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Anti-Bias Work on Self-Identity in a Primary Montessori Classroom

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Anti-Bias Work on Self-Identity in a Primary Montessori Classroom

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An Action Research Report

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Abstract

This research sought to determine the effect of implementing an anti-bias curriculum on the self-identity of children in a private primary Montessori classroom. Twenty-two students aged three to six from a highly concentrated urban community in a northeastern coastal city participated in the study. Pre and post discussion questions, a running log of personal observations, visible child-produced artifacts, and an attribute checklists were the four tools used in this study. These tools determined the effect of the anti-bias work on each child's ability to self-identify. The interactions and artifacts produced specific and traceable data on children's thoughts and perceptions before and during the implementation of anti-bias work. Data analysis concluded that the study impacted the student's ability to self-identify positively. To further investigate this work, I will continue to present anti-bias materials, engage in discussions, and provide diverse works for all children to explore in the inclusive environment.

Keywords: Montessori education, anti-bias curriculum, self-identity

The Oxford Dictionary (2017) defines self-identity as "the recognition of one's potential and qualities as an individual, especially in relation to social context" (par. 1). Researchers Siraj-

Blatchford and Clarke (2001) have stated that a child's identity and self-worth are not hereditary, but learned over time. Roberts (1998) agrees that the interactions and relationships young children possess create self-esteem and therefore a positive self-identity. Siraj-Blatchford and Clarke (2001) also argue that a child's identity formation is based on superimposed systems, such as gender and class, woven into a convoluted process that is never quite finalized. These dominating impressions are constructed and established early in life and have profound implications, building upon layers of nuanced behaviors and actions presented through the child's family, friends, school, and the larger community. Harmful and stigmatizing messages initiated in childhood are ingrained perceptions about one's self and others often accrue over one's lifetime, sealing in misinformation, generationally. Congregations, such as school settings can make progress in ending the perpetuation of stereotypes through openly addressing the individual child's attributes and abilities as equal and valid. This research intends to describe the need, implementation, and gained insight into using anti-bias strategies to engage young students in recognizing and identifying their unique self-identity.

The development of a positive self-identity is a cornerstone of the Montessori method. Dr. Maria Montessori described a child's self-formation as the "overriding goal of this period of development" (Lillard, 1996, p. 24). Louise Derman-Sparks (2015), a leader in this field of work describes anti-bias education as

> a critical approach to teaching and learning that recognizes that change is needed. Anti-bias teaching helps children strengthen their identities as capable and empowered human beings. Through anti-bias education, young children identify issues and inequities in their lives, ask questions, consider multiple perspectives, and think about their lives critically, growing to actively resist prejudice and discrimination. (p. 15)

Together, Louise Derman-Sparks and Julie Olsen Edwards (2010) have stressed the importance of self-awareness, confidence, family pride, and positive social identities in anti-bias work with young children.

Students in the private lower school, where the anti-bias research was used to increase self-identity, took place include a majority white (European-American) demographic, with mostly similar family situations (personal experiences, wealth, privilege, social connections, resources, and so forth). Consequently, racially insensitive conversations and questions are constantly at play in our classroom. The students, 11 boys, and 11 girls, have commented on skin color preferences, nanny's ethnicities, differences in speech/pronunciations, hair textures, food choices, clothing options, cultural norms, acceptance/exclusion, and so on. Often, the children of color and minority students and families have expressed concerns regarding the importance of awareness and inclusionary work in the lower school. As teachers, we had done some work to address these real and permeating concerns. However, I believed we still needed to do more to adequately respond to and foster an environment of culturally and racially aware and accepting students. Our classroom has used assorted children's books, conversations, diverse imagery, differing cultural food preparation, varied parent and guest speakers, world holiday celebrations, and use of the Montessori Cultural and Biome curriculum to study and address the unique and exciting differences amongst our students and their families.

The Montessori philosophy underlines an abstract appreciation of multiculturalism and acceptance (Montessori, 1943/1986). Some Montessori communities have worked to include this peace mission into diversity work and inclusion in their schools (McCain, 2017). However, more bias-awareness training, planning, and evaluating needs to be implemented in Montessori

communities. Yezbick (2007) agrees that further dialogue, greater inclusion, and the implementation of anti-bias work needs to become the norm in Montessori circles.

Through the children's social interactions, spontaneous questions, and comments made individually and in a group context, as well as parental concerns relating to diversity and inclusion, the need for anti-bias work in the classroom became apparent. The lack of awareness and space to talk about diversity and community has caused undue harm to children's perceptions and understanding of 'otherness' in many of its forms.

This action research has been conducted in an urban, affluent Montessori community where children work independently and collaboratively with their multi-aged peers. The difference in experience and ability is presented as normal and exciting within the range of skills and preferences in Montessori environments. However, research shows that White children develop a tendency to generate a preference towards other white children as early as two years of age (Derman-Sparks, LeeKeenan & Nimmo, 2015). Anti-bias work benefits both the White majority children and the children of color. The three-year cycle, a Montessori technique to group developmentally similar children into mixed-aged environments over the course of three years, creates routines, boundaries, and bonds that form a line of open communication, honesty, and trust amongst families, students, and teachers. The Montessori method, coupled with developmentally appropriate anti-bias curriculum- ongoing discussions, inclusive imagery, and diverse literature, can provide a learning environment where children became more aware of themselves and others through themes and materials related to gender, ability, race, self-identity, and family structure.

Literature Review

Several historically significant theorists, such as René Descartes, Jean Piaget, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault, have explored the formation of personal identity and the process of creating one's self in relation to their surroundings. George Herbert Mead, an American philosopher, and sociologist considered self-identity to be a distinctly social process that is continually renewed based on interactions with one's environment. Thus, our society affects how we feel about ourselves (Chen, 2009). The British sociologist, Anthony Giddens', 1984 structuration theory supports this notion of social influences, particularly in school life and teachers, and the interplay between identity construction. Giddens theorized that the two systems, educational institutions (regulations and curriculum design), as well as school culture (gender issues and children's peer culture) are a direct mirror of repressive societal systems of class, race, and gender (Chen, 2009). Preschool is often the first place to form social relationships outside of the home. Therefore, a primary classroom setting can encourage a wide range of acceptance skills for children to create and experience diverse friendships (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001).

Discussion

The scope and variety of anti-bias curriculum vary according to the direct aim or problem being addressed in the classroom. For example, anti-bias work can focus on all or several types of biases including differences in culture, racial identity, language, gender identity, socioeconomic status, class, family structures, differing abilities, and acknowledged holidays, or be narrow in its work on a specific topic, like targeting racial prejudice. Resoundingly, authors agree that anti-bias work in the classroom is crucial in countering misinformation and prejudices. Many early childhood classrooms create self-portraits as part of their curriculum. Through the process, personal traits and features are identified and expressed, creating many organic

opportunities to address and celebrate skin tone differences individually and collectively.
According to Derman-Sparks, LeeKennan and Nimmo (2015),

> Diversity exists in the differences among people and groups. It is not a term that refers to
> some people and not to others. The term anti-bias includes the concept of diversity.
> Diversity in anti-bias education is defined as inclusive of all people's racial identity,
> ethnicity, family culture, gender, class, and ability. (p. 3)

Need for Anti-Bias Curriculum

Biases are formed from children's environments, media, parents, teachers, peers, and
children's own perceptions. The most common forms of prejudice come from social isolation,
with little to no interaction or acceptance with differing peoples and internalized and/or
vocalized negative stereotypes by other children because of skin tone, language, gender, and
culture (Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke, 2000). Children from many diverse backgrounds spend a
significant part of their childhoods in early childhood programs (Carter and & Curtis, 2010). As
the United States' population diversifies, so do the demographics of children in early childhood
programs (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). This fact makes anti-bias work imperative to creating
welcoming and inclusive learning environments. Studies (Aboud, 2003; Augoustinos &
Roseware, 2001; Bigler & Liben, 1993; Hraba & Grant, 1970) show that racial awareness begins
around 3-4 years of age. Around age six, European-American children display distinct
preferences for their race and show an anti-African-American bias (Cristol & Gimbert, 2008).
Throughout decades of racial research, studies consistently find the White children prefer their
race (Fox & Jordon, 1973; Newman, Liss & Sherman, 1983; Ramsey & Myers, 1990; Rosenfield
& Stephan, 1981; Stabler, Zeig & Johnson, 1982; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001). While Black
children show a greater acceptance of other races (Graham & Cohen, 1997; Hallinan & Teixeira,

1987; Ramsey & Myers, 1990). Children under the age of five use one-dimensional, fragmented racial characteristics to make distinctions. As young children mature, racial understanding is informed more through social, emotional, and cognitive influences (Aboud & Amato, 2001). The research concludes that children develop patterned racial prejudices between five and seven years of age (Aboud & Amato, 2001). Derman-Sparks and Edwards (2010) found,

> By three years old questions may be asked about "their own attributes, including racial identity, language, gender and physical disabilities. By four, children in the classroom may be aware of economic class and familial structure. By five, children are well underway with the formation of social identity, the sum total of perceptions of oneself (self-concept) and feelings about oneself (self-esteem) relative to others who are similar to and different from themselves. (p. 6)

Research (Katz, 2003) shows that as biases, racial prejudice, and preferences begin to form in very young children, the need for intervention and appropriate anti-bias curriculum implementation is critical in preschool programs to shift the trajectory of prevailing negative stereotypes. Literature (Perkins & Mebert, 2005; Cristol & Gimbert, 2008) shows that children exposed to anti-bias, multicultural curriculum view diversity in a more positive light. To adequately address the needs of a diverse population, society and therefore, teachers must first accept that a problem exists. Davey (1983) states that as a society we have to accept that racism and prejudices have endured and until biases have been condemned by all, young children will continue to receive negative implications from their environment (Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke, 2000). When supportive curriculum and inclusive environments for young children are available, peers begin to understand the uniqueness and collectiveness of humanity (Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke, 2000).

