

MSJ comes to Portland

Portland will host the Montessori for Social Justice conference in June

BY MONTESSORI FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE STAFF

The 6th annual Montessori for Social Justice Conference will be held in Portland, Oregon, at Harmony Montessori School from Thursday, June 20, to Sunday, June 23, 2019. This is the first time the conference has been held in the Pacific Northwest or even on the West Coast. Previous conferences have been held in St. Louis, Salt Lake City, Cambridge, Houston, and St. Paul.

Montessori for Social Justice (MSJ) was founded to support the creation of sustainable learning environments that dismantle systems of oppression, cultivate partnerships to liberate the human potential, and amplify the voices of the Global Majority. People of the Global Majority (PoGM) is a term used to identify people who identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. People of the Global Majority make up 80% of the world's population.

The theme of the 2019 conference is Decolonizing the Human Potential. The conference will open up discussions on how to disrupt and dismantle structural systems of oppression that can manifest in teachers' beliefs. It will offer information on how to develop a safe classroom environment that is anti-biased and anti-racist, where learners are engaged in quality learning. The MSJ conference will also continue to offer a session on de-centering whiteness for attendees.

"This conference will provide a safe space for attendees, especially attendees identified as people of the Global Majority, to lift up their voices and speak their truths as educators, parents

and social justice advocates. This conference is also a wonderful platform that offers a space for educators from all walks of life to come together to share ideas on how to bring Montessori to all. This includes all socioeconomic backgrounds, all who are of the LGBTQIA community, all abilities (cognitive and physical), all religions, all ethnicities, all races, and all cultures to work together to serve and prepare our future—the children" said conference organizer Keinya Kohlbecker, who is currently a teacher at Harmony Montessori and attended the MSJ conferences in 2017 and 2018.

Kohlbecker adds, "After living in Portland for 16 years, I felt like I was alone as a Black woman in my profession. At times, it was a challenge for me to express the educational inequities in Portland's Montessori community, and how this form of education was not made readily available to all families.

As a result of this, I began to prepare my spiritual purpose as a teacher, and sought to "unlearn" and dismantle the knowledge I previously had of how systems of oppression can appear in our national education system, as well as how that can find its way into the learning environment.

As an educator, my goal is to spread the message to our local community that we can do better in making Montessori accessible for all families. The Montessori for Social Justice conference can be that conduit of information and resources to liberate our minds of implicit bias as educators."

Organizers encourage educators, particularly in Montessori, parents, social justice advocates as well as all educators and administrators to attend and share ideas on how education can be more accessible to all learners, with a focus on the importance of Montessori

education in the public sector. The nonprofit also welcomes the financial and volunteer support of the Portland community. Donations to MSJ help offset costs for teachers to attend the conference.

Montessori for Social Justice has been organizing the annual gathering since 2014 when a small group of Montessori teachers and supporters convened at City Garden Montessori Public Charter School in St. Louis, MO. The conference attendance continues to increase every year. In June 2018, a record number of 320 Montessori educators attended the four-day conference at St. Catherine's University, in St. Paul, MN.

For more information on how you can help sponsor the conference or to join the MSJ community, visit montessoriforsocialjustice.org or contact montessoriforsocialjustice@gmail.com.

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