking, and like doing things like that I think is counterproductive. (Workshop 3, 12/2/17)

Esperanza's point uniquely combines both Montessori's theory of self-discovered morality as well as theories of power and control (Foucault, 2010; Freire, 1970/2000). In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire identified a primary obstacle to achieving social liberation as when the "oppressive reality absorbs those within it and thereby acts to submerge human beings' consciousness" (p. 51). Esperanza's quote applies that perspective to the relationship between the adult and young children in a Montessori early childhood classroom. In a Montessori classroom, children should be allowed to develop in a way that meets their needs, without overbearing adult interference. This includes allowing children to come to their own opinions regarding social issues.

However, in her final reflection that same day, Esperanza shared a slightly less certain understanding of how to address injustice, including unjust politics, with young children. She began by telling the story of several families from her school who travelled to Washington DC to stand with DACA students and the undocumented community. With a shaky voice she continued:

I feel like-- they're not my children, but our children, our community's children  
 And so when I think about this work and the work my interactions with the  
 children and I like to keep my lens clear, I think of exactly like what we're doing.  
 The children are seeds, and we don't know what they'll grow up to be. We don't

know yet what will they be. They're in the process of opening, of being...I feel like the spirit being awoken because they're in their seed. They are still seeds. And so when I was thinking about all of this work and the challenges of the way that we view the world from our experiences and having to critically examine our views and say, "Is this really right? Am I pushing this, so to speak, on the child or am I really creating space so that they can develop their own thinking?"

(Workshop 3, 12/2/17)

This exemplifies the struggle between allowing children to see and experience the world in their own independent way and ensuring that they understand what is considered right, just, equitable and peaceful – in this case far beyond the classroom.

Esperanza spoke several times about the fear, pain, and hardship members of her Latinx school community were experiencing during and after the 2017 election, as well as her awareness of the privileges she held as a United States citizen and having a white mother (Workshop 1, 8/15/17). While she repeatedly confirmed her commitments to staying neutral in the classroom with the children, she was by no means lacking in opinion and concern regarding the current political and social state of affairs. During her final interview, Esperanza reiterated her stance:

We're in a special place, we get to see we get to look at what's happened, we have access to all that [historical] material, and then we get to see where else do we need to keep working? Like, I don't think it's time to just relax. /Liv: Nooo/ No, I mean we get to relax, yes, we get ... I'm sorry, I have a lot of urgency around these kinds of issues. /Liv: Oh yeah./ And so, that's the other part that I needed to express too, that, I forget that, I think sometimes I forget to hold that.

Because that urgency is not the children's. Does that make sense? They don't have that urgency. They don't have the sense of urgency. They may be developing it, but I think at this really early age they don't have that urgency that adults do. (Final Interview, 12/9/17)

She continued, reflecting on those same children who had accompanied their parents to Washington DC to speak with legislators regarding DACA and immigration. Yet still, Esperanza saw her role as one of neutrality and the creator of an environment that facilitated children's self-discovery.

I can have more urgency as an adult and I can continue my work, but when I'm in the environment, I have to stay neutral. Like even if the children are having dialogue that I agree with around the current political systems and situation that were living in ... I get to just hear them. I get to just listen, I get to just hear them and intervene if it's being hurtful to another child or to the environment, or to me if it's being hurtful. But if it's not and the child's expressing their opinion and working out their thoughts, I get to just hear them. (Final interview, 12/9/17)

Esperanza clearly articulated the typically perceived role of the Montessori teacher as a watchful observer, yet she also made an explicit reference to keeping a neutral stance toward political conversations *she agreed with*. One cannot help but wonder how this commitment might change regarding political opinions that conflicted with her own. The political and social climates had become increasingly hurtful – both emotionally and through physical violence. Therefore, delineating when politically related conversations became inappropriate was closely linked to corresponding opinions. For example, a conversation regarding coming to the United States and the deportation of

undocumented immigrants within a community made up of mixed immigration status families had the potential to do harm by inciting fear and anxiety. Because the social and political conditions had become so contentious and violent there was noticeable tension in the threshold between taking direct actions toward social justice and allowing children to develop their own morals freely with minimal guidance.

### **Conclusion**

Esperanza, Sally, Beth, Lola, Katherine, and Lauren all expressed some level of caution when it came to intervening in social justice related conversations. There was a general consensus that if comments were made that were obviously hurtful (e.g., “girls are bad, boys are good”) it was their job as the teacher to intervene. However, what is obviously hurtful to one person may not be to another, exemplified by Beth’s versus Sally’s reactions to the discussion regarding same-sex marriage and Esperanza’s description of when discussions may be considered upsetting. In general, our conversations were focused on a broader conception of ways in which social issues may arise, rather than focusing on several explicit examples as Derman-Sparks and Edwards (2010) do in their opening chapter. Still, these discussions depict the contrast between Montessori’s belief in objectivity, neutrality, and protecting children from the adult word versus the teacher agency and activism that is an inherent part of ABAR pedagogy. Beth noted that these attributes are instilled during the transformation of becoming a Montessorian during teacher training when she said “I think aiming for neutrality or aiming for objectivity *like they try to tell us to be in training* is more harmful than it is helpful because it’s not possible” (Workshop 3, 12/2/17, emphasis added). Practicing objectivity and being neutral is a part of the commodification of Montessori teachers and

the embodiment of a Montessori teacher social identity. In addition, the constraints placed on teachers to take the position of servant and protector limits the possible forms of explicit *action* against injustice and oppressions that seep into school life.

Lola, Beth, Katherine, Lauren, Sally, Esperanza and I were left to question whether interjecting our views in the conversations about same-sex marriage, the current president, or other social issues is a form of social activism or an irresponsible imposition of our ideas on young minds. There is no easy answer to this and I suspect it is an issue with which teachers of all types struggle when working with very young children. However, today many agree that avoiding conversations with young children around race, social class, gender, sexuality, among other social markers of difference is detrimental (Ausdale & Feagin, 2001; Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010; Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006; Han, 2018; Hawkins, 2012; Husband, 2012; Kemple, Harris & Lee, 2015; Kissinger, 2016). Children are not blind to the world around them and while teachers can offer safety and comfort in a chaotic world they cannot and should not evade acknowledging the diverse and at times difficult experiences children come from, as well as the realities of the world in which we are all a part. This is no easy task as bias manifests through microaggressions that frequently go unnoticed and unaddressed. Therefore, it is especially critical for Montessori teachers to learn about identity bias, reflect on their own privilege and marginalization, strive to become acutely aware of the ways in which oppression takes shape in early childhood classrooms, and address them when they occur – schools, including early childhood, are not neutral zones. Had one of the children in the conversation Sally overheard on same-sex marriage come from a home with two moms how might that discussion have marginalized her life experience? Sally

responded to the discussion in a way she was trained to do, yet her growing awareness of bias and ABAR perspectives to teaching provoked a critical incident, and left her uncertain.