Goals of Anti-Bias Curriculum

As with any undertaking, anti-bias work in the classroom should have specific intentions and an objective design. Derman-Sparks and Edwards (2010), provide an outline of anti-bias curriculum's goals:

Goal 1**:** Each child will demonstrate self-awareness, confidence, family pride, and

positive social identities. Goal 2: Each child will express comfort and joy with human

diversity; accurate language for human differences; and deep, caring human connections.

Goal 3: Each child will increasingly recognize unfairness, have language to describe

unfairness, and understand that unfairness hurts. Goal 4: Each child will demonstrate

empowerment and the skills to act, with others or alone, against prejudice and

discriminatory actions. (pp. 4-5)

Nadia Saderman Hall (1999) states "The anti-bias classroom is rooted in the singular belief that children will grow up to be flexible, accepting, open-minded, and non-judgmental adults if they can live, learn, and play with the rich diversity of the human experience" (p. 2).

Studies on Biases

Race. Racism and the development of racism in children have been studied since the early 1930s in America. Even though the term "race" is a social construct opposed to being biological, it continues to be a major factor in everyday lives. Children learn that race is often a way to separate and distinguish groups of people based on their physical appearance (Walton, Priest & Paradies, 2013). Seminal research such as Bogardus (1930); Dollard (1938); Horowitz & Horowitz (1938); Smith (1939) and research through the 1940s, including Cook (1947); Goodman (1946); Hartley (1944); Helgerson (1943); and Powdermaker (1944) are examples of work investigating racial awareness and attitudes among young children. Clark and Clark's

(1947) White and Black doll preference study is recognized worldwide. Psychologists Kenneth and Mamie Clark worked to examine the effects of segregation and self-esteem on children of color. The study was a turning point in accepting the systemic plague of racism and prejudice in America (Chen, 2009). Clark and Clark's (1947) research and Goodmans' (1952) study were vital in the desegregation of American public schools, through the 1954 Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* in Topeka, Kansas (Walton et al., 2013). The work presented in the first half of the 20th century graciously contributed to an ongoing and influential dialog about children and race (Cristol & Gimbert, 2008). Race studies continued throughout the late 1970s and 1980s with research by Aboud (1988); Katz (1976); Patchen (1982); Scholfield (1989); Singleton & Asher (1977); and Slavin (1980). These studies concluded that school integration did not lead to fewer prejudices. Therefore, a push for multicultural education and anti-bias awareness began to be researched (Walton et al., 2013). The 1990s reflected research regarding children's racial cognition by Ramsey and Myers, 1990; Ramsey, 1991; Bigler and Liben, 1993; and Hirschfield, 1994. Recently, more attention has been paid to the importance of classroom diversity and racial inclusion. Research by Aboud (2003); Beonson and Merryman, (2009); Hirschfield (2008); Katz (2003); Katz and Downey (2002); Mac Naughton and Davis, (2009); Ramsey (2004); and Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001) also show that children of color exhibit a preference for lighter skin tones. The Cable News Network (CNN) commissioned a study in 2010 that revealed the same bias perceptions (Study, 2010; Derman-Sparks, LeeKeenan & Nimmo, 2015). Some of the literature remains skeptical of the long-term effects of simulated anti-bias work in the classroom (Bigler & Hughes, 2010; Crisp & Turner, 2009). One study found little change in young children's attitudes with increased anti-bias awareness and knowledge (Perkins & Mebert, 2005). However, much of the findings suggest otherwise; citing

an increased need for anti-bias work to combat the historical and long-lasting effects of racism, prejudices, and use of 'colorblind' philosophies regarding young children (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010; Husband, 2012; Kemple, Lee & Harris, 2016). Children who grow up in multiracial environments generally learn racial context and distinctions more fluidly and more accepting than those in homogeneous settings (Walton et al., 2013). However, anti-bias curriculum does not only serve diverse geographical areas. All demographics need to be immersed in anti-bias work to create a more inclusive society. Classrooms that encourage understanding of oppressive behavior empowers children with tools to combat exclusion (Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke, 2000).

Ethnic Differences. Quintana (1998) developed a cognitive model to understand the abilities of children to perceive an ethnic perspective. Quintana (1998) based his four-level model on Selman's 1980 theory of social perspective. Children ages three-six are considered Level zero. Levels one-three consist of an increased perception, perspective, and consciousness of ethnic awareness and identity. Bernstein, Zimmerman, Werner-Wilson and Vosburg (2000) examined the ethnic awareness of young children by also using cognitive theories to research classification and understanding. Through the study, Bernstein et al. (2000) found that young children in heterogeneous settings coupled with anti-bias curriculum could change their attitudes and feelings towards different ethnic and cultural peers. (Cristol & Gimbert, 2008).

Social Class. Social class concepts, such as the economy, jobs, status, money, and wealth can create biases in children (Dittmar & Van Duuren, 1993). However, for young children, comprehending the complexities of social class revolve around concrete objects like their house and clothes. By the age of five, a child can make assumptions equating happiness with material wealth (Berti, Bombi & Lis, 1982; Naimark, 1983; Ramsey, 1991b; Ramsey, 2004).

Gender Differences. Studies (Bigler, 1997; Bigler & Liben, 1993; Liben & Bigler, 2002) show that children in preschool learn and perpetuate gender roles and norms which construct and effect self-identity and self-esteem. Children show preferences towards same-sex peers (Bigler, 1995). Gender segregation is commonly seen before preschool and solidifies during the early childhood years (Ramsey, 1995).

Differing Abilities. Studies show that children's attitudes and beliefs about disabilities change over time. Children, particularly in their preschool years, will often show acceptance and forge relationships with differing-able peers (Diamond & Hestenes, 1996; Diamond & Innes, 2001). However, perceptions and attitudes are often based on the type of disability. Behavioral, emotional, and cognitive disabilities are often shunned by peers from lack of cognitive understanding (Kostelnik, Onaga, Rohde & Whiren, 2002). Research shows that preschool children find it easier to include and accept peers who have disabilities due to external factors. Children who are thought to have control over their disability, like being overweight or acting out are less accepted (Diamond & Innes, 2001). These biases can be regulated through an inclusive and diverse classroom, where young children show greater understanding and acceptance of differencing abilities (Diamond, Hestenes, Carpenter & Innes, 1997).

Classroom Environment

Literature shows that teachers who are trained in anti-bias education (Lin, Lake & Rice, 2008), and engage in open discussion of differences in their classrooms, particularly if the classroom is majority White (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2004), increase their students' knowledge and awareness of prejudices and biases (Boutte, Lopez-Robertson & Powers-Costello, 2011; Derman-Sparks, LeeKeenan & Nimmo, 2015). When teachers utilize tools to promote self-identity, such as self-portraits, drawings, and encouragement of expressive

language, to create meaning about themselves, they support positive self-worth and inclusiveness (Chen, 2008; Derman-Sparks et al., 2015). Studies show that teachers have a vital role to play in helping form a young child's self-identity (Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke, 2000). Furthermore, teachers, regardless of their social identities, who forge relationships with their diverse students foster an increase in positive interactions (Howes, Guerra, Fuligni, Zucker, Lee, Obregon & Spivak, 2011; Howes & Spivak, 2011). Because teachers are important socialization agents (Grant & Agosto, 2006), they and the curriculum offered may play a role in the formation of positive attitudes in children even at the preschool level (Cristol & Gimbert, 2008). Social relationships are a driving force in primary classrooms. Studies indicate that prosocial behavior and acceptance from peers are indicators of future success and social competence (Bulotsky-Shearer, Domíngues, Bell, Rouse & Fantuzzo, 2010; Connolly, Keenan & Stevenson, 2016; Coolahan, Fantuzzo, Mendez & McDermott, 2000). Teachers in a Montessori setting are trained in spiritual preparation and are uniquely tuned into children's individual needs and concerns. This setting provides an opportunity for open communication, socialization, freedom, and choice (Wolf, 1996/2014).

Conclusion

Anti-bias curriculum can have a positive effect on young children's self-identify and creates a more inclusive classroom. Racial integration along with age-appropriate anti-bias work has been researched for decades. Implementation of anti-bias curriculum into the classroom is necessary. Anti-bias work fits directly in line with Maria Montessori's vision of a more just and peaceful world. To further understand this curriculum, I have studied the effects of implementing anti-bias lessons on the children's ability to self-identify in a primary classroom in the fall of

2017. The research aims to answer the question: What effect does the implementation of anti-bias curriculum have on the self-identity of children in a primary Montessori classroom?

Methodology

Participants and Setting

The participants in this study were 22 children ranging from three to five years old. Out of the 22 children, nine students attended school half days and 14 students attended full days. The study was conducted in a Primary classroom at a private Montessori school in a densely populated and diverse urban area in a Northeastern coastal city. In the classroom, there were two teachers, one being myself and one temporary paraprofessional working with the 22 students. Both teachers were American Montessori Society (AMS) certified Primary guides. A Primary guide, according to AMS (2017),

> functions as a role model, demonstrator, record keeper, and meticulous observer of each child's behavior and growth. Like her students, she is an active and curious learner. A delight in continual inquiry and growth and a respect for each child's unique learning styles and interests are among her key qualities. It is the Montessori teacher who prepares the active, developmentally appropriate learning environment, furnished with specially designed materials, where students explore, discover, and experience the joy of learning.

Being trained to observe students and lead by example helped me to seamlessly implement and analyze the anti-bias work introduced into the environment.

After obtaining parental consent, the research group consisted of 22 children, 11 boys, and 11 girls. Out of the 22 students, 20 of them attended a private Montessori school at least one year prior. The remaining two students were new to a school setting and Montessori education entirely. Data was collected over six weeks of all 22 students. Out of the 22 students

participating in the study, 13 were White, one was Native, two were Asian, and five were of

mixed-race decent- including combinations of Asian and White as well as Black and White.

