

Equity Reading List

An annotated collection for Montessori educators and leaders doing structural equity work. This is not a beginner list. It is organized by domain and built to challenge, deepen, and expand how you think about justice inside the schools you lead and the classrooms you prepare.

This list prioritizes scholars and practitioners whose work is often absent from mainstream Montessori professional development: Black, Indigenous, Asian, Latiné, SWANA, queer, disabled, and other historically excluded voices whose scholarship directly addresses the structures Montessori educators operate within every day. Some of these names will be familiar. Many should be.

01 Structural Frameworks

The theoretical foundations for understanding how inequity is built into institutions, not just interpersonal interactions. Start here if your school's equity work has focused on implicit bias training without examining policy, process, and design.

Kimberle Crenshaw

Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex (1989); On Intersectionality: Essential Writings (2017)

Crenshaw's intersectionality framework is essential for any school examining discipline data, admissions patterns, or family engagement. A child is never just one identity. Schools that disaggregate data by race alone miss the compounding effects of race, gender, language, and disability.

Ibram X. Kendi

How to Be an Antiracist (2019)

Kendi's distinction between antiracist policy and racist policy, with no neutral middle ground, is the sharpest tool for evaluating your school's actual structures. Not intentions. Structures. Apply it to your admissions criteria, your discipline records, your curriculum purchasing decisions.

Tema Okun

White Supremacy Culture: Still Here (updated, dismantlingracism.org)

Okun's characteristics of white supremacy culture, including perfectionism, urgency, defensiveness, and worship of the written word, describe the operational norms of most Montessori schools with uncomfortable accuracy. Essential reading for any leadership team examining why equity initiatives stall.

Eve Tuck

Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities (2009)

Tuck, an Unangax scholar, challenges the damage-centered narratives that schools use to describe the communities they serve. If your school frames equity work around 'closing gaps' or 'helping underserved families,' this short, powerful piece will change how you talk about the children and families in your building.

Cheryl I. Harris

Whiteness as Property (1993)

Harris's legal scholarship on how whiteness functions as a property interest helps explain why Montessori schools with stated equity commitments still reproduce exclusion through tuition structures, admissions preferences, and cultural norms that treat whiteness as the institutional default.

02 Culturally Sustaining Practice

What equity looks like inside the classroom: curriculum, materials, pedagogy, and relationships that sustain rather than erase children's cultural and linguistic identities.

Django Paris and H. Samy Alim

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies: Teaching and Learning for Justice in a Changing World (2017)

Paris and Alim move beyond 'culturally relevant' to 'culturally sustaining,' asking whether our teaching sustains the cultural practices of communities or merely tolerates them. For Montessori educators: does your prepared environment sustain the languages, traditions, and knowledge systems children bring, or does it ask them to leave those at the door?

Gholdy Muhammad

Cultivating Genius: An Equity Framework for Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy (2020)

Muhammad's framework centers identity, skills, intellect, and criticality in literacy instruction. For Montessori reading and language programs, this is a direct challenge to ask: whose stories are on your shelves, whose histories are in your Great Lessons, and whose genius is your environment designed to cultivate?

Zaretta Hammond

Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor (2015)

Hammond connects culturally responsive practice to neuroscience, showing how culture shapes the brain's information processing. For Montessori educators who value the science behind the pedagogy, this bridges the gap between cultural responsiveness and the neurological development work Montessori already claims to do.

Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz

The Archaeology of Self (framework and body of work)

Sealey-Ruiz's archaeology of self framework asks educators to excavate their own racial histories, biases, and assumptions before attempting to teach across difference. This is the interior preparation work Montessori talks about but rarely applies to race and identity.

Christopher Emdin

For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood... and the Rest of Y'all Too (2016)

Emdin's reality pedagogy speaks directly to the power dynamics Montessori schools often reproduce without naming. His concept of cogenerative dialogues, where students co-construct the learning environment, extends Montessori's own commitment to following the child into the equity domain.

03 Language, Literacy, and Linguistic Justice

How language ideologies shape what counts as literacy, whose language is valued, and what Montessori reading instruction communicates about belonging.