The existence and effects of Montessori teacher neutrality and objectivity exemplifies a way in which the Montessori knowledge and belief system contrasts with ABAR practices. While my ABAR workshops focused primarily on building knowledge of systemic oppression and engaging in ABAR self-reflection, the conversations around what it means to practice neutrality provoked the Montessori social identity. As each participant became increasingly aware of inequities swirling through everyday life – both through our workshops and the socio-political events of the time – they began to look more critically at what their role in the classroom should and could be. These conversations exemplified Husband's (2012) claim that anti-racist education *is* overtly political in nature, whether that was initially obvious to the participants or not. However, because the Montessori knowledge and belief system upholds several beliefs that have the potential to challenge ABAR practices, the ability to embody a dialogic identity was not a seamless task.

Today, more than ever, the world has watched children and teenagers take the lead in the fight for justice, often because they know of and have experienced the opposite. Protecting children from unnecessary harm should be a goal of any adult, but withholding, ignoring, and refraining from addressing social issues has the potential to work against Montessori's vision of knowledgeable children growing up to be empowered justice-oriented adults. During the Sixth Internationale Montessori Congress in 1937, Montessori gave a lecture titled *The Need for Universal Accord So That Man*

*May Be Morally Trained to Defend Humanity*. The lecture addressed social concerns still prevalent today such as nationalism, globalization, migration, morality and of course, the role of education. She claimed that,

changing the way history is taught in schools is not so important as studying the present structure of our society – a structure of which mankind remains totally unaware, since education does not help man understand contemporary phenomena. A science that would investigate our own era, a science of peace, has become urgently necessary. (Montessori, 1972, pp. 101-102)

Montessori felt the same urgency that Esperanza, myself, and many more people feel today. As such, she advocated for a method of education that she felt would best support development, including that of moral development. To implement this, Montessori teachers today should have a strong understanding of the structure of society, one that includes an awareness of systemic bias as well as the ways systems have shaped our own lives, identities, and perceptions. This quote acknowledges the need for not only a greater social awareness but perhaps one that could even be implemented in the classroom as *a science of peace*. In her lecture, Montessori did not elaborate on when and how this new science should be introduced through teaching, but she continued on at significant length highlighting its importance, including a recognition of the effects an increasing globalized world was having on social relations among people of all types. I contend that perhaps this science of peace could be instigated in early childhood through more intentional incorporation of ABAR teaching practices, including encouragement to actively address social justice in the early childhood classroom.

## Chapter 7: Final Thoughts and Implications

Thinking about the phenomenon of Montessori teachers engaging in ABAR reflection with theory helped to illuminate productions (e.g., finding meaning in Montessori's writing today, ongoing development of a social identity) and provocations (e.g., the servant/master narrative, teacher neutrality). Because I used post-intentional phenomenology as my guiding methodology, I had the opportunity to explore the phenomenon through a wide breadth of phenomenological material. The phenomenon is shaped and can be understood through lived experiences as well as other important intentionalities, such as historical influences, that have contributed to its existence, evolution, productions, and provocations. The possibilities for phenomenological material initially felt infinite and overwhelming; but, as I continued on my analytical journey, I felt guided by the phenomenon itself (Vagle, 2018). Moments of intensity called for further inquiry as I mapped out connections and disconnections between the ABAR work, Montessori pedagogy, participants' comments, and my guiding theoretical frameworks. While spending time in the in-between spaces, the thresholds, I searched for further theory, research, and phenomenological materials to help me understand what I was being drawn to. Bringing more information into the mix carried with it more rhizomatic and seemingly messy lines, yet I found that it also almost miraculously offered clarity. Thinking with theory illuminated characteristics of the phenomenon that could have gone unnoticed but have an important influence on the productions, provocations, and ongoing evolution of the phenomenon.

Vagle (2014) explained that phenomena often speak for themselves and “as post-intentional phenomenological craftswomen and men, the choices we make to emphasize one thing or another – and knowing when to explain and when to get out of the text’s way are critical” (p. 143). I found this to be true as I moved through analysis of the phenomenon. I attempted to explain the productions and provocations I felt called to explain by the phenomenon *through* the phenomenological material such as Montessori’s texts, and my participants comments. Some productions and provocations stayed in the foreground, never demanding further attention (at least for now). The most direct way to describe my analysis process is that I reflected on my experiences and trusted my instincts. According to van Manen (2014), a phenomenon may *give itself* to each individual in a different way. This dissertation is a rich description of the ways in which the phenomenon gave itself to me (and I to it).

### **Review of Research Questions**

Included in my research questions were inquiries into the productions and provocations of the phenomenon through the examination of Montessori social politics, historical influences, and classroom experiences. I believe I have explored these questions in several ways. The adherence to Montessori’s words, written and recorded many years ago, as well as influential biographies such as Standing’s (1957), have resulted in a Montessori hierarchy that has continued to place Montessori herself at the very top. Hodder (2003) posited that a text “often allows language and meanings to be controlled more effectively, and to be linked to strategies of centralization and codification. The word, concretized or ‘made flesh’ in the artifact can transcend context and gather through time extended symbolic connotations” (p. 157). I have found this to

be the case through my analysis of the ways in which Montessori's words have transcended time and continue to influence and even control teachers and the Montessori world today.

Because Montessori continues to fulfill the role of leader in today's Montessori social world, she is looked to for meaning, reassurance, and guidance. My participants and I were able to glean new meaning and sense-making from texts Montessori had written well over sixty years ago. However, while her work still produces a feeling of comfort and offers support to teachers in classrooms today, it also has the potential to create a rigidity by valuing her words as the primary truth in the Montessori social system. Furthermore, a social identity has developed that obeys a well-articulated way of being, believing, and behaving learned and understood by many Montessorians through their training. Engaging in a teaching perspective that can differ or even contradict Montessori's pedagogy provokes the long-standing Montessori knowledge and belief system as well as its social identity. Several classroom experiences that my participants shared, such as when to interject in seemingly innocent conversations regarding social issues, highlighted this tension.

### **A Personal Analysis**

I have a final analysis to include in this dissertation which sheds light on the ways in which the Montessori social world is active in a Montessori teacher's life. I have saved this section for the end because it is personal, just as I opened this dissertation.

A question I had when conducting this research was: what is produced and provoked in a Montessori teacher's self and social identities when engaged in ABAR teacher self-reflection? As I began my initial material analysis I had a moment of panic.

Even though my participants and I had spent a relatively significant amount of time together, how could I really know if, how, and why the ABAR work had produced or provoked their self-identities? As I continued on with analysis - listening and re-listening to the ABAR workshops, reviewing Foucault and Fairclough, and sketching out connections between theory, comments, and reflexions – I realized that there was one participant’s identity I could readily explore more deeply, my own.

*I'm the one who's identity is being produced and provoked through taking up ABAR teacher self-reflection. I'm the primary subject because I can only truly (even if that) know myself/my identity. In a way, my participants were the ones producing and provoking me (or at least our work together was). I know that I'm taking up ABAR reflection. I think my participants did. To their own degree – but can I ever really know if/how/in what way their identities evolved? And of course, identity isn't static. What we discussed even a month ago may have just slipped away, or at least left the forefront of their minds – whereas it's constantly at the forefront of me [through doing this work]. (Post-Reflexion, 1/3/18)*

### **My Engagement in ABAR Self-Reflection**

I am an AMI trained Montessori teacher who has been engaged in ABAR self-reflection for the past five years. My Montessori identity really began when I was born, my mom had been trained as a Montessori teacher in the 1970s and the philosophy influenced her parenting. When I was three years old, I was sent to a Montessori preschool which I attended through kindergarten. I am still exceptionally close to my best friend who I met during that time. When I began my own Montessori training in 2006, memories of using the materials as a child washed over me, bringing with them a feeling

of comfort, destiny, and purpose. The wheel had come full circle and my transformation complete.

