



Mortarboard Review: Montessori-Related Dissertations, 2025

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Annually, *Journal of Montessori Research* editors publish an article highlighting recently completed doctoral dissertations. Our goal is to raise awareness of these important contributions to the field, as they are not widely indexed and may be stored only within institutional repositories or databases devoted solely to dissertations and theses.

This year, we are modifying our approach to provide a broader overview of the range of works completed during the previous year. Rather than a detailed review of a small number of dissertations, this article provides a high-level analysis of the topics studied along with an annotated bibliography that includes reprinted abstracts from all dissertations identified in the database search described in the next paragraph.

We identified 18 doctoral dissertations completed in 2025, for inclusion in this review. The process to identify dissertations began with a search of databases and repositories with national and international coverage of dissertations and theses: EBSCO Open Dissertations (<https://opendissertations.org>), Open Access Theses and Dissertations (OATD, <https://oatd.org>), and ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global (PQDT Global, <https://www.proquest.com>). We were unable to include

searches within Networked Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (NDLTD, <http://search.ndltd.org>) because the services provided by University of Cape Town Digital Libraries Laboratory were taken offline due to unresolved issues related to security, stability, and infrastructure. In collaboration with Virginia Tech University Libraries, the organization is planning a full redevelopment of the system to better meet current needs. Dissertations with only cursory references to Montessori education were excluded, but all other English-language dissertations are included regardless of the university's status (e.g., nonprofit/for-profit, public/private, religious/secular).

Dissertation topics were analyzed to provide a broad overview of common themes and current areas of study. Ten dissertations addressed one or more of the following topics: learning environment (five dissertations), teacher development or preparation (four dissertations), visual or performing arts (three dissertations), and anti-bias/anti-racist (ABAR) education (two dissertations). Eight of the included dissertations addressed unique topics that did not fall into any of these categories.

The most prevalent topics for 2025 Montessori-related dissertations were related to learning environments, with two focusing on the interplay of

environment with learner agency. Hale (2025) explored the influence of learning environment design on agentic learning in public Montessori education in an instrumental case study based on teacher perspectives. Korngold (2025) conducted observations in infant Montessori childcare classrooms to explore pedagogical naturalism as it relates to infant agency. Ameley-Quaye (2025) examined early childhood physical environments' spatial and pedagogical alignment through a multi-case study of three Arizona schools, including a Reggio-inspired private school, a Montessori school, and a Head Start program. Ellis (2025) focused on the auditory environment of a Lower Elementary Montessori classroom through an observational study comparing white noise or classical background music on task engagement. Finally, Nishibun (2025) applied Montessori philosophy in a vocal pedagogy setting to study its potential to offer solutions to common and developing pedagogical issues within undergraduate vocal studio practices with a focus on creating an environment in which the student independently flourishes.

These five dissertations are featured along with 13 others in alphabetical order in the section that follows. Links to the complete dissertation documents are also provided.

Annotated Bibliography of Dissertations

Ameley-Quaye, A. A. (2025). *The power of place: Optimizing early childhood learning environments through pedagogical and spatial alignment* [Doctoral dissertation, Arizona State University]. PQDT Global. <https://www.proquest.com/openview/8ba85d95c7ff0edc3c4a50f8636c137c>

The physical learning environment embodies qualities that contribute to the development of a growing child, significantly impacting learning journeys. As early childhood pedagogical approaches expand to support the needs of children, there is often a disconnect between the physical design of learning spaces and the support for current and evolving pedagogies. The existing gap, coupled with educators' limited training and the absence of practical support that help teachers recognize and use the environment as a 'third teacher,' often leads to the underutilization of spaces with intrinsic qualities to support children's learning outcomes. This study, guided by the affordance and situativity theories, explored the concept of pedagogical and spatial alignment through a multi-case study of three Arizona schools, a Reggio-inspired private school, a Montessori school, and a Head

Start program, elevating the voices of educators on their successes and challenges in aligning their teaching spaces with their pedagogy. The findings showed that pedagogical and spatial alignment is a mediated and curated process, often influenced by factors such as school architecture, maintenance culture, institutional frameworks, a stable and consistent classroom layout, and the level of teacher autonomy in curating the learning space. While some educators already mediate the alignment of pedagogy and space in intuitive ways that often go unnamed, the research highlighted the need to build and expand educators' spatial literacy, equipping them with tools and resources to curate spaces that mediate child development and meaningful learning.