Observational data collection for this action research took place in two Primary

classrooms, the gymnasium, rooftop playground, and library. The majority of the time was spent

in a classroom that is approximately 1100 square feet with three large south-facing windows and

one door that leads to the other Primary classrooms, exit, and staircase for accessing the

gymnasium and rooftop playground.

Consistently, the classroom morning experience from 9:00 am-12:00 pm consisted of a

two-hour work time, which was an uninterrupted cycle of choosing materials to learn from

individually or collaboratively with other students. Planned anti-bias activity presentation lessons

were provided to individual students or in small groups by myself. Each morning at 11:00 am

students and teachers partook in a group meeting. During this time, students discuss the calendar,

weather, seasonal and nature changes, discoveries, as well as song singing, role-playing,

discussions, and reading a story. Playtime was held on the school's rooftop, three floors above

the classroom, for 30 minutes in the morning. By noon, the half-day students had been

dismissed, and the full-day students continued their day with a 45-minute lunch. Afterwards, the

first-year students (three-year-olds) were picked up by a 'rest' teacher and ushered into a nap

room to facilitate an open-ended rest time. The second-year students (four-year-olds), were

required to rest on a mat for 30 minutes while the Kindergarten students (five-year-olds)

completed a writing and drawing assignment related to the morning's book at meeting in their

'blue journals'. Another work cycle was instilled for the following 45 minutes and then the

second roof playtime ensued. After playtime, the class convened, including the first-year

'nappers' for community 'jobs' and then the second circle meeting with another book, discussion, lesson, project, or full-group activity. Dismissal for all full-day students commenced at 3:00 pm.

The materials used throughout this action research were available for all children in the class and were presented as a choice in work options, both for individuals and small groups to manipulate, explore, and complete were found in all areas of the classroom shelves and curriculum.

Materials

A variety of materials were used to implement this action research project over six weeks. The anti-bias and self-identity materials were available from late September through early November. The materials were used to aid in social/emotional and academic learning as well as supporting the development of the self-identity of each participating child. Materials suggestions provided by Lee, Ramsey and Sweeney (2008) were introduced to the children and available for independent use included the following:

Art Materials. Pre and post self-portraits commenced after modeling my own analysis of traits and characteristics from a clear picture of my face at the class's morning meeting. I presented how to sketch an outline with pencil and then determined my features with an array of skin tones crayons, eye color pencils, and hair color pencils. I referenced a step-by-step portrait card to ensure all of my facial features were represented. Aloud, I pondered differences and similarities while emphasizing the beauty in all of the tone and color choices. Afterwards, individual students used their own picture to create a self-portrait while I sat, observing and notetaking next to them. I provided the following materials for the children to use in this activity:

• Skin-tone crayons, markers, and paints provided in the art area

• Displays of contemporary and realistic images of children and adults from a range of racial

groups

• Illustrations from a book about differences

      Reading material. Throughout the intervention, I introduced stories, books, and songs

focusing on the themes of similarities and differences among people and families. Examples

included:

• Amazing Grace, by Mary Hoffman

• Dear Juno, by Soyung Pak

• The Talking Cloth, by Rhonda Mitchell

• All the Colors of the Earth, by Sheila Hamanaka

• Black, White, Just Right! by Marguerite Davol

      Puzzles and games. Both the puzzles and games allowed student collaboration and

facilitated peer to peer conversations which I observed and recorded. Games included:

• Concentration game with children's faces

• Life-size child puzzles

• Puzzles depicting a range of racial groups, families, occupations (some challenging gender

roles)

• 20 small multiracial, multiage dolls

Data Collection

      All 22 children created the following artifacts:

1)   Pre and post self-portrait (See Appendix A)

2)   Pre and post information gathering/discussion questions (See Appendix C)

Both artifacts are part of the normal educational program. For example, typically, each child in the class makes one self-portrait at the beginning and end of the year. The children were exposed to a variety of anti-bias books, materials, and activities. Pre and post discussion questions assessed how children felt about differences amongst themselves and their peers, family structures, attributes among genders, as well as feelings regarding differences in ability. Written observations kept a running log of interactions regarding group and individual discussions and conversations regarding self-identity based on books, materials, and works regarding anti-bias topics. These interactions and artifacts gave specific and traceable data on children's thoughts and perceptions before and during the implementation of anti-bias work. The checklists determined whether the intervention influenced the children's positive self-identity and ability to recognize their unique traits and qualities. The collection of tangible artifacts such as self-portraits were used to access student attitudes, perceptions, and achievement related to depicting their self-identity. These four data tools helped determine whether the intervention affected the children's self-identity from discussing and analyzing their current beliefs and understandings about self-identity compared with their post-self-portrait, ability to self-identify, and their responses to the discussion questions. The participant's information is anonymous and stored securely for identity protection.

Analysis of Data

This research aimed to determine whether anti-bias work in the classroom could have a positive effect on the self-identity of young students. "The anti-bias classroom is rooted in the singular belief that children will grow up to be flexible, accepting, open-minded, and non-judgmental adults if they can live, learn, and play with the rich diversity of the human experience" (Hall, 1999, p. 2). To understand the curriculum's effect, I compared the information

presented and discussed in the participant's pre and post anti-bias discussion topics (Appendix C). I also analyzed the trends found through the collected observational data of interactions, conversations, comments, and questions surrounding anti-bias topics and self-identity. Then, I measured the variance in each child's ability to self-identify their physical attributes. To make this comparison, I conducted pre-evaluations of children's knowledge, awareness, and perceptions of gender, skin tone, appearance, ability, age, and family structure. To establish baseline data, I observed, posed questions (Appendix C), and facilitated discussions amongst the group over the course of a week before the implementation commenced. The following week, I began regularly held group discussions, every Tuesday and Thursday, revolving around one anti-bias topic. Likewise, pre-implementation self-portraits were conducted and collected. The checklist (Appendix B) was utilized while the child and I sat together to form their original self-portrait. This one-on-one interaction allowed me to gather the child's initial comprehension of their specific attributes. The following five weeks of data collection included presenting the available anti-bias themed work choices (Appendix E), leading group discussions surrounding anti-bias topics (Appendix C), reading related books (Appendix F), and adding visually diverse imagery to the classroom environment. Consequently, both qualitative and quantitative data was obtained, securely kept, and further analyzed.

An Increase in Self-Identity

The data revealed that there was a correlation between the implementation of anti-bias work and the increased ability of the children to identify their attributes. The observational data (Appendix D), artifacts (Appendix A), ability to name own physical traits (Appendix B), significant discussions (Appendix C), and use of available anti-bias material choices (Appendix E), were used to analyze the effect of the anti-bias curriculum implementation. Collectively,

these tools affirmed an increase in the overall ability to properly self-identity by expressing a

reasonable or an accurate choice regarding their physical traits. Figures 1 through 7 are the

graphs representing children's ability to identify markers of skin tone, eye color, hair color, and

hair texture. Data were compared between the children's pre and post intervention answers. The

children chose their hair color from a collection of pencils (black, dark brown, light brown, red,

dark blonde, and light blonde). Pictures of different hair textures (tight curls, loose curls, wavy,

and straight) determined if the child could identify their hair type. Figure 1 shows the increase in

the children's ability to correctly identify (measured as a reasonable choice out of the three

deduced colors from the range of skin tone crayons) their skin tone. Overall, there was a 10.53%

increase in their ability to self-identify their skin tone. During the pre-curriculum phase, 17 out

of the 22 students could correctly identify their skin tone. By the end of the study, 21 students

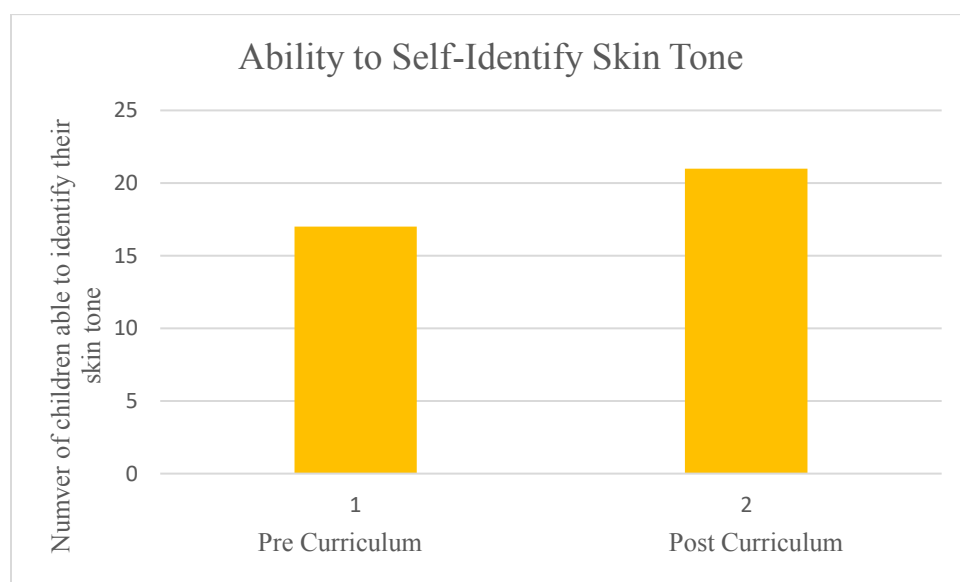were demonstrating success in this self-identifying category.