For seven years, I was an active member of the AMI Montessori social world. When I was teaching in a Montessori early childhood classroom I never called myself a preschool teacher, rather I virtually always said I was a Montessori teacher when asked what I did professionally. While this was partially because I felt that term gave me more credibility than “preschool teacher” would (i.e., “a glorified babysitter”), it was also because it acknowledged the social community I had worked hard to be accepted into and I was proud of my accomplishment and membership. During those years, I fulfilled the image of the Montessori teacher to the best of my ability, was observed and assessed by Montessori consultants and trainers, attended Montessori gatherings and lectures, and led parent education events on core tenets of the philosophy. I have my Montessori social identity to thank for connecting me to work I enjoy, for inspiring me to be a part of social change through Montessori’s message of peace, for being what I hope is a good parent, and for providing me with a community to be a part of and believe in. Being a Montessorian is so much of who I have been in the world and was a primary influence to pursue a PhD.

When I embarked on my doctoral journey I expected to gain the knowledge, skills, and tools to only *confirm* the wonders of the Montessori method. Several of my initial course papers did just that, heralding Montessori’s developmental theories, and important benefits of Montessori characteristics like a mixed age classroom. In general, I continue to stand by those claims. However, as I began to more deeply explore and engage in current conversations and research regarding social justice in education –

including the many extreme inequities in the educational system, colorblindness in curriculum and teaching, and lack of access to high quality school programs particularly in early childhood education – I began to wonder how the Montessori method was addressing, and working to resolve, such issues today. While I had seen and experienced the broad message of Montessori as a means to changing the world, I started to question if enough was being done to enact this change. As my academic interests moved into teacher identity and teacher education I began looking specifically at how prepared Montessori teachers, including myself, were to tackle these challenges and dismantle inequity in their classrooms and beyond. After all, the memory I shared at the beginning of this dissertation is a perfect example of how unrealized biases and a racist and classist mindset seeped into my own classroom interactions. These moments of self-reflection and immense learning marked the beginning of my critical examination of the method, the Montessori social world, and my own identity as a Montessorian.

Because being a Montessori teacher has been such an important part of my life and who I am today, questioning the pedagogy at all has felt like a personal, social, and even moral betrayal. As I have explained, the presence of an adored leader, or Great Woman, plays a crucial role in the establishment and maintenance of a social identity. To be included in the group, one must accept and believe the shared message (Ball, 2010; Schinder et al, 2013; Steffans, Haslan & Reicher, 2013). Through my own ABAR work, I have begun to question some of the shared messages that unite Montessorians and have felt the social effects of that questioning. Over the course of my doctoral journey, I have lost support and connection from some Montessorians, but also have greatly gained it from others. I assume that some of that shift has been because of my evolving interests in

teacher education and critical and constructive thinking around the method, though I cannot be sure. Yet ultimately, by questioning one of my primary social leaders *I* have felt disconnected from a group that used to give me unwavering comfort.

The system of knowledge and belief that I followed has begun to wobble. When I was teaching in an early childhood classroom, I knew precisely how to act, speak, handle materials, interact with children, and what to say to parents all according to Montessori truth. Moving even slightly away from an authentic version of the profession left behind the comfort in knowing how to be and what to believe. What is more, immersing myself in the study of systemic oppression a part of the education system has brought with it a never ending flood of emotions ranging from shame, fear, sadness, and determination as well as significant self-questioning. This work combined with leaving the security of my Montessori social identity has been jarring. While preparing for my research, my post-reflexions offer a glimpse into my confused emotional state.

*I feel stuck. Like I see it all but like I don't know what to do. Like I'm grasping at a million things. Like I'm trying to dodge a million bullets. Like I'm flailing in the water. Like I'm searching for something in the darkness. Like I'm running in sand. (Post -Reflexion, 5/3/17)*

The productions and provocations of engaging in ABAR self-reflection also emerged during my dissertation process. Over the course of the nine months I spent working with and through my phenomenological material and putting my findings into words, I have felt excited at the prospect of reimagining what Montessori teaching could be today, nervous and even fearful at how my ideas will be received by others, and at times have felt so disconnected that I have questioned even being involved in the Montessori

world at all. But, as I drew connections between theory and my phenomenological material, followed lines of deterritorialization, and spent time in the thresholds, I found myself so often moved by Montessori's writing, just as Katherine and Sally shared in their final reflections. Montessori was an educational innovator and a courageous woman who started a powerful social movement. Today, I do not adore her as a leader, as I once did. But she, and the work she has inspired so many to do, is still profoundly important to me and continues to motivate me in my personal and professional life.

Today, I talk *some* of the right talk, and walk *a bit* of the walk, and believe *most* of the right things (Gee, 2014) and so I have found myself faced with a boundary experience in which I cannot fully identify with a social practice that once provided me with total comfort. Through ABAR self-reflection my perspective on education, and society in general, has changed and evolved. I still believe in many elements a part of Montessori pedagogy, include Montessori's mission to change the world through the education of young children. But I also see an urgent need to evolve some of the practices to meet the needs of the time. In a social world where authenticity and purity has long been prioritized, questioning the pedagogy at all has the potential to produce and provoke uncertainty in community that once gave me unquestioned security. Had my Montessori social practice included space for critical reflection on the method from the very beginning – during my transformation into a Montessorian - perhaps this personal growth would not have caused such an identity wobble.

### **Implications**

Today, many Montessori teacher education programs are experiencing a moment of change. In her keynote Hall (2018) noted several significant changes being made to the

longstanding traditions of AMI teacher education such as more flexible course formatting and program alignment with universities. Together, AMS and AMI have worked through MPPI to develop a clear and concise list of “Montessori Essentials” that should be prioritized in any Montessori program (school or teacher education) for the Montessori approach to be implemented authentically and successfully (MPPI, 2015). Other AMS professional development opportunities such as webinar’s on supporting children who have experienced trauma and new teaching endorsements on inclusions of children with exceptionalities have proven to be highly popular within the Montessori community. Grassroots organizations, such as Montessori for Social Justice which exist to facilitate critical and constructive conversations regarding equity in Montessori education, have garnered support from Montessorians of all types – trained and untrained teachers, teachers from private and public school programs, parents, administrators, and even students. As issues such as access, quality, inclusion, equity, and unity move to the forefront of Montessori teacher education programs, the need for understanding how ABAR reflection aligns and differs with Montessori practices is important insight. Now is the time to intentionally and effectively incorporate tenets of ABAR teaching into the Montessori social practice.