Barton DiBernardo, L. M. (2025). *The intersection of translanguaging and Montessori in early childhood classrooms: An instrumental case study of supporting multilingualism* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin–River Falls]. OATD. <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1793/95890>

The number of multilingual learners in U.S. classrooms is steadily increasing, yet dominant monolingual norms often marginalize these students and constrain both academic and identity development. Translanguaging pedagogy offers a transformative alternative by encouraging learners to use their full linguistic repertoires to engage in meaning-making and social connection. This instrumental case study explores the intersection of translanguaging and Montessori pedagogy in early childhood education. Guided by a theoretical framework integrating sociocultural theory and culturally sustaining pedagogy and grounded in a critical theory lens informed by Freire and Giroux, this study examines how Montessori educators perceive the alignment between translanguaging practices and Montessori philosophy. Data were collected through interviews, classroom observations, and reflective journals from early childhood teachers working with multilingual learners. Findings indicate that educators view translanguaging not as an add-on or intervention, but as a natural extension of core Montessori principles—student agency, freedom within limits, the Prepared Environment, and respect for the whole child. Participants employed strategies such as differentiation, scaffolding, modeling, family engagement, and exposure to multicultural content. This study contributes to research connecting multilingualism with developmentally responsive, justice-oriented education. It offers implications for early childhood policy, teacher

preparation, and curriculum design, and invites further exploration into how Montessori environments can support linguistically inclusive, identity-affirming learning spaces.

Buck, M. T. (2025). *Exploring belonging in early childhood care and education: Perspectives of young children* [Doctoral dissertation, Boise State University]. PQDT Global. <https://scholarworks.boisestate.edu/td/2345/>

Belonging is a fundamental human need with significant developmental implications, influencing identity, self-concept, mental health, emotional-wellbeing, and behavior. While school belonging has been widely studied, research on belonging in early childhood care and education (ECCE) settings, particularly from young children's perspectives, is limited. This multi-case study investigated young children's perspectives in ECCE settings to determine how they explained the term belonging and to identify key factors contributing to their sense of belonging through photography, tours, discussions, and drawings. Prioritizing cross-case analysis, the findings revealed that young children could explain belonging and articulate specific factors, places, people, or activities as contributors. The findings also demonstrated that the young children associated belonging with specific experiences, including spending time in special places, engaging in big movements, creating with open-ended materials, and working with Montessori lessons. Additionally, the young children emphasized acts of nurturing—such as serving, sharing, and helping—as a factor that contributed to their friends' sense of belonging. These findings highlight the importance of including young children's voices in research to inform teaching practices and environmental design. By integrating young children's perspectives about belonging, ECCE teachers can better meet the developmental and emotional needs of young learners by fostering a sense of belonging in ECCE settings.

Ellis, L. (2025). *Comparisons of the effects of white noise and classical background music on student on-task engagement during work cycles in a lower-elementary Montessori class* [Doctoral dissertation, George Fox University]. EBSCO Open Dissertations. <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/edd/263>

This study compares the effects of classical and white noise background music, played during in-class work cycles for lower elementary students (grades 1–3) at a Montessori school in Pennsylvania. I aim to

measure academic on-task engagement and overall classroom behavior. I will observe and record notes on their progress when there is no background sound, white noise, or classical music playing. Research has shown that introducing different sounds to the background of a classroom can positively affect student focus and retention of information (Levitin, 2006; Williams, 1961). Manipulation of sound or music played in the background can have a sizable effect on student success (Schwartz et al., 2017). On-task engagement and behavior in the classroom are greatly affected by environmental characteristics (Chen, 2023; Foran, 2009; Herman, 1996; Sacks, 2007; Schwartz et al., 2017). The larger context of student progress needing supplementary tools for learning exists not only in our school but in the entire academic realm.

French-Adams, I. R. (2025). *Investigating the influence of a Montessori-based basketball program on positive skill development in children: An exploratory study* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin–River Falls]. OATD. <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1793/95891>

This study employed a qualitative exploratory design to critically examine the role of a Montessori-based basketball program in fostering skills that promote positive personal growth in children aged 6 to 12 years who attend Montessori schools. Data was obtained through interviews with players and parents to explore the lived experiences and perceived outcomes of students involved in a Montessori-based basketball program. The study examined findings to detect evidence of the development of key virtues, including agency, character, intellectual love, reflective deliberation, patience, quickness, solidarity, obedience, embodied ethics, and abstraction. These virtues served as themes for assessing the program's effectiveness. By integrating PYD [Positive Youth Development] principles, the Sport Education Model (SEM), and Montessori philosophy into the theoretical framework, this research investigated whether applying Montessori methods to basketball effectively fostered these developmental outcomes.

Givens, K. (2025). *Beyond the Pink Tower: Retention trends in Montessori education post-preschool* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Kansas]. PQDT Global. <https://www.proquest.com/openview/eb72cc874e369933a1afa13cde73ee78/1>

Retaining students in public Montessori education is difficult. This may be due, in part, to goals of the

Montessori method compared to traditional education, and parents' limited awareness of long-term benefits of the Montessori method. Understanding why parents choose to enroll, keep, or withdraw their children from a Montessori school may help with retention. This qualitative study explored parental decisions related to enrolling, keeping, or withdrawing their children in one urban, public Montessori school. Interviews were analyzed using a modified version of the Beliefs, Expectations, Autonomy support, and Relationships (BEAR) Framework. Findings from parent interviews indicated that there are several factors that influence school choice. Strategies a school or district might consider are presented, as well as less mutable factors. Opportunities for future research are also presented.