Figure 1. The Pre and Post Average Difference in the Children's Ability to Self-Identify Their

Own Skin Tone

Likewise, that data represented in Figure 2 also represents a 10.53% increase in the class's ability to self-identify their eye color. During the pre-curriculum phase, 15 students could correctly identify their eye color. By the end of the study, 19 students were demonstrating success in this self-identifying category.
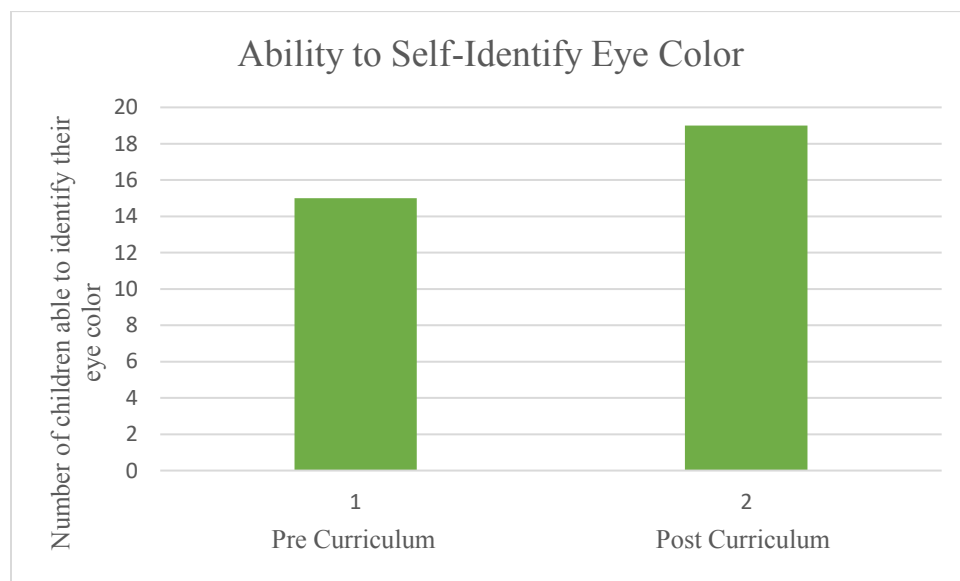

Figure 2. The Pre and Post Average Difference in the Children's Ability to Self-Identity Their Own Eye Color

Once the post-implementation data was compiled, we as a class graphed the variety of eye colors self-expressed by each child at the group meeting.

The largest increase of the four self-identifying areas was depicted in Figure 4, with a 27.27% increase in ability to self-identify hair color. During the pre-curriculum phase, 15 students could correctly identify their hair color. By the end of the study, 21 students were demonstrating success in this self-identifying category.
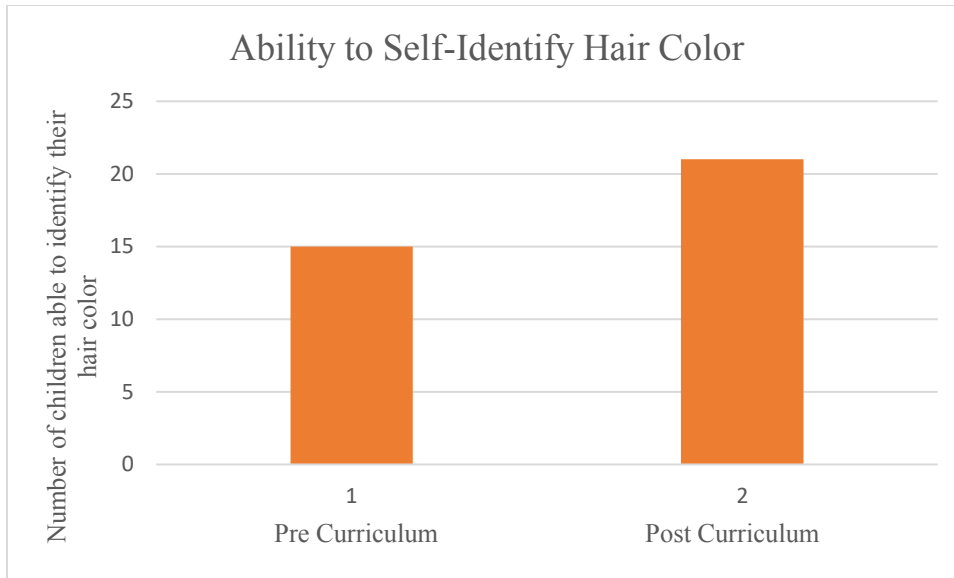
Figure 4. The Pre and Post Average Difference in the Children's Ability to Self-Identify Their

Own Hair Color

Figure 5 illustrated an increase of 13.64% in the children'a ability to self-identify their

hair type. During the pre-curriculum phase, 17 students could correctly identify their hair type.

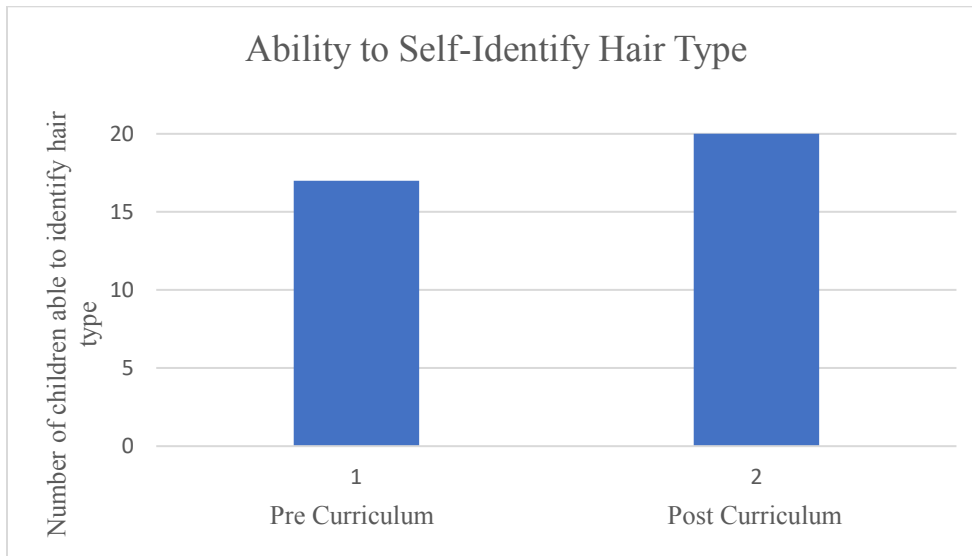By the end of the study, 20 students were demonstrating success in this self-identifying category.

Figure 5. The Pre and Post Average Difference in the Children's Ability To Self-Identify Their

Hair Type

There was an increased ability in naming individual traits. For those students who were still unable to correctly choose their personal characteristics, many presented an increased awareness is the diversity amongst their peers.

Observations and artifacts on children's perception of differences

Through my daily observations (Appendix D), collected artifacts (Appendix A), and gathered kindergarten journals- which were prompted by me after the group's anti-bias meeting, story, and discussion, I compiled key words and questions the students used most frequently. Words and terms used most often included "similar, but just a little different", being "born that way", and remembering the "golden rule when seeing someone different than you". These are writings and drawings that are part of daily the kindergarten experience. Kindergarten journal assignments are assigned after lunch for the eldest students in the class, where the topic is directly related to the anti-bias book that was read at the group meeting. For example, after reading *Everyday Dress-up* by Selina Alko and holding a group discussion about gender preferences and play, I asked the kindergarteners to write and draw about what they like to dress up as at home. Another day, I read *It's Okay To Be Different* by Todd Parr. After the group's discussion, I requested that the kindergarteners write and draw what makes them unique. The self-portraits were often referenced by the children, as they were displayed in the classroom for a scheduled parent gathering. Below are examples of kindergarten artifacts that highlight their expression of self-identity after reading and discussing the books, *Two Eyes, a Nose, and a Mouth* by Roberta Grobel Intrater, *My Families* by Sheila Kinkade, and *One Family* by George Shannon.
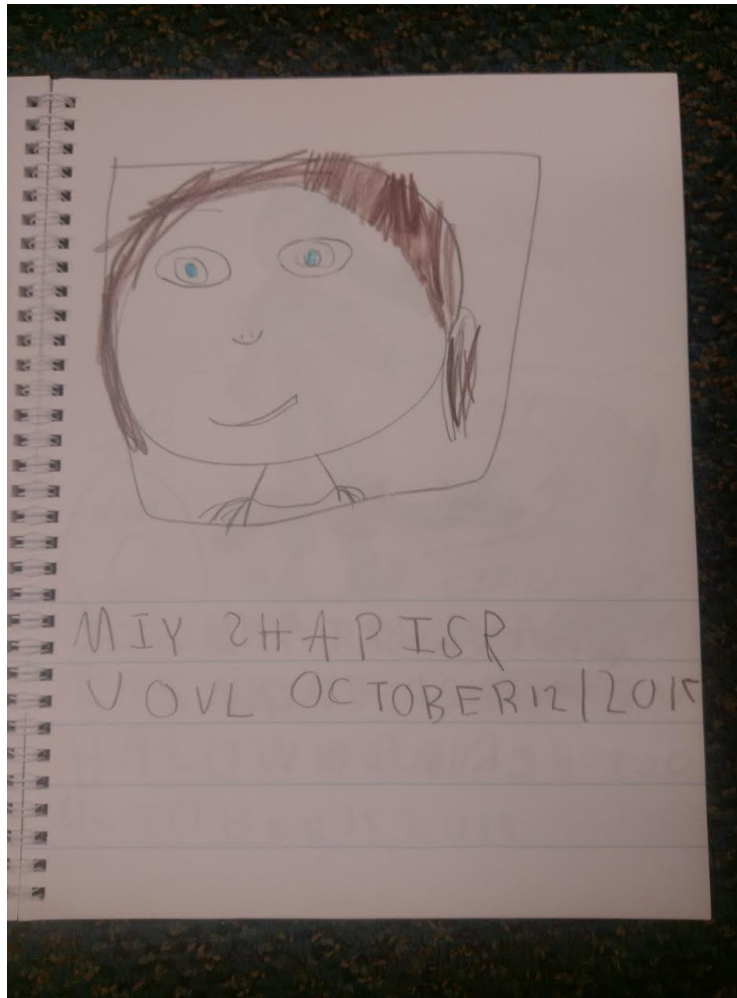
Figure 6. Kindergarten Artifact of Themselves
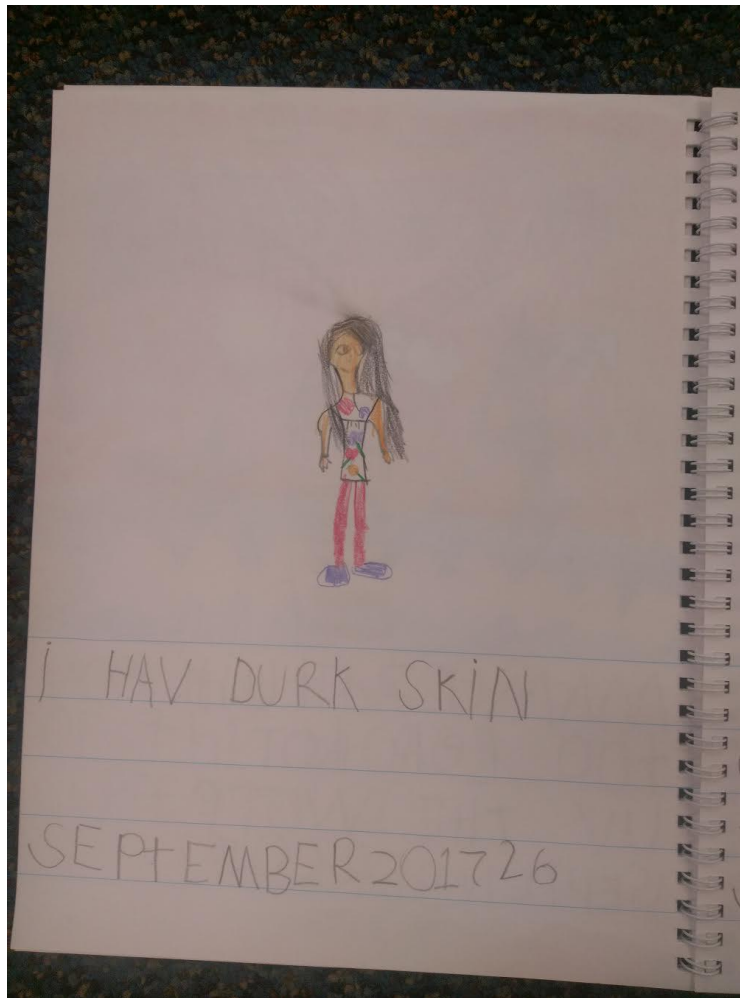
"My eye shape is oval."