While ABAR teaching should be implemented when teaching children of all backgrounds regardless of whether the classroom is deemed diverse or not, the growing Montessori public school movement does add an additional demand. Montessori education has become more accessible to a diverse array of children and families as the Montessori public school programs continue to grow. Historically, the strict adherence to authentic Montessori has prevented attempts to bring Montessori into the public

educational system, and generated judgments and assumptions regarding those schools that have called themselves Montessori (Debs, 2016b). The rules and regulations that come with public schooling has been thought to limit, dilute, and skew the genius and effectiveness of the method – giving the public a false idea of what the method was and could be. Thus, in the past, Montessori has primarily served the needs of families that could afford private schools for their children. However, today public Montessori is rapidly growing, and often includes preschool and kindergarten classrooms. Because of this evolution, Montessori classrooms are becoming more diverse. Debs (2016a) found that between 2012 and 2013, the student population of whole-school public Montessori schools was comprised of 55% of students of color. Furthermore, private preschools like the ones that Beth, Lola, and Esparanza work in offer significant financial assistance to families from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds (e.g., immigrant, non-English speaking, Native), working-class families, and families living in poverty. Innovative social justice oriented initiatives such as Montessori Partners Serving All Children exist to bring quality and affordable, if not free, Montessori education to communities where the need is greatest (MCM, n.d). Today, the demographic of the Montessori child is becoming increasingly diverse and varied.

The growing accessibility to Montessori education is exciting progress, but research has shown that Montessori teachers are in need of ABAR work to best serve the students in their schools. Brown and Steele (2015) examined the relationship between suspension rates and race in Montessori and non-Montessori schools. While Montessori schools suspended students less on average than non-Montessori schools, their research still showed a racial disproportionality - Black Montessori students were three times more

likely to be suspended than their white counterparts. Brown and Steele (2015) posited that “the first important implication of these findings is that the Montessori schools in this district are not immune to the phenomenon of racial discipline disproportionality” (p. 23). Just as Gilliam et al. (2016) found that racial and gender bias influences the ways in which preschool teachers see and respond to behavior, Brown and Steele’s research suggests that Montessori teachers specifically have similar tendencies – despite the spiritual preparation dictated by Montessori.

Research such as Brown and Steels (2015) and Gilliam et al. (2016) has shown that there is a need for teachers to become self-aware of their own implicit biases so that they may work to avoid committing micro and macro aggressions as well as address such instances when they occur in schools. My intention with this study was to gain a better, deeper, fuller understanding of what it was, is, and could be like for Montessori teachers to engage in ABAR self-reflection so that Montessori teacher education programs begin to thoughtfully and effectively incorporate ABAR related content into the Montessori teacher transformational experience. As a novice teacher educator, I am humbly aware that I am not working in an early childhood setting. While I have substantial memories of my days in the classroom, I do not know what it is like to teach young children using an ABAR lens. I was not taught this during my teacher education. It is very important to me that I, and others, avoid disseminating teaching ideals and strategies to prospective educators without taking the time to understand their needs. I hope to honor what Montessori began, respect the Montessori transformation, *and* activate teachers to intentionally address justice in their classrooms and beyond. I hope to empower teachers, not overwhelm them.

## **Recommendations for Montessori Teacher Education**

I discovered that there are key factors that contribute to the development of and loyalty to a Montessori social identity such as the strict adherence to Montessori's writing and the positionality of teachers in the Montessori social practice. While wobbling that image creates opportunity for change, it is important that Montessorians do not feel wobbled right out of their community, or discouraged by either the Montessori method or ABAR perspectives. Introducing ABAR reflection and teaching alongside Montessori pedagogy should be done thoughtfully. I suggest the following three recommendations to Montessori teacher education:

**1.) ABAR reflection should be explicitly incorporated into Montessori spiritual preparation.** Montessori described at length the importance of self-reflection during teacher preparation. However, most of her instructions revolved around a new understanding of child development and capabilities. When she was developing her method, educational strategies such as individualization, fostering independence, and free choice were revolutionary and required a mindset shift for perspective teachers. Today this may still be true, but is perhaps less radical as more people are familiar with tenets of the Montessori method and similar program models such as Waldorf and Reggio Emilia. While deep learning of and reflection on human development and needs in early childhood is important, teachers should also be introduced to the prevalence of biases that manifest in teaching, and even in their everyday life. Understanding what implicit bias is, how it is reproduced over time, and the ways in which a teacher may contribute to ongoing oppression are critical teaching skills. This work cannot be done in one class session, or over the span of a few short hours; instead it should span the entire length of

the training program. Questions that encourage critical self-reflection, a culturally relevant lens, and examination of any theory, materials, and lessons for potential contributions to ongoing oppression should be asked throughout all coursework. Montessori teachers should enter the profession with both a deep understanding of the method and an ability and willingness to evaluate Montessori practice using an ABR lens that they gained during their teacher transformational experience.

**2.) Montessori should be admired, but not adored.** This suggestion has been the most difficult one for me to recognize - a reflection that exemplifies the struggle to critically examine the messages of a Great Woman. Engagement in ABAR reflection should include critical examination of Montessori practices. However, because Montessori has become an adored leader who remains the primary voice on what is considered true a part of the Montessori social system, questioning her ideas or relevancy can strain the leader-follower relationship and even jeopardize one's Montessori social identity. Furthermore, relying on Montessori's past writing to address needs in today's classrooms limits options for teachers to tackle dilemmas and resolve their own uncertainty in their practice, and at times even reifies oppressive discourses (e.g., servant/master metaphor).

Montessori certainly deserves recognition and admiration for her contributions to educational reform, and particularly that of early childhood. Instructing prospective teachers on Montessori theory and pedagogy is essential and providing historical background on Montessori's life is important context. However, as teachers are simultaneously encouraged to engage in ABAR self-reflection, they should be permitted, and even encouraged, to examine Montessori practices with the same ABAR lens.

Including content such as the history of educational oppression, landmark early childhood programs (e.g., the Abecedarian Project, the Perry Preschool), and alternative theories of early childhood education is just some content that could aid in this process.

It is important to note that not all Montessori trainings are exactly the same, and some programs do include texts such as Derman-Sparks and Edwards (2010) *Anti-bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves*, or an overview of other historical figures in education such as John Dewey. However, that does not mean that simply by including such information in a teacher education program Montessorians feel comfortable critically examining the work their leader left behind. Even after five years of ABAR reflection, I have still wavered in my ability and confidence to question the relevancy and appropriateness of some Montessori practices. When Beth reflected on her ongoing identity formation as a Montessori teacher during her final interview she described her training as “such a strange experience, I feel like it’s really very strange and you’re kind of forced at all this information without much time to reflect or to think critically” (Final Interview, 12/6/17). As a result of this intensive and controlled experience, she had then taken the path of becoming what she saw as *overly* critical and disillusioned with the Montessori method and community during her first year of teaching. The avoidance of critical reflection during Montessori teacher education can result in either a trepidation to ever question Montessori’s work or an experience of disenchantment with the method once faced with real teaching dilemmas; both have the potential to lead to an identity crisis. Therefore, information should be coupled with guidance and support to think deeply and critically. Becoming a Montessori teacher is such a transformative experience

and it is important to build that dialogic identity during teacher training when that transformation begins.