Ofelia Garcia, Susana Ibarra Johnson, and Kate Seltzer

The Translanguaging Classroom: Leveraging Student Bilingualism for Learning (2017)

Garcia's translanguaging framework challenges the idea that languages should be kept separate in the classroom. For Montessori schools serving multilingual children, this is a direct question: does your language environment honor how children actually use language, or does it enforce a monolingual norm?

April Baker-Bell

Linguistic Justice: Black Language, Literacy, Identity, and Pedagogy (2020)

Baker-Bell argues that the way we teach language arts communicates whose language matters. For Montessori schools that claim to respect the child, this work asks whether that respect extends to the language the child actually speaks at home and in community. Essential for anyone making decisions about reading instruction, language materials, and assessment.

Gloria Anzaldua

Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza (1987)

Anzaldua's exploration of linguistic, cultural, and geographic borderlands speaks to the experience of children who navigate multiple worlds daily. For Montessori schools in communities with significant Latiné populations, this text reframes bilingualism and biculturalism as strength, not deficit.

Nelson Flores and Jonathan Rosa

Undoing Appropriateness: Raciolinguistic Ideologies and Language Diversity in Education (2015)

Flores and Rosa show how the concept of 'appropriate' language use in schools is inseparable from racial ideology. Montessori's emphasis on precise language and grace and courtesy can inadvertently enforce raciolinguistic norms. This article is a necessary examination of what we are actually communicating when we correct children's speech.

David E. Kirkland

A Search Past Silence: The Literacy of Young Black Men (2013)

Kirkland redefines literacy beyond school-sanctioned reading and writing to include the full range of meaning-making practices young Black men engage in. For Montessori educators, this expands the question of what it means to support a child's literacy development far beyond phonics and comprehension.

04 Indigenous Knowledge and Decolonization

The Great Lessons tell the story of the universe, life, and humanity. Whose knowledge traditions are included in that telling, and whose are treated as supplementary, determines whether cosmic education is truly cosmic or merely colonial.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith

Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples (1999, 3rd ed. 2021)

Smith, a Maori scholar, examines how Western research traditions have historically extracted from and misrepresented Indigenous communities. For Montessori educators using cultural materials, timelines, and history presentations, this book asks: whose knowledge counts as knowledge in your curriculum, and who decided that?

Sandy Grande

Red Pedagogy: Native American Social and Political Thought (2004, 2nd ed. 2015)

Grande articulates an Indigenous educational philosophy that challenges both liberal multiculturalism and critical pedagogy. For Montessori schools that include Native American content in their cultural studies, this is essential: are you teaching about Indigenous peoples or teaching from Indigenous knowledge systems?

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson

As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance (2017)

Simpson, a Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar, writes about Indigenous education as it exists within Indigenous communities, not as it is interpreted by Western schooling. For Montessori educators building cultural curriculum, this challenges the assumption that Indigenous knowledge needs to be adapted to fit your framework. Sometimes the framework needs to change.

Bryan McKinley Jones Brayboy

Toward a Tribal Critical Race Theory in Education (2005)

Brayboy's TribalCrit framework addresses the specific experiences of Indigenous peoples in education, distinct from other racial analyses. For Montessori schools with Native students or schools teaching about Indigenous civilizations, this provides the theoretical grounding for understanding Indigenous experiences as shaped by colonization, not just race.

Robin Wall Kimmerer

Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants (2013)

Kimmerer, a Potawatomi scientist, weaves Indigenous ecological knowledge with Western botany. For Montessori's cosmic education, this is a model for how to hold multiple knowledge traditions in relationship rather than hierarchy. Particularly relevant for the Great Lessons on life and the universe.

05 Disability Justice and Neurodiversity

Montessori claims to follow the child. Disability justice asks: which children? And whose definition of 'normal development' are you following them toward?

Subini Ancy Annamma, David Connor, and Beth Ferri

Dis/ability Critical Race Studies (DisCrit): Theorizing at the Intersections (2013)

DisCrit examines how racism and ableism are interdependent forces in education. Black and brown children are disproportionately identified for special education and disproportionately excluded from gifted programs. For Montessori schools, this intersectional framework challenges how we observe, assess, and make placement decisions about children whose bodies and minds do not match our expectations.