Figure 7. Kindergarten Artifact of Themselves
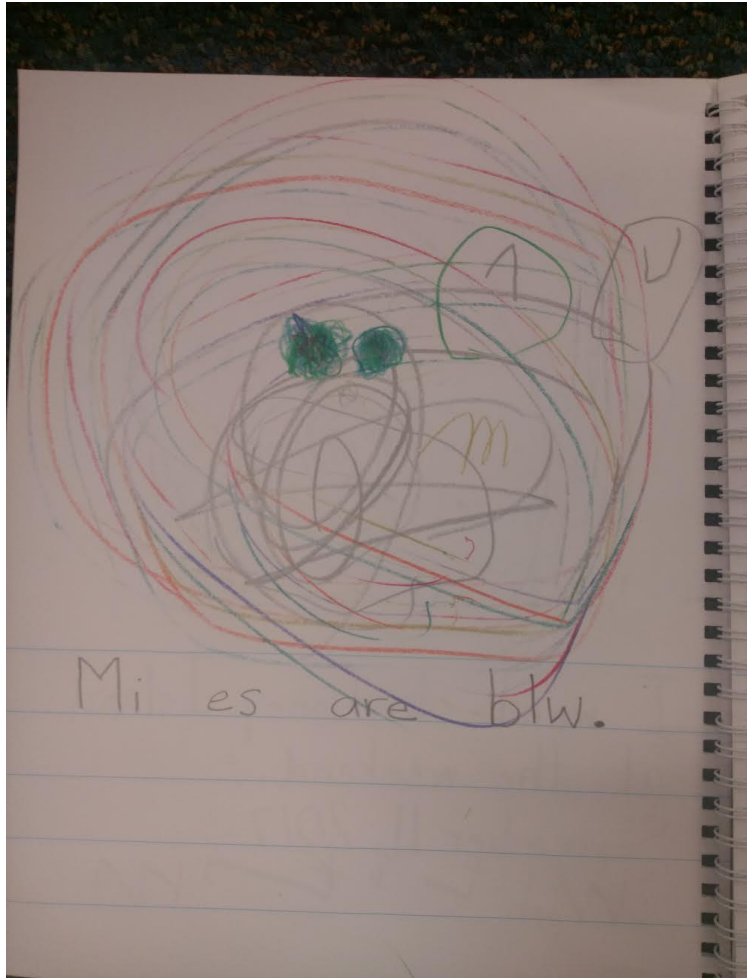
"I have dark skin."

Figure 8. Kindergarten Artifact of Themselves
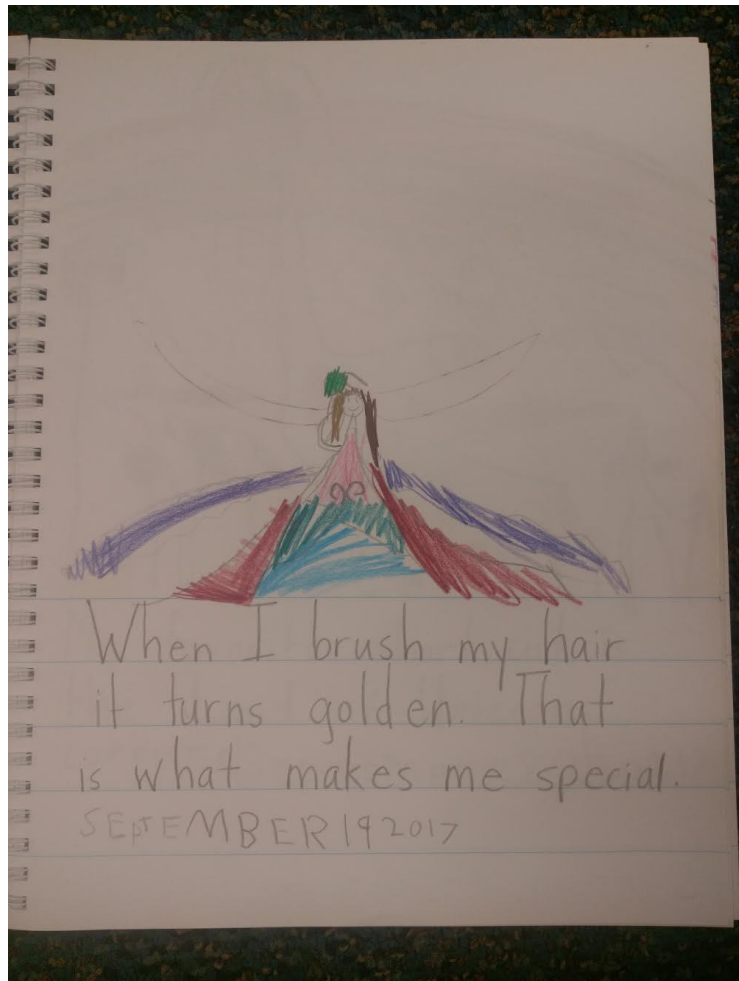
"My eyes are blue."

Figure 9. Kindergarten Artifact of Themselves

 "When I brush my hair, it turns golden. That is what makes me special."

After the assignment was completed, each kindergartener would be required to discuss their

drawing and writing process with me. Often, the group's afternoon meeting would involve

further discussion of the day's assignments and topic, leading to a more in-depth group

conversation about the day's anti-bias focus. For example, children would recount to themselves,

"Oh, today is Tuesday! Remember, we are going to read more about families today! We read

about different mommies and daddies today!" These artifacts represent a developing self-

awareness and ability to name and describe personal traits based on the specific anti-bias book

and discussion earlier in the day. The analysis is based on the artifacts proof of an increased

awareness since a couple of the kindergarteners were represented as not self-identifying their

physical features appropriately.

Family Structure

Since a child's family directly influences self-identity including topics and materials on

varying family structures was essential. Many anti-bias resources concur that a child's family is

one of the most important aspects of a child's self-identity (Derman-Sparks, LeeKeenan &

Nimmo, 2015; Hall, 1999; Kissinger, 2017). "Teachers must be able to see children not just as

individuals but also as members of various social groups" (York, 2016, p. 135). Subtopics that

splintered from discussions about families included religion, differing beliefs and holidays, and

clothing- such as the hijab, which the children were exposed to in the materials, stories, and

imagery around the room. Family similarities and differences were a source of much interest to

the children. Figures 10-12 are representations of kindergarten artifacts based on several books,

including *Who's in My Family? All About Our Families* by Robbie H. Harris and Todd Parr's *The

Family* Book. The class's chart compiled the many home languages spoken in the children's

households daily.