It may be argued that questioning Montessori's meanings and intents has the potential to stray from authentic Montessori practices, sacrificing the tenets of her original design; but, an alternate argument can be made. Montessori was a scientist who was constantly observing, experimenting, revising, and reflecting on her educational approaches. Just as an audience member asked Lillard (2108) whether or not Montessori would be developing new materials today, one cannot help but wonder, and even assume, that Montessori would be revising her method to meet the needs of children living in a world that she had never known. Loeffler (2000) reminded Montessorians:

If we really are to make a difference [in the 21<sup>st</sup> century], we must be sure that we possess that same spirit of discovery and excitement that Montessori herself possessed as she began to understand and see children in a new and different way at the turn of the last century. (p.23)

Creating space to consider new possibilities of the method becomes possible when Montessori is no longer positioned as a single hierarchical power in the regime of truth. Instead, core tenets of her method may be upheld (e.g., freedom of movement, mixed age classrooms, beauty and order) to guide and influence the evolution of Montessori practices.

**3.) Montessori teachers should not be given the impression that they can become, or should be, objective and neutral in their work with children.** No one can be truly objective, including Montessori teachers. Giving teachers the impression that they can achieve objectivity is misleading and even has the potential to be harmful. As

Beth stated during our third workshop: “[being objective] is not possible, nor is it even desirable really if you think about it, you know, like why would you want to strip yourself of your humanity when looking at children?” (Workshop 3, 12/2/17). Stripping oneself of what makes them who they are when entering the classroom resembles a form of bracketing, such as Husserl described. I suggest that adopting a reflective teaching philosophy and practice based in the tenets of post-intentional phenomenology, including post-reflexing, could be a more useful and relevant approach (Branch & Christensen, 2018). Post-intentional phenomenology acknowledges the engagement and effects a person has on a phenomenon, and vice versa. Instead of stripping oneself of their humanity, as Beth described, teachers are able to see themselves as both an influence and as influenced by the children with whom they work. This mindset shift requires teachers to understand what they bring to the classroom and investigate how their identity affects their interactions with children and the classroom community at large.

Neutrality has the potential to err on the side of identity-blindness by avoiding the need to address identity differences, an “all children are the same once in the classroom” approach, and shielding or even ignoring the realities children face outside of the school. In her final interview, Katherine explained her growing awareness of this fact:

we have children where my biases come in like *oh I should be watching this child* [...] and it's not always what you assume. By outward appearances and capabilities, they don't always match up, and I think that's important to remember [...] but thinking about just the differences and just seeing a child for who they are. (Final Interview, 12/4/17)

A commitment to recognizing and accepting the uniqueness of each child is important for any teacher. However, ABAR teaching also includes a self-awareness that acknowledges the unique perspective a teacher brings to the classroom and to each teacher-student relationship – teachers are subjective, not objective, in their work with children. An understanding of the ways in which identities have the potential to affect social interactions is important as Montessori teachers have the growing opportunity to work with an increasingly diverse demographic of children. Additionally, it is important to remember that ABAR teaching can and should be enacted in more homogenous classrooms as well. In their well-respected book, *What if All The Kids are White*, Derman-Sparks and Ramsey (2006) explained how discrimination affects white children by fostering “a false sense of racial superiority [that] is damaging, causes isolation, and ill prepares children to function in a diverse society” (p.1). Milner (2010) described the experience of a Black female teacher working in a suburban, wealthy, and predominantly white school. By facilitating discussions regarding social justice oriented issues, the teacher was able to support the development of empathy for others rather than pity. It is imperative that children of all races, genders, social classes, among other social markers of differences, are not simply exposed to diversity, but also engaged in related conversations so that they may grow to respect and appreciate their unique selves, and that of others.

### **Future Work**

While this research offers insight on what it is like for Montessori teachers to engage in ABAR reflection, there are limitations that must be considered and may guide future work. As I have mentioned throughout this dissertation, because phenomena are

always moving through the world, it is not possible to settle on a fixed definition or understanding of this phenomenon of study. The reflections my participants shared during our workshops have likely already evolved, changed, and affected their identities and teaching in new and different ways. This research should be viewed as window into the life of a phenomenon – while it offers a valuable view of its rhizomatic make-up, there are some lines still beyond what can be seen within the window's frame.

Additionally, this research is not meant to be generalizable to the Montessori population at large. Every Montessori teacher has had their own experience of becoming and being a Montessorian, and of course brings their own unique identity to the transformation.

While I have at times pointed out characteristics of an AMI training that reinforce findings such as the image of Montessori as a Great Woman, I recognize that not all training programs are the same. Likewise, the similarities and differences between AMI and AMS teacher education programs can vary greatly, with no one training organization being necessarily better than the other. This research has included references to AMI training because that is the training my participants and I experienced. Had I conducted this study with Montessori teachers trained from a variety of programs, or having received only an AMS teacher education, the results may have been the same, or of course, different. Further research investigating the ways in which different individual Montessori teacher education programs have included ABAR related work, if at all, is an important next step to gaining an understanding of the work that needs to be done and to unifying the Montessori approach to ABAR teaching (Kitchens, 2018).

Similarly, this research focused solely on the experiences of early childhood Montessori teachers. While there is a similar transformational experience for Montessori

elementary and adolescent preservice teachers, aspects of the pedagogy and curriculum do differ. Considering facts such as Montessori's belief that moral development can be taught after the age of six, elementary teachers may feel more equipped, and have methodologic strategies, to address justice issues in their classroom. Further research on how ABAR practices exist, if at all, and how they may be enacted in elementary and adolescent Montessori teaching would help to bring a cohesive approach to ABAR self-reflection through all program levels.

This research focused solely on ABAR self-reflective practices and building an awareness and understanding of systemic oppressions, particularly in education. I recognize that there are many next steps to becoming and being an ABAR teacher that include curriculum and lesson work not addressed in this research. While self-reflection is the critical first step, it is not an endpoint to doing this work in classrooms. Additional subjects such as strategies to imploring critical literacy in early childhood and culturally relevant parent engagement are just some of the additional topics that should be incorporated into Montessori teacher education. Future research on what is considered best practice ABAR curriculum and how it may be integrated into the Montessori method is necessary.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the complexity of Montessori's work. Montessori wrote a plethora of books on her method, as well as gave countless recorded lectures. While reading and re-reading her texts, it became clear that there were concepts that evolved for her over time. For example, in a different text, Montessori articulated the servant/master metaphor in a less oppressive way:

Montessori teachers are not servants of the child's body, to wash, dress and feed him – they know that he needs to do these things for himself in developing independence. We must help the child to act for himself, will for himself, think for himself; this is the art of those who aspire to serve the spirit. (1946/1991, p. 96)

There is certainly a difference between comparing a teacher to a valet serving his master to a servant to the spirit of a child. Yet, both descriptors build upon a servant/master metaphor that runs through much of Montessori's writing, spanning throughout her life. Therefore, it is important to note some slight discrepancies in meaning, as I am doing here, but also recognize the extremity of her language and its effects. Because the Montessori social world is guided primarily by the texts she left behind, descriptions such as a teacher as a servant to a master have become cemented in the system of knowledge and belief.