Hale, D. J. (2025). *Teacher perception and awareness of the interrelationship of the learning environment design and agentic learning in public Montessori settings* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin–River Falls]. OATD. <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1793/95719>

This exploratory qualitative research study aimed to amplify the voices of public-sector Montessori teachers by examining their perceptions of the interrelationship between learning environment design and agentic learning. Using an instrumental case study design, the research employed semi-structured interviews and photo-elicitation to gather teacher perspectives. Reflexive thematic analysis was used to interpret key phrases and statements, shedding light on teachers' lived experiences, observations, and insights regarding how learning environment design is related to agentic learning in public Montessori elementary classrooms. This study's findings suggest that participants understood the interrelationship between the design of the learning environment and agentic learning. Their descriptions and observations demonstrate an awareness of their roles and responsibilities in designing the learning environment and an understanding of agentic learning. The findings of this study contribute to an underexplored area of study by elevating the perceptions of underrepresented public Montessori teachers and highlighting their awareness of the interrelationship of learning environment design and agentic learning.

Korngold, K. T. (2025). *Agency piccolo in the Montessori infant environment: A confirming qualitative case study of the presence of infant agency* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin–River Falls]. OATD. <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1793/95722>

Agency is in the spotlight in numerous fields, nationally and internationally. While the importance of agency features prominently in academic and popular publications, more attention needs to be concentrated on infants. This confirming qualitative study seeks to fill that gap, presenting case study research conducted with a naturalistic approach at the Montessori Children's Center, one of the first full-time Montessori child care programs in the United States. The study is set within two separate child care rooms, each populated with eight infants. The purposes are to explore how infants express their agency without using words and illustrate how the Montessori environment makes possible agentic development. Data collection occurred using an IRB [Institutional Review Board]-approved, researcher-designed observation instrument. The study intimately focuses on the settings, processes, and interactions with the environment, materials, other infants, and caregivers, in a series of descriptive, vivid, narrative accounts that reflect pedagogical naturalism (Frierson, 2025). The findings demonstrate the presence of agency in six foundational elements identified by me as well as various researchers as pillars of the Montessori environment. These pillars serve as building blocks of agency in infants: expressing freedom of choice, building or extending concentration, demonstrating freedom of movement, practicing independence, displaying perseverance, and exhibiting repetition of a self-chosen activity. The research will contribute significantly to wider discussions of agency, influencing educators, child care providers, parents and guardians, policymakers, funders, regulators, and legislators to transform the lives of infants in the United States.

Kpenkaan, E. (2025). *Montessori-based ABAR approaches to literacy practices: An exploratory case study* [Doctoral dissertation, Barry University]. PQDT Global. <https://www.proquest.com/openview/f3d44e1afce67939b32c4b2bd0dd3b27/1>

The purpose of the study was to explore early childhood Montessori educators' perspectives on the

use of ABAR [anti-bias, anti-racist] approach within their literacy practices. An exploratory case study was employed to understand the elements of ABAR that Montessori educators believed were incorporated into literacy practices, and how they were being implemented. Data was collected through an online questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and from document sources. Six Montessori educators, from private and public schools, participated in both completing the online questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. A six-step qualitative data analysis was utilized to generate themes to inform the study. Themes that emerged showed that ABAR was integrated in literacy to reflect a global perspective, cultural orientation, and promote multiple identities. The study also showed that educators described the use of ABAR through Montessori-based experiential engagements, language support, and theme-based literature activities. Two challenges with incorporating ABAR were attributed to its perception as a risky and arduous approach. Quality training and allyship themes emerged as pathways to overcoming perceived challenges associated with incorporating ABAR. Some of the implications of this study include the importance of educator reflexivity and its impact on supporting more transformative practices.

Lindeman, N. O. (2025). *Effects of administering intergenerational Montessori-aligned instruction to mitigate ageist attitudes among children ages 3–5* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin–River Falls]. OATD. <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1793/95723>

This research explores the potential of a Montessori-aligned aging pedagogy as an early childhood intervention to address ageism. Grounded in principles of individualized learning, empathy, and respect across the lifespan, the Montessori approach offers a distinctive framework for fostering meaningful intergenerational interactions. By integrating evidence-based intergenerational practices with Montessori pedagogy, this model is designed to support the developmental needs of both preschool children and older adults through high-quality, regularly scheduled shared activities. A quasi-experimental design with pre- and post-test assessments is employed, using the recently validated tool, Young Children's Views of Older People (YCVOP). During the intervention, children interacted with older adults in weekly planned activities, with trained observers measuring engagement between

the children and the older adults. The methodology suggested that early childhood Montessori pedagogy, which encourages autonomy and collaborative learning, can positively influence young children's attitudes towards older adults, fostering mutual respect and understanding. The implications for educators, aging care providers, and policymakers underscore the importance of implementing Montessori-aligned intergenerational programs to combat ageism from an early age, thereby promoting a more inclusive and empathetic society.

Mai, X. (2025). *Montessori preschool teachers' perceived efficacy and experience in teaching and modeling emotion regulation: An exploratory method study* [Doctoral dissertation, Regent University]. PQDT Global. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/3205420556>

This exploratory qualitