



Montessori for Social Justice (MSJ) held its 5th annual conference at St. Catherine's University in St. Paul, Minnesota this past weekend. The mission of the Montessori for Social Justice organization is to ***support the creation of sustainable learning environments that dismantle systems of oppression, amplify voices of the Global Majority, and cultivate partnerships to liberate the human potential.***

The overarching theme for the conference was "***Reclaiming Montessori for Universal Liberation***". Conference attendance grew almost 250% this year. In 2017 the organization hosted 130 participants vs. the 320 participants this year.

The four day conference started on Thursday, June 28, 2018 with two full day workshops: a gathering specifically to honor Montessorians of the Global Majority, and another group focusing on Decentering Whiteness. The first keynote speaker, Mr. Sam Simmons offered historical context for the conference through his session on Historical Trauma. Keynote speakers Lorena and Roberto Germán reminded us of the importance of centering joy as we practice culturally sustaining pedagogies.

The many presentations focused on three primary areas of interest: Social Justice, Classroom Lesson Development, and Liberatory Educational Practices. All workshops encouraged and challenged Montessorians to engage in rigorous self-reflections as we work to "unlearn" biases and race-based practices that repress the liberation of humanity and to dismantle systems of oppression in America, our wider communities, our schools, and particularly, our Montessori classrooms.

Key themes were woven in throughout the conference and served as reminders to all that before we can model the values and ideals of a just society, we must face and acknowledge past injustices that have led to current systemic oppression. First, all were reminded that wherever we gather in this country, we are meeting on stolen land and that Native Americans

are still a vital part of our nation. Secondly, we practiced the principle of collective economics, the effort to foster and support businesses owned and operated by the global majority. Finally, as a practice of goodwill and radical hospitality, participants defied the social norms that have been so evident in our country for so long. During meals, White attendees yielded service to People of the Global Majority, parents with young children, elders, and people with disabilities. This action elicited thoughtful discourse around the ways in which People of the Global Majority have been marginalized and helped participants use **critical consciousness** as a sociopolitical tool that engages learners in questioning the nature of their historical and social situations.

Words like “empowering” and “life-changing” are being used by attendees” Participants are inspired and anxious to return to their schools to use the information, explicit practice options, and tools offered at the conference. Attendees expressed that they are motivated and excited to engage in social justice work in their personal lives and in their Montessori environments. The following remarks made by #MSJ2018 attendees reflect enthusiasm regarding social justice work and the impact that attending the conference will make in their professional lives.

“The Montessori for Social Justice Conference was life changing. It provided such a healing space for me as a Montessorian of Color. Not only did I come away with many resources to pour into my community, I was also able to build connections with other amazing Montessori educators. The Montessori for Social Justice Conference refreshed me and reminded me that I am not alone in this work.” **Teresa Mullet of Waco, TX**

“This has been one of the best Montessori Conferences I’ve ever been to. The sense of community that has been cultivated over the course of only a few days is incredible and awe inspiring. I am humbled at the level of vulnerability and authenticity that the presenters have shown---sharing their experiences as well as their wealth of knowledge. I truly feel that the strength of the community that was built is from lifting up the voices of the People of the Global Majority. I am walking away feeling empowered to do the work that Maria Montessori would want us to do---keep working until there is racial and social justice and UNIVERSAL LIBERATION for all.”
Erin McKay of Cambridge, MA

“Empowering and enlightening! The presentations were awesome. I was able to learn a lot about issues that pertain to other members of the global majority.” **Aka Chaves of Cochiti Pueblo, NM**

The keynotes and session presentations were engaging, thought provoking and provided an introspective experience. I have never felt this level of camaraderie at a conference. The connections to other Montessorians of the Global Majority was uplifting. This conference should be mandatory for everyone in Montessori education.
Iana Phillips of Washington, DC

Indeed there are many of groups of people that made this year’s conference a success. The MSJ Board of Directors expresses deep gratitude to Liv Christensen, Carol Sicard, Teresa Ripple, their department, Early Childhood and Montessori Programs, at St. Catherine’s University for their hospitality and all their hard work in hosting the 5th Annual Montessori for Social Justice conference.

We are eternally grateful to our gracious sponsors:

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