This research is meant to encourage evolution while building off of the tenets of the Montessori method. I do not wish to criticize and disavow Montessori for the ways she articulated her ideas 70 plus years ago. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge the fact that she was a scientist engaged in ongoing research that evolved her ideas over time. Her writing should be examined for oppressive discourse, and rearticulated in a way that still values her discoveries and meaning.

### **Conclusion**

In this section I have suggested three changes to implement in Montessori teacher education that I feel will support the development of a Montessori and ABAR teacher dialogic identity. I recognize that any programmatic changes can be notoriously slow to

enact. However, the urgency to affect social change that Esperanza expressed is real for many. Montessori teacher educators today should be compelled to reevaluate their programs and encourage developing teachers to engage in ABAR work. As research mounts on topics such as early childhood development of bias (e.g., Katz, 2003), racial discipline disproportionately (e.g., Brown & Steele, 2015), and heart-wrenching consequences of teacher bias such like the cradle to prison pipeline (e.g., Delale-O'Connor, Alvarez, Murray, Milner, 2017) the necessity for teachers to act against injustice and foster social acceptance and inclusion in their classrooms has become abundantly clear. Montessori teachers need to address implicit bias in themselves and in their classrooms and promote social justice with young children *today*.

ABAR teaching is intended to directly address injustice in the classroom, and beyond (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010; Husband, 2012). Furthermore, as Husband (2012) stated, anti-racist teaching is a political act. Montessori saw education as a means to social reform; to enact this mission I contend that *early childhood Montessori teachers need to see themselves as social reformers*. According to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, the word “reform” is defined as “to put or change into an improved form or condition”. Montessori was changing education over 100 years ago; but, there is still much to improve in the world today and we need relevant ideas, tools, knowledge and inspiration to do so. Montessori teachers should feel inspired by the mission and vision of the method, but also see themselves as individual agents of change – equipped with self-awareness, an understanding of systemic oppression, an ability to critically examine teaching practices, and the confidence to employ and even develop new approaches that will improve the lives of the children in their classrooms and beyond.

This research brings an awareness of how the Montessori social world affects and even limits Montessori teachers in taking up new ways of teaching and being a teacher through its longstanding knowledge and belief system. As teachers are introduced to ABAR perspectives during their Montessori transformation through teacher education programs that effectively combine ABAR teaching and Montessori content, the Montessori social world will progress towards one that is founded by a mission for peace and enacts it today through relevant knowledge and skills.

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## Appendix A

## Schedule of Workshop 1

Activity	
Welcome	9:30
Opening Reflection	9:45
Overview of plan for the day	9:55
Identity Work Activity	10:05
Break	11:20
What is "Normal" Activity	11:30
Lunch and vocabulary building	12:15
Break	1:15
Yale study	1:25
Preparation of the Adult	1:45
Some more tangible strategies	2:15
Wrap up	2:30
Workshop ends	3:00

## Appendix B

### ABAR Ongoing Reflection Prompts August – December 2017

- What happened in my classroom today?
- What did I perceive as normal/not normal or appropriate/inappropriate?
- What challenges did I face today? – in the classroom, in the school community, as a teacher
  - Did I make assumptions?
  - How might my identity have influenced those challenges (their existence, emotional responses, resolutions, etc.)?
  - Explore those challenges using an ABAR lens.
  - Is there anything I could do differently?
  - What do I need to work through those challenges?
- Today I would describe my relationships with the children in my classroom as...
- Today I would describe my relationship with the Montessori materials as...
- Today I would describe my relationship with the Montessori method as...
- Today I would describe my identity [as a teacher] as...
- Was there a moment when I became especially aware of my [social identity category] today?
  - What happened?
  - What was that awareness like?
  - What did it make me think about?
- What did I do today that was anti-racist and anti-bias?
  - What was that like?
  - Did that affect my teaching?
  - Did that affect my identity?
  - Did that affect my perception of myself as a Montessori teacher?
  - If I don't think I did anything ABAR, why not?
- Today I feel I need this type of support to be an effective Montessori ABAR teacher...

Appendix C

Retrieved from: [https://www.greatschoolspartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Continuum\\_AntiRacist-2-1.pdf](https://www.greatschoolspartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Continuum_AntiRacist-2-1.pdf)

**Continuum on Becoming an Anti-Racist Multicultural Organization**

MONOCULTURAL ==> MULTICULTURAL ==> ANTI-RACIST ==> ANTI-RACIST MULTICULTURAL					
<i>Racial and Cultural Differences Seen as Deficits ==&gt; Tolerant of Racial and Cultural Differences ==&gt; Racial and Cultural Differences Seen as Assets</i>					
<b>Exclusive</b>	<b>2. Passive</b>	<b>3. Symbolic Change</b>	<b>4. Identity Change</b>	<b>5. Structural Change</b>	<b>6. Fully Inclusive</b>
<b>An Exclusionary Institution</b>	<b>A "Club" Institution</b>	<b>A Compliance Organization</b>	<b>An Affirming Institution</b>	<b>A Transforming Institution</b>	<b>Anti-Racist Multicultural Organization in a Transformed Society</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∨ Intentionally and publicly excludes or segregates African Americans, Native Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans</li> <li>∨ Intentionally and publicly enforces the racist status quo throughout institution</li> <li>∨ Institutionalization of racism includes formal policies and practices, teachings, and decision making on all levels</li> <li>∨ Usually has similar intentional policies and practices toward other socially oppressed groups such as women, gays and lesbians, Third World citizens, etc.</li> <li>∨ Openly maintains the dominant group's power and privilege</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∨ Tolerant of a limited number of "token" People of Color and members from other social identity groups allowed in with "proper" perspective and credentials.</li> <li>∨ May still secretly limit or exclude People of Color in contradiction to public policies</li> <li>∨ Continues to intentionally maintain white power and privilege through its formal policies and practices, teachings, and decision making on all levels of institutional life</li> <li>∨ Often declares, "We don't have a problem."</li> <li>∨ Monocultural norms, policies and procedures of dominant culture viewed as the "right way" business as usual"</li> <li>∨ Engages issues of diversity and social justice only on club member's terms and within their comfort zone.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∨ Makes official policy pronouncements regarding multicultural diversity</li> <li>∨ Sees itself as "non-racist" institution with open doors to People of Color</li> <li>∨ Carries out intentional inclusiveness efforts, recruiting "someone of color" on committees or office staff</li> <li>∨ Expanding view of diversity includes other socially oppressed groups</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>But...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∨ "Not those who make waves"</li> <li>∨ Little or no contextual change in culture, policies, and decision making</li> <li>∨ Is still relatively unaware of continuing patterns of privilege, paternalism and control</li> <li>∨ Token placements in staff positions: must assimilate into organizational culture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∨ Growing understanding of racism as barrier to effective diversity</li> <li>∨ Develops analysis of systemic racism</li> <li>∨ Sponsors programs of anti-racism training</li> <li>∨ New consciousness of institutionalized white power and privilege</li> <li>∨ Develops intentional identity as an "anti-racist" institution</li> <li>∨ Begins to develop accountability to racially oppressed communities</li> <li>∨ Increasing commitment to dismantle racism and eliminate inherent white advantage</li> <li>∨ Actively recruits and promotes members of groups have been historically denied access and opportunity</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>But...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∨ Institutional structures and culture that maintain white power and privilege still intact and relatively untouched</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∨ Commits to process of intentional institutional restructuring, based upon anti-racist analysis and identity</li> <li>∨ Audits and restructures all aspects of institutional life to ensure full participation of People of Color, including their world-view, culture and lifestyles</li> <li>∨ Implements structures, policies and practices with inclusive decision making and other forms of power sharing on all levels of the institutions life and work</li> <li>∨ Commits to struggle to dismantle racism in the wider community, and builds clear lines of accountability to racially oppressed communities</li> <li>∨ Anti-racist multicultural diversity becomes an institutionalized asset</li> <li>∨ Redefines and rebuilds all relationships and activities in society, based on anti-racist commitments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∨ Future vision of an institution and wider community that has overcome systemic racism and all other forms of oppression.</li> <li>∨ Institution's life reflects full participation and shared power with diverse racial, cultural and economic groups in determining its mission, structure, constituency, policies and practices</li> <li>∨ Members across all identity groups are full participants in decisions that shape the institution, and inclusion of diverse cultures, lifestyles, and interest</li> <li>∨ A sense of restored community and mutual caring</li> <li>∨ Allies with others in combating all forms of social oppression</li> <li>∨ Actively works in larger communities (regional, national, global) to eliminate all forms of oppression and to create multicultural organizations.</li> </ul>