Figure 10. Kindergarten Artifact of Themselves as Part of a Family

"Shane, Daddy, Me, Mommy"
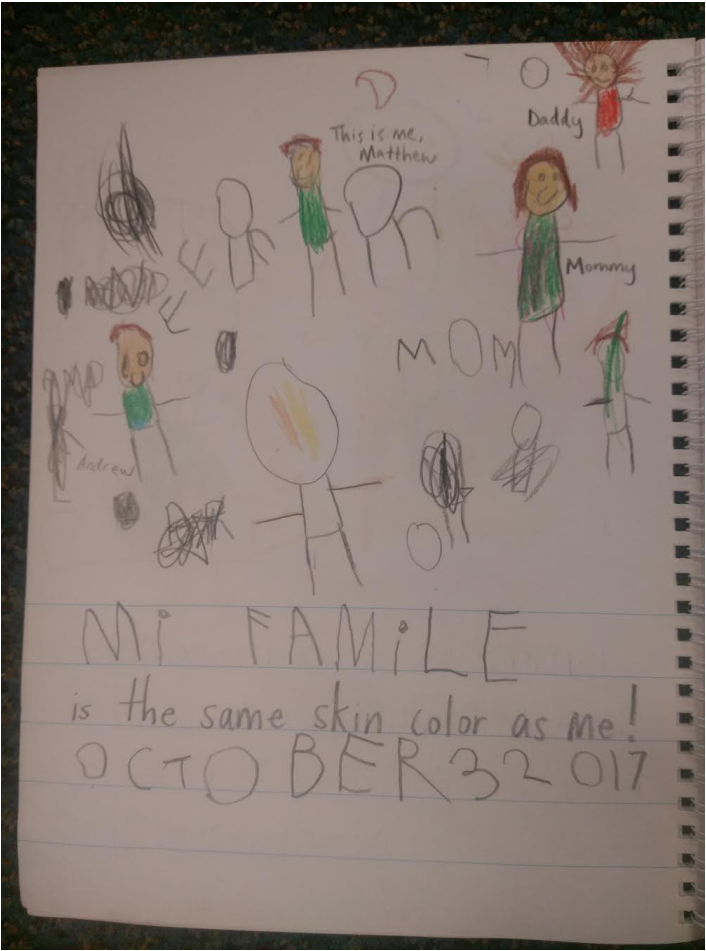
Figure 11. Kindergarten Artifact of Themselves as Part of a Family

"My family is the same skin color as me!"

English	French	Spanish	Hindi	Russian	Icelandic	Italian	Polish	Vietnamese
√√√√√√√√ √√√√√√√√ √√	√	√√√√	√	√	√	√√	√	√
22	1	4	1	1	1	2	1	1

Figure 12. Class's family languages spoken at home chart created at group meeting on

10/24/2017

The artifacts provide information on the children's ability to process, depict, and name their family members collective representations (skin tone, eye color, hair color and texture) in relation to the child's self-identity as part of a larger group. Figure 12 demonstrates the wide variety of languages spoken in the homes of children in the classroom. Many discussions sprung from this gathered information. For example, collectively, the children expressed an interest in learning more about the different languages. Therefore, we started singing songs, listening to music during job time, and counting in different languages. The children who spoke these languages displayed excitement. For example, one child shared "I'm so glad I speak two languages!", while another one asked, "Can I teach the class how to count in Russian today?" while sharing more about the usage and origin of their home language. Hanging the chart in the classroom for all students seemed to validate and normalize the different home languages that the children speak. For example, children's reactions included: "I speak Spanish too!", "Where did you learn how to speak Polish?", "Would you say 'hello' to me in Hindi?". These comments and subsequent conversations suggest that children are interested and accepting of lingual differences amongst different households.

Age and Ability

One's age and ability was a reoccurring topic discovered through my observations and conversations with the children. With the children's use (sorting by age, ability, similarities, and differences) of diverse and differing-abled figurines (Appendix E) as a catalyst for such conversations, I began listening to children's play and commentary regarding ability, age-based theories, similarities, and differences. Questions and comments arose around these topics often. Conversation themes included:

1. Height as a determining factor in ability and/or age.

2. Babies as being incapable of most things.

3. Moms (or female caretakers) are the people who take care of the family (cooking, cleaning, dropping-off/picking-up from school).

4. Dads are the people who go to work and play with you on at night or on the weekend.

5. You die when you are really, really old, or really sick.

6. That older people have "wild" hair and lots of extra skin.

These remarks represent a held belief that boys are more physically capable than girls as well as ability being determined by a person's specific age or height. After I encountered many observations around these opinions, much discussion about gender, age, ability, differences, and similarities ensued. After which, I observed less gender and ability-based biases and more inclusivity in play, collaboration, and less gender specific roles, and more mixed-aged friendships. For example, a male student who had claimed that younger female children could not tag him during playtime was challenged to a race. The younger female child beat the older male child and was congratulated by the losing child. The two children subsequently ended up becoming friends through this shared experience.

Figure 13 shows a chart that the group created after reading many books dealing with age and ability. During the formulation of the chart, many children expressed thoughtful opinions about practicing things to get better at them, being and doing what you choose when you get older, and excitement for future learning and growth.

Baby	Pre-school/Kindergarten	Elementary	Upper Elementary	Young Adult	Adult	Older Adult/Elderly
-Crawl -Drink milk -Cry -Sleep -Play -Learn new things -Grab	-Walk -Go to school -Run -Ride a bike -Bounce -Play -Take care of self -Eat independently -Learn to write	-Read well -Ride a two-wheeler -Ride a unicycle -Ride a bus -Do hard math -Write well -Draw well	-Draw really well -Read really well -Dance really well -Run fast -Make plans -Climb high	-Walk to school alone -Take the bus/subway alone -Learn a new language -Choose what to learn -Make own food	-Drive -Clean -Work -Maybe become a parent -Feel frustrated -Have to be nice -Stay up late	-Drive sometimes -Help kids/grandkids -Take care of house, pool, and animals -Tell stories, jokes, and show pictures

Figure 13. Class comments of age and ability created at group meeting on 10/31/2017
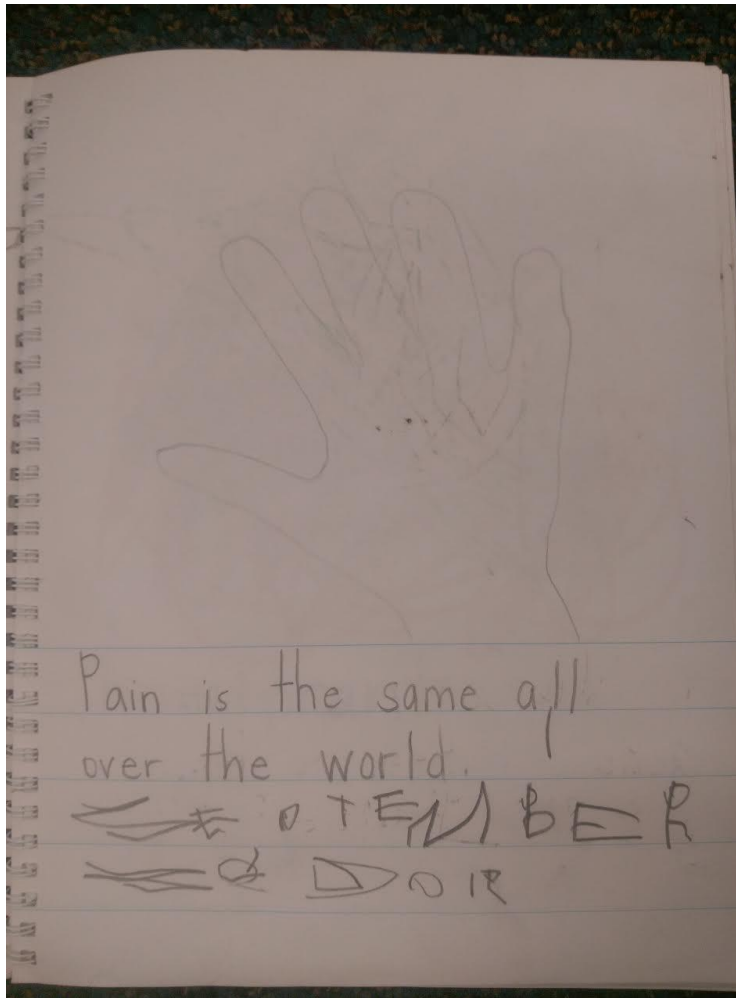
Figure 14. Kindergarten Artifact of Similarities

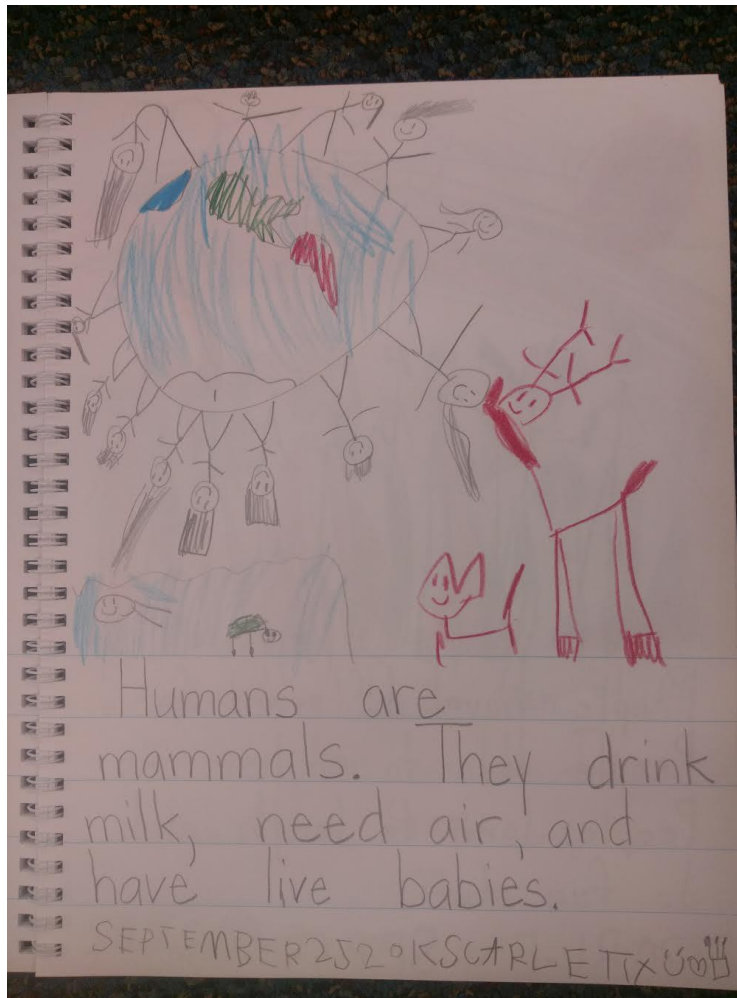"Pain is the same all over the world."