Sins Invalid (Patty Berne, principal author)

Skin, Tooth, and Bone: The Basis of Movement is Our People, A Disability Justice Primer (2019)

This primer from the disability justice performance project Sins Invalid lays out ten principles of disability justice, including intersectionality, leadership of the most impacted, and anti-capitalist politics. For Montessori schools, the principle that the people most affected by systems should lead their redesign applies directly to how we include disabled children, families, and staff.

Talila A. Lewis

Working Definition of Ableism (updated annually, talialewis.com)

Lewis, a community lawyer and organizer, maintains an evolving, community-informed definition of ableism that centers how ableism intersects with racism, colonialism, and capitalism. Short, precise, and more useful than any textbook definition for examining how your school's norms, schedules, and expectations exclude disabled people.

Mia Mingus

Access Intimacy, Interdependence, and Disability Justice (leavingevidence.wordpress.com)

Mingus writes about access not as accommodation but as intimacy, the care and attention required to genuinely include people. For Montessori schools that frame inclusion as a compliance task, Mingus reframes it as a relational practice. Her concept of access intimacy is what the prepared environment should feel like for every child.

Nick Walker

Neuroqueer Heresies: Notes on the Neurodiversity Paradigm, Autistic Empowerment, and Postnormal Possibilities (2021)

Walker's neurodiversity paradigm rejects the pathologization of neurological difference. For Montessori educators who work with autistic, ADHD, dyslexic, and otherwise neurodivergent children, this is a philosophical challenge: is your observation practice designed to identify deficits or to understand how a child's mind actually works?

06 Queer and Gender-Expansive Education

Children are telling us who they are. The question is whether the environment we prepare has room for all of them.

Kevin Kumashiro

Troubling Education: Queer Activism and Anti-Oppressive Pedagogy (2002); Against Common Sense (2009)

Kumashiro, a queer Asian American scholar, argues that anti-oppressive education requires disrupting what feels 'normal' in schools. For Montessori educators, his work challenges the assumption that a peaceful, orderly classroom is inherently just. Sometimes the disruption is the learning.

sj Miller

Teaching, Affirming, and Recognizing Trans and Gender Creative Youth (2019)

Miller provides concrete frameworks for supporting gender-expansive children in school settings. For Montessori environments that organize materials, bathrooms, social groupings, and language around binary gender assumptions, this is practical and immediate.

Cris Mayo

LGBTQ Youth and Education: Policies and Practices (2014)

Mayo examines how school policies and everyday practices either support or undermine LGBTQ students. For Montessori schools, the question extends to families: how do your enrollment forms, family events, and communication practices signal who belongs?

Harper Keenan and Lil Miss Hot Mess

Drag Pedagogy: The Playful Practice of Queer Imagination in Early Childhood (2020)

Keenan and Hot Mess articulate drag as a pedagogical practice of creative self-expression and world-making. For early childhood and Montessori primary educators, this challenges narrow ideas about gender expression in young children and expands what it means to follow the child's identity development, not just their academic development.

07 Race, Identity, and the School Experience

How race shapes what children experience inside schools that claim to see every child as an individual.

Bettina Love

We Want to Do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom (2019)

Love's abolitionist framework calls for the end of educational practices that harm Black and brown children, not their reform. For Montessori schools, this means examining whether your version of 'following the child' actually follows all children, or whether it follows white, neurotypical, English-speaking children while managing everyone else.

Monique W. Morris

Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools (2016)

Morris documents how Black girls are disciplined, surveilled, and pushed out of schools at alarming rates. For Montessori schools that pride themselves on not using punitive discipline, this work asks: are you sure? Look at your redirection patterns, your family conferences, your 'not a good fit' conversations.

Jarvis R. Givens

Fugitive Pedagogy: Carter G. Woodson and the Art of Black Teaching (2021)

Givens recovers the history of Black teachers who built intellectual traditions within and against oppressive systems. For Montessori schools working to diversify their teaching staff, this is a reminder that Black educators bring not just representation but pedagogical traditions with deep roots and independent authority.

Dena Simmons

White Rules for Black People (2024)

Simmons examines how schools enforce white cultural norms as universal standards of behavior and achievement. For Montessori schools, where 'normalization' is a technical term with specific pedagogical meaning, this work asks whether the 'normalized child' your training described looks suspiciously like a white, middle-class child.