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## Appendix D

## Schedule of Workshop 2

Overview of the Day	11:00
ABAR Check In	11:10
Map of Myself Activity	11:40
Break/Lunch	12:00
History of Oppression in the US (emphasis on Education)	12:15
Historical Blindness & Colorblindness	1:15
Resource & Activity Sharing	1:30
Final reflection	2:05
End Workshop	2:15

## Appendix E

*Note: Each bolded date with content was printed out on a spate 8.5 by 11 inch piece of paper*

### **Selected Timeline of Evolution of Educational Justice in the United States**

#### **Early 1700s**

Elias Neau opened a private school in NYC for Africans with the intent of catechizing them. However, support declined when two of the former students planned an uprising.

#### **1740**

South Carolina is the first state to make it illegal to educate slaves. Many states followed. Some individuals and organizations used private funds to educate slaves, but typically with the desire to teach Christian principles.

#### **Late 1700s – 1800s**

The New Jersey and Philadelphia Quakers each opened a school for Black learners.

#### **1800s**

In California, school administrators routinely denied Chinese American children entrance into school

#### **1800s**

Somewhat greater acceptance of educating girls emerged.

#### **1828**

*The Infant School Society of Boston*

Established by a group of evangelical women hoping to make early childhood care accessible to working parents. Their mission was to morally reform the poor through a program that focused on social skills of a proper American

#### **1833**

Oberlin College became the first college to admit Black students.

Oberlin was also the first college to offer bachelor's degrees to women and men apart of the same curriculum.

#### **1836**

Georgia Female College

First college to offer baccalaureate degrees to women.

#### **1841**

First 3 women obtain degrees from Oberlin College.

#### **1850**

Several institutions for deaf and blind individuals opened in the US.

Part of a larger trend to reform aspects of American society. Many feared the direction of the country's moral standards. Led to increased reform of asylums and prisons.

#### **1855**

University of Iowa was the first state university to accept women.

#### **1865**

*13<sup>th</sup> Amendment.*

The beginning of "Reconstruction" and Black Americans began to gain rights.

**1877**

End of Reconstruction.

Civil rights begin to slow or reverse.

**Late 1800s**

Jim Crow laws widely enacted throughout the country, mandating racial segregation in public places including schools.

**Late 1800s**

Boarding Schools for Native American children open widely.

Forced assimilation to white culture

Prohibited speaking native languages

**1884***Tape v. Hurley*

Established that Chinese American children had the right to attend public schools.

California continued to permit and enforce segregated Chinese schools for decades after.

**1875**

Child welfare was included on the National Conference of Charities and Corrections agenda. "Day nurseries" were established to offer care to children in poverty and increase assimilation.

**1896***Plessey v. Ferguson*

Separate-but-equal.

Black schools were clearly underfunded, and at times not even available.

**1899***Cumming v. Richmond County Board of Education Georgia*

US Supreme court refused to stop a school district from allocating funds to a white high school while concurrently closing a Black high school

**1903**

Kindergarten was thought to provide...

"our earliest opportunity to catch the little Russian, the little Italian, the little German, Pole, Syrian, and the rest and begin to make good American citizens of them"

(from the editor of Century Magazine)

**1910**

Special education programs became available in many urban schools. However, many lacked resources, professional development, etc.

**Post WW1**

In the mid-1700s, 1-in-3 of Pennsylvania's population was German and resulted in many German based schools.

English settlers became concerned that it would threaten the English way of life and used schools to suppress the German language.

After World War 1, local school boards and state governments prohibited teaching of German in parochial and public schools.

**1920***19<sup>th</sup> Amendment*

Women's right to vote.

**1923**

34 states had passed laws requiring English only in public schools.  
Indigenous, African, Mexican languages, among others, were seen as inferior.

**1931***Roberto Alvarez v. The Lemon Grove School Board*

Prohibited Lemon Grove School board from turning away Mexican American students.  
Judge used rationale that children of Mexican origin are considered part of the white race.

**1941**

## Lanham Act of 1941

Funding for job creation during World War II. Included money for over 3,000 child care centers.  
When the war ended, funding ended.

**1947**

## Mendez v. Westminster

Challenged segregation of Mexican-American children sent to remedial schools in Orange County, CA.

**1954***Brown v. Board of Education*Overturned *Plessey v. Ferguson*

Separate was *not* equal!

Progress was slow and Black students encountered substantial opposition. Resistance was dramatic and often violent.

**mid 1950s**

Most public schools provided some sort of services for children with disabilities, though they were not required.

**1957**

## Integration of Little Rock High School

President Eisenhower used military force to protect the Black students who struggled to get into the school. (Though the President did not attend).

**1964***Federal Civil Rights Act of 1964*

Prohibited federally funded programs from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, or gender.  
Office of Civil Rights was established to enforce civil rights of education

**1963**

Coral Way Elementary School opened in Miami, FL as the first bilingual public school in the post-World War II US.

**1964**

Employment discrimination based on gender was outlawed.  
However, gender discrimination continued.

**1965***The Elementary and Secondary Education Act*

Provided funding to schools for special education services and to universities to train teachers.

**1968***Bilingual Education Act*

Congress committed to providing discretionary, supplemental funding to schools which established programs to meet the needs of children with limited English. Participation was voluntary.

**1972***PARC v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*

Established the precedence for guaranteeing special education services to children with cognitive disabilities.

**1972***Title IX*

Added to the U.S. civil rights legislation, extended ban on gender discrimination to schools and other institutions that received federal funding.

**1973***Mills v. the District of Columbia*

guaranteed special education services to *all* children with disabilities.

**1974***Lau v. Nichols*

Supreme court sided with the parents of Chinese-speaking students in CA schools who charged that the schools were not providing equal educational access to their children.