Figure 15. Kindergarten Artifact of Similarities

"Humans are mammals. They drink milk, need air, and have live babies.

The artifacts, figures 14 and 15, feature empathetic expressions about the human experience in

relation to age and ability. I was overwhelmed by the sincerity the children conveyed about

fairness, kindness, and generosity towards the emotions and inequities of the world. For

example, during the group's discussion about different human similarities, I heard "No one is

better than another person.", "We should be nice to everyone even if they don't have a home.",

"Everyone needs love to be happy.".

Gender

A major theme that surfaced during the anti-bias implementation was the differences between boys and girls and their differing abilities. Conversations I encountered were mainly dominated by the boys in the classroom. Examples of conversational themes included:

1. Boys are better at running, games, building, sports, lifting heavy objects, etc.

2. Boys should have short hair and girls should have long hair.

3. Boys should not wear nail polish.

4. Boys do not like "girl" colors (i.e., pink, purple, sparkles, glitter, etc.)

5. There should be a "fast" boys only sink.

6. Chase and tag are boy's games because they are "faster".

7. Boys don't need help with their math work.

Since this topic was the most prolonged and debated observation during this study, I expanded upon the subject of differences and similarities amongst boys and girls as well as age and ability. Figure 16 depicts the chart created at group meeting after many books (Appendix F) were read with themes about gender, age, and ability. Towards the end of the study, I began observing a shift in vocalized perceptions regarding the shared abilities between boys and girls. For example, I overheard a boy refer to a girl's dress as "beautiful". Another time, I overheard a boy admit to his favorite colors as pink and purple, two colors typically seen as "girl colors", much to the surprise of his male peers. Both statements sparked a group discussion about preferences, honesty, acceptance, and similarities.

ANTI-BIAS ON SELF-IDENTITY

What is similar and different about boys and girls?
Similarities: 　　1.　They both have skin 　　2.　The both have eyes 　　3.　They both have hands 　　4.　They both have faces 　　5.　They both have bones 　　6.　They both can walk, run, or skip 　　7.　They both have blood
Differences: 　　1.　They might like different colors 　　2.　They sometimes wear different clothes 　　3.　They like different shoes

Figure 16. Class's comments on the similarities and differences of boys and girls created at group meeting on 11/2/2017
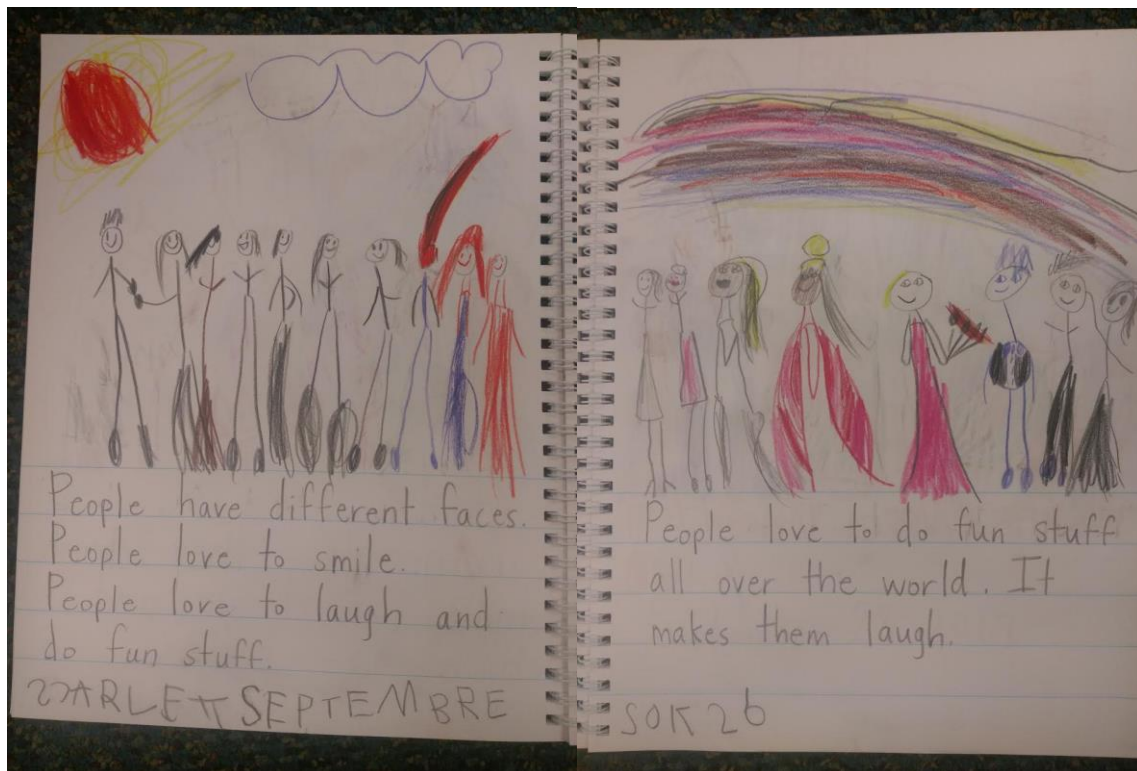

Figure 17. Kindergarten Artifact of gender, similarities, and differences

"People have different faces. People love to smile. People love to laugh and do fun stuff. People love to do fun stuff all over the world. It makes them laugh."
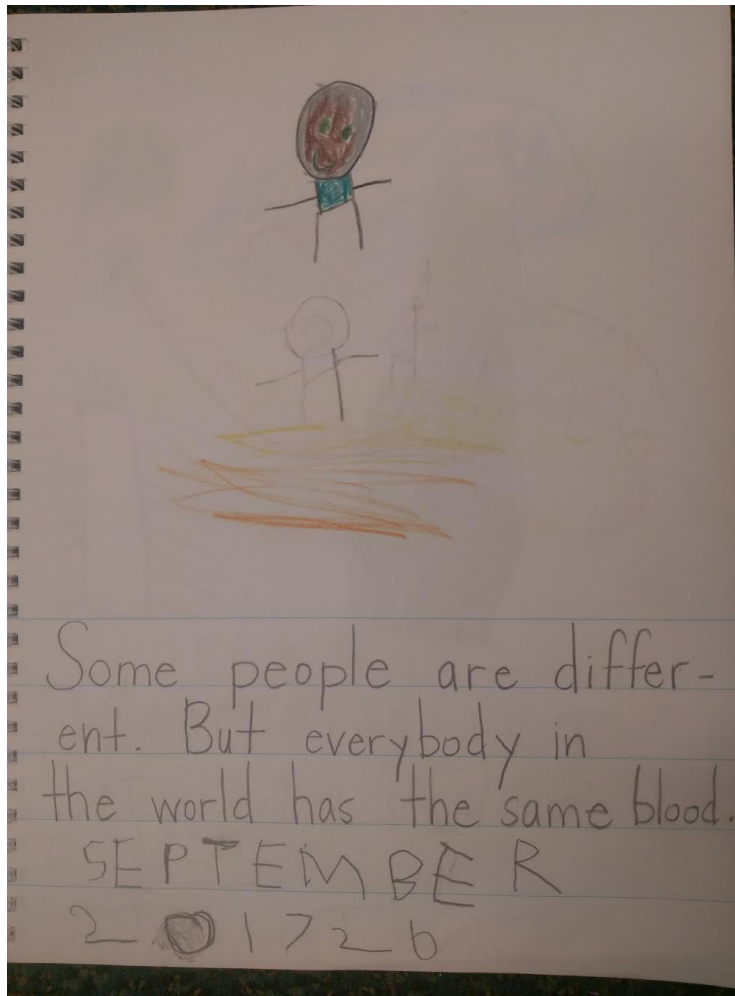
Figure 18. Kindergarten Artifact of gender, similarities, and differences

"Some people are different. But everybody in the world has the same blood."

Data reflection on anti-bias work

I know, through observations and collected data, that this study has made a positive

impact on the students in the class. The data reflected an increase in the ability of the children to

self-identify the physical traits of skin tone, eye color, hair color, and hair texture. Furthermore,

the observations and artifacts provided proof of the study's influence on the children's thoughts,

processing, and expression. Emotive language was expressed throughout our readings and group

discussions, as well as in my recordings of peer conversations and observations. The stories about adoption, fairness, and peacemaking seemed to engage the children the most. For example, when reading Todd Parr's *We Belong Together,* there was not a fidgeting body in the group. Most of the students responded and asked clarifying questions. For example, "Why would someone not have a family?", "Who can adopt babies?", and "I want to adopt someone who is looking for a mommy when I grow up!". As a class, we went to the library to gather more books about adoption for further inquiry. I spotted many students looking at our anti-bias books in the book corner and in pairs at a work rug. The older children have had experiences with reading and engaging in activities around Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s life story and societal impact. After many discussions about skin tone and equality, a kindergartener requested that we read, *A Picture Book of Martin Luther King, Jr.,* by David A. Adler. This proved to be a very enlightening conversation for the group. Questions such as "Why would someone care about the color of his skin?", "He's a strong man.", "He looks like my uncle.", and "No one should be treated unfairly." The children progressively became more aware of their attributes, naming other's attributes, and describing character's appearances in the books read at the group's Tuesday and Thursday meetings over six weeks. Conversations, group discussions, use of anti-bias materials, and self-portraits confirmed these significant findings through the language and comments shared at meetings and in peer-to-peer talks, revisions of group games on the playground, and roles attributed to people's age, gender, and ability.

Conclusion

This project has dramatically impacted my teaching. As Nadia Saderman Hall (1999) said to lead anti-bias programs is "our responsibility as teachers, which is to assist children to view their physical and social world through the prism of human diversity (p. xi). This action

research's implementation, observation, and analysis have allowed me to understand the many merits of providing anti-bias materials and group discussions in a primary classroom regardless of demographics. Anti-Bias work, coupled with Dr. Maria Montessori's emphasis on following the child, has brought me more clarity to each trajectory. Depth has been established in each area of the child's development-particularly social and emotional expansion, through anti-bias work. The child's self-identity and personal progress were addressed through anti-bias work. An increase in the classroom's ability to self-identify their physical attributes was determined through the data analysis. The correlation between anti-bias work- awareness and acceptance of one's own attributes, is clearly linked through the data. This work has proved foundational for creating an inclusive and child-directed primary Montessori classroom. From now on, each school year will commence with an anti-bias introduction as well as the implementation of the described self-identity and inclusive materials, works, artifacts, and group discussions. I have found tremendous validity in furthering this work to become a better teacher and further help impact student's understanding of themselves and the world around them.

Action Plan

This action research was implemented to determine whether an anti-bias introduction would assist children's ability to self-identify positively in class. After conducting a continuous analysis of the six-week-long anti-bias work, results revealed the curriculum had a positive effect on the classroom and an increase in the ability of the students to self-identify their own physical traits.

Further Anti-Bias Study

Works and materials (Appendix E) such as interchangeable magnetic dolls with differing family structures, differing ability figurines, and puzzles depicting continental diversity, were

purchased specifically to assist with this action research. Many materials will continue to be available as work choices for all of the classroom children. A rotation and exchange of diverse puzzles, imagery, materials, and topics will be used throughout the remainder of the school year. Once our class begins researching a specific country in the spring, more cultural information will be presented to the children regarding the biome and customs of that particular place. Clothing, native languages, food preferences, and so forth will be discussed at length. Therefore, a continuation of the anti-bias work and its core mission will be naturally extended.

The group meetings will continue to be a time for introducing and continuing discussions around anti-bias topics. An emphasis on social and emotional skills regarding fairness, kindness, diversity, and leadership will continue to be explored both individually and in small groups. To further promote self-regulation and a continuation of each child's awareness and acceptance of people's similarities, differences, and equality will continue to be a part of our weekly routine. These anti-bias topics will continue to be discussed in an age-appropriate manner.

After investigating the children's ability to self-identify personal traits and characteristics through exploration of anti-bias materials and discussions, I have found *language* to be the most complicated hurdle. Both parents and teachers found language usage to be difficult in the guiding of a child's self-development through anti-bias topics. The potentially sensitive nature of anti-bias work can prove challenging for some adults through their own learned and perceived experiences. Just as Montessori guides are trained to use precision with language during lessons, introducing anti-bias materials also requires a deep investigation of language usage. Therefore, the use of open, honest, concise, and consistent language seems to be most arduous task in implementing anti-bias work in the classroom and perhaps at home. Better understanding of the use of language regarding this work will propel the potential impact on student's lives.

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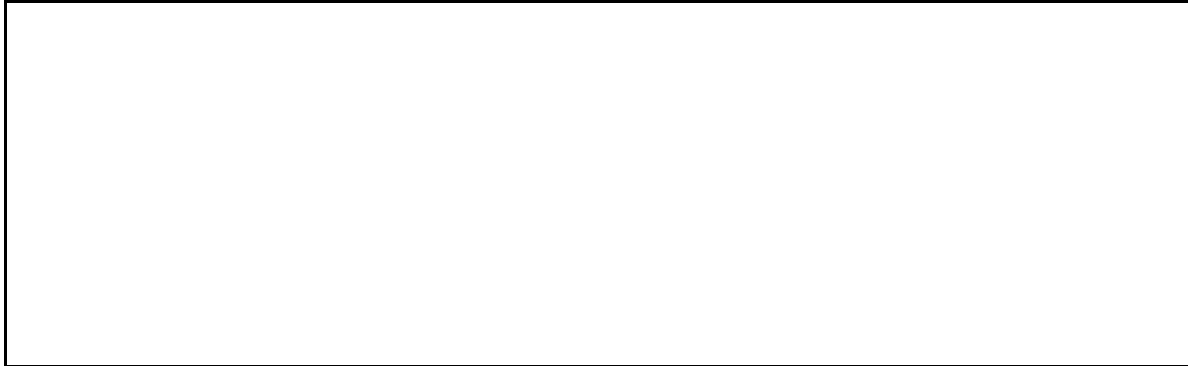
Appendix A

Artifact Collection:

Child's Name:
Child's Age:
Date:

Comment and attach original/color copy of drawing/collage

One pre and post self-portrait/collage from current photo

Appendix B

Checklist:

Child identifies own physical characteristics:	Skin color	Eye color	Hair color	Hair type
Name of child				
Name of child				
Name of child				
Name of child				
Name of child				
Name of child				
Name of child				
Name of child				

Appendix C

Pre and Post Intervention Discussion Sample Questions:

-Do all children look alike?

-Do people have different skin tones?

-What differences do you see about these two people? (showing two pictures of

race/ability/gender)

-What makes someone nice?

-What kind of children do you like to play with?

-Are all families the same?

-Can someone have two mommies or two daddies?

-What do boys do well?

-What do girls do well?

Appendix D

Observational Documentation:

*Note when comments or questions revolving around self-identity occur.
*Was it in response to story, work, or lesson?

Child's Name:
Child's Age:
Observation Date:
Observation Time:
Location:

Appendix E

Anti-Bias Materials:

Puzzles:

Melissa & Doug Children of the World Jumbo Jigsaw Floor Puzzle (48 pieces)

https://www.amazon.com/Melissa-Doug-Children-Jigsaw-
diameter/dp/B0007P954U/ref=sr_1_3?ie=UTF8&qid=1513732988&sr=8-
3&keywords=melissa+and+doug+jumbo+world+puzzle

Constructive Playthings CPX-1137 Set of 6 Wooden Jigsaw Puzzle Set for Kids With Real
Photographs

https://www.amazon.com/dp/B009OM2CVA/ref=asc_df_B009OM2CVA5150970/?tag=hyprod-
20&creative=394997&creativeASIN=B009OM2CVA&linkCode=df0&hvadid=198109692418&
hvpos=1o33&hvnetw=g&hvrand=16886629523270749112&hvpone=&hvptwo=&hvqmt=&hvd
ev=c&hvdvcmdl=&hvlocint=&hvlocphy=1022762&hvtargid=pla-348751706542

Games:

I Never Forget a Face Memory Game:
https://www.amazon.com/eeBoo-Never-Forget-Face-Matching/dp/B000ELQUZO

Peaceable Kingdom Friends and Neighbors: The Helping Game Award Winning Emotional
Development Cooperative Game for Kids

https://www.amazon.com/Peaceable-Kingdom-Friends-Neighbors-
Development/dp/B01CCIS41O/ref=sr_1_2?s=toys-and-
games&ie=UTF8&qid=1513733172&sr=1-2&keywords=peaceable+kingdom+games+helping

Family/People Figurines:

My Family Builders 32 Piece Set

https://myfamilybuilders.com/

Lakeshore Pretend and Play People People with Differing Abilities

https://www.amazon.com/Lakeshore-Pretend-People-Differing-
Abilities/dp/B002HZ8NTQ/ref=sr_1_3_sspa?s=toys-and-
games&ie=UTF8&qid=1513733301&sr=1-3-
spons&keywords=lakeshore+pretend+and+play+people&psc=1

Lakeshore Pretend and Play People, Sets of Black, Hispanic, Asian, While, and Native American Families

https://www.amazon.com/Lakeshore-Pretend-Play-People-American/dp/B002HZ6S7U/ref=sr_1_2_sspa?s=toys-and-games&ie=UTF8&qid=1513733301&sr=1-2-spons&keywords=lakeshore+pretend+and+play+people&psc=1

https://www.amazon.com/Lakeshore-Pretend-Play-People-Family/dp/B002HZ4F5W/ref=sr_1_6?s=toys-and-games&ie=UTF8&qid=1513733301&sr=1-6&keywords=lakeshore+pretend+and+play+people

https://www.amazon.com/Lakeshore-Pretend-Play-People-Caucasian/dp/B002R9WFPU/ref=sr_1_4?s=toys-and-games&ie=UTF8&qid=1513733301&sr=1-4&keywords=lakeshore+pretend+and+play+people

https://www.amazon.com/Lakeshore-Pretend-Play-People-Hispanic/dp/B002HZ7LLM/ref=sr_1_9?s=toys-and-games&ie=UTF8&qid=1513733301&sr=1-9&keywords=lakeshore+pretend+and+play+people

https://www.amazon.com/Lakeshore-Pretend-Play-People-Family/dp/B002HZ5RIG/ref=sr_1_13?s=toys-and-games&ie=UTF8&qid=1513733301&sr=1-13&keywords=lakeshore+pretend+and+play+people

Appendix F

Examples of Read Anti-Bias Books:

Thunderboy Jr - Sherman Alexie and Yuyi Morales
The Babies on The Bus - Karen Katz
Who's in my family? All about our families - Robie H. Harris
Amazing Grace - Mary Hoffman
Two Eyes, A Nose and A Mouth - Roberta Grobel Intrater
Todd Parr Books:
We Belong Together
It's Okay to be Different
Be Who You Are
The Family Book
Black, White, Just Right! - Marguerite W. Davol
Every-Day Dress-Up - Selina Alko
Yoko - Rosemary Wells
Families are Different - Nina Pellegrini
Niño Wrestles the World - Yuyi Morales
My People - Langston Hughes
Shades of Black - Sandra A. Pinkney
One Family - George Shannon
My Family - Sheila Kinkade
Haircuts at Sleepy Sam's - Michael R. Strickland
Something Beautiful - Sharon Dennis Wyeth
So Much! - Trish Cooke
Whoever You Are - Mem Fox

Examples of Displayed Anti-Bias Imagery from Googling "Interconnectedness and Diversity":