Stacey J. Lee

Unraveling the 'Model Minority' Stereotype: Listening to Asian American Youth (2009)

Lee challenges the model minority myth that renders Asian American students invisible in equity conversations. For Montessori schools that may unconsciously treat Asian students as 'fine' or 'high-performing,' this is a corrective: the myth erases the diversity of Asian American experiences and the specific forms of racism Asian students face.

Guadalupe Valdes

Con Respeto: Bridging the Distances Between Culturally Diverse Families and Schools (1996, updated 2017)

Valdes examines how schools misunderstand and undervalue the parenting practices of Mexican immigrant families. For Montessori schools with Latiné families, this is a direct challenge to the assumption that families need to be educated about Montessori rather than that schools need to learn from the families they serve.

08 Assessment, Discipline, and Institutional Equity

The structures where inequity hides in plain sight: how we measure children, how we respond to conflict, and how we grade the work.

Margo Gottlieb

Assessing Multilingual Learners: A Month-by-Month Guide (2021)

Gottlieb's equity-centered assessment framework challenges the assumption that standardized measures capture what multilingual children know. For Montessori schools using observation-based assessment, this pushes further: are your observation protocols designed to see multilingual children's competence, or are they calibrated to monolingual English norms?

Joe Feldman

Grading for Equity: What It Is, Why It Matters, and How It Can Transform Schools and Classrooms (2019)

Feldman examines how traditional grading practices perpetuate inequity through bias in subjective assessment, penalties for behavior, and the averaging of scores over time. Montessori schools may not give letter grades, but the underlying patterns, whose work is noticed, whose progress is celebrated, whose struggles trigger concern, apply to narrative assessments and progress reports just as powerfully.

Cornelius Minor

We Got This: Equity, Access, and the Quest to Be Who Our Students Need Us to Be (2019)

Minor writes about literacy instruction as an equity practice, with practical frameworks for making classroom decisions that center the children who are most often underserved. For Montessori literacy leads and reading specialists, this connects the daily work of teaching reading to the larger structural questions about who gets access to what.

Marit Debbink and Megan Boulton

Interrogating Whiteness in Montessori Education (Journal of Montessori Research, 2020)

One of the few published academic examinations of whiteness as an operating system within Montessori institutions specifically. If you read one Montessori-specific equity article, this is the one. It names what many practitioners feel but few have articulated in print.

Mira Debs

Diverse Families, Desirable Schools: Public Montessori in the Era of School Choice (2019)

Debs examines how public Montessori schools navigate questions of access, integration, and equity within the school choice landscape. Essential reading for anyone in public or charter Montessori who is grappling with who their school actually serves versus who it was designed to serve.

09 Montessori-Specific Equity Work

The scholars and practitioners doing equity work from inside the Montessori community, building the bridge between Montessori philosophy and racial justice.

Ayize Sabater and the Black Montessori Education Fund

Conference presentations, published reflections, and organizational work (ongoing)

Sabater's work through the Black Montessori Education Fund centers Black Montessori educators and families in a field that has historically marginalized them. Follow the organization's published work, conference presentations, and community-building initiatives. This is not historical scholarship. This is the living equity work happening inside Montessori right now.

Jacqueline Cossentino

Big Work: Goodness, Vocation, and Engagement in the Montessori Method (2006); various published works

Cossentino's research on Montessori practice and identity provides a scholarly foundation for understanding how Montessori culture reproduces itself, for better and worse. Her work helps explain why Montessori communities can simultaneously hold deep respect for children and deep resistance to examining their own institutional norms.

Angela K. Murray

Research and publications through the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector (NCMPS)

Murray's work on Montessori outcomes in public settings provides the data infrastructure for equity conversations. If you are making the case that Montessori can serve all children equitably, you need the research, and you need to know where the research is still incomplete.

Carter G. Woodson

The Mis-Education of the Negro (1933)

Woodson's foundational text on how education systems were designed to miseducate Black people remains devastatingly relevant. For Montessori educators, this is the origin point: if you do not understand how education has historically functioned as a tool of racial control, you cannot build a school that does something different.

This list is a living document. It will be updated as new scholarship emerges and as the work continues. If you are a scholar or practitioner whose work should be here, contact us.