Set a precedent that schools districts have the responsibility of providing services and accommodations to students who do not speak English.

**1974***Equal Educational Opportunity Act*

Extended the Lau decision by mandating that no state could deny equal educational opportunity to students with language barriers.

**1975***All Handicapped Children Act*

Required that school districts identify students with disabilities and provide them a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment.

Required an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

**1970-80**

De facto school segregation still existed. Mandated busing of students from one district to another began.

**1981***Castañeda v. Pickard*

Schools required to take actions to overcome language barriers and serve linguistically diverse students.

**1984***Project 10*

Widely recognized as the first organized effort to provide support for LGBTQIA youth in schools. Majority of facilitators were heterosexual.

**1988**

First Gay-Straight-Alliance in a private Massachusetts school. Shortly followed by the first public GSA in MA.

**1992**

Report by the American Association of University Women asserted the education policy makers neglected issues relevant to girls such as declining self-esteem, gender bias in testing, achievement gaps, and lack of women's issues in the curriculum.

**Late 1900s**

Educational researchers and professionals began to look at issues related to boys' achievement in schools. Issues regarding stereotypes, favoritism, and deficit-mindsets in relation to boys is discussed.

**1971**

Sen. Mondale and Rep. Brademas introduced the Comprehensive Child Development Act to the senate. The bill proposed funding toward preschool programs, would have alleviated strain on welfare system and lessened segregation resulting for programs specifically targeting children in poverty. The bill passed both the house and senate but was vetoed by President Nixon who claimed it was a threat on family values and aligned with communist beliefs.

**1998**

California's *Proposition 227* eliminated most forms of bilingual education by mainstreaming students into the same classes and their English only peers.

**1999**

*Utah East High GSA v. Board of Education Salt Lake City*

Court ruled that denying access to a school-based Gay-Straight Alliance was a violation of the Federal Equal Access Act giving students the right to use facilities for extracurricular activities at any school that receives public funding - regardless of private standing or religious affiliation.

**2000**

White and Black high-school graduates attended college at nearly the same rates.

**2000**

Arizona eliminated bilingual education.

**2002**

The average white student attended a school with a population that was nearly 80% white.

Black students attended a school that was less than 33% white

**2002**

Massachusetts eliminated bilingual education.

**2004**

*Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*

**2006**

Less than 50% of Black youth living in inner-cities graduated high-school.

Black students were significantly overrepresented in special education programs.

**2006**

Study by Mueller, Singer and Carranza found that 63% of teachers sampled reported receiving no training or preparation to work with Language minority students.

**2007**

Girls scored higher than boys on National Assessment of Education Progress

**2007**

11 million Language minority students, representing 21% of all elementary and secondary students.

**2008**

Despite promise of bilingual approaches, the majority of language minority students received instruction only in English.

**2010**

Boys have higher rate of school dropout, grade retention, special education referrals, and disciplinary actions.

**2010**

Gender imbalance in teaching profession. More than 90% of all elementary teachers are women (75% of teachers of all grades).

**2010**

Over 6.5 million children with disabilities were being educated in American public schools.

**2011**

FAIR Education Act

California law which compels the inclusion of the political, economic, and social contributions of persons with disabilities and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people into educational textbooks and the social studies curricula in California public schools by amending the California Education Code. It also revises the previous designation of "black Americans, American Indians, Mexicans, Asians, [and] Pacific Island people" in that list into "Native Americans, African Americans, Mexican Americans, Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, and European Americans". It would also amend an existing law by adding sexual orientation and religion into a list of characteristics (which already includes race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, and disability) that schools are prohibited from sponsoring negative activities about or teaching students about in an adverse way.

**2014**

U.S. Department of Education issued guidelines asserting that transgender students are protected from gender discrimination under *Title IX* (1972)

**2015**

Students at Brandon High School in Rankin County, Mississippi, attempted to start a GSA, but the school board met and publicly stated they wanted to prevent the formation of "gay clubs" in the school district. They then created a policy requiring parents to provide written permission before a student can join any club. Students then protested with support from the ACLU.

**2017**

7 states (Alabama, Arizona, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Texas) uphold state education laws that expressly forbid teachers from discussing gay and transgender issues (including sexual

health and HIV/AIDS awareness) in a positive light, if at all. Some laws even require that teachers actively portray LGBT people in a negative or inaccurate way.

**2017**

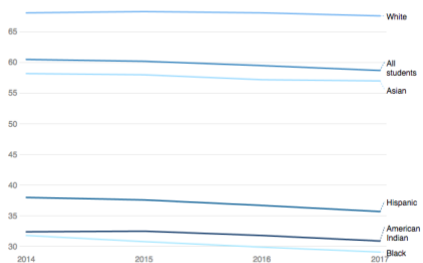
The Trump administration issued a new set of guidelines, effectively withdrawing Obama-era protections that allowed transgender students to use the bathrooms and locker rooms that correspond with their gender identity.

**2017**

**MN Achievement Gap**

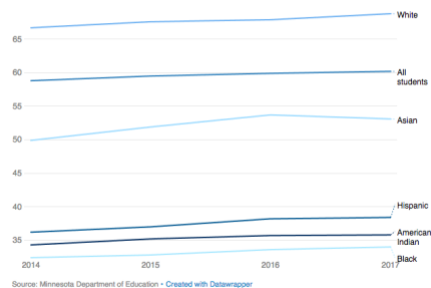
**Percentage of students proficient in math**

The Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments are given in grades 3-8 and once in high school.



**Percentage of students proficient in reading**

The Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments are given in grades 3-8 and once in high school.



## Appendix F

## Schedule of Workshop 3

Overview of the Day	11:30
Moving Toward Social Justice	11:40
Break/Lunch	12:10
Encounters and Listening	12:20
Individual Reflections	12:30
Final reflection	1:30

## Appendix G

Adapted from Heitzeg (2014).

## Moving Toward Social Justice

### 1. Reflection on Experience

“We have all experienced injustice. Perhaps we are part of an oppressed group; perhaps we are allies; perhaps we have benefitted – intentionally or not – from the oppression of others.”

- Reflection on experience allows us to make connections between our lives and the larger structural reality.
  - *See what frames our seeing*
- Consider direct personal experiences, or indirect prolonged experiences.
- Name your locations, privileges, oppressions.
- Name your knowledge and talents that can translate into action!

### 2. Social Analysis

“We must analyze the scope of the justice issue, understand the social economic, political, and cultural contributors, identify the groups who benefit and who are harmed, and examine both existing policies and potential solutions”

- Prepare to transform social structures.
- Get to know the issue beyond ourselves.
- Become critically and broadly informed.

### 3. Moral Judgment

“We must always take sides. Neutrality helps to oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.” (Wiesel, 1999, as cited in Heitzeg)

- “Our values guide our understanding of our experiences, the larger social analysis and our actions.”
- Deeply consider what your values are.
- Where do you draw the line? Align your values with analysis and action.

### 4. Action Plan

“We must engage in informed action”

- Consider the actions you are able to take.

- Consider the actions you are willing to take.
- Consider challenging yourself to take actions you may find difficult.
- Combine your experiences, knowledge and values to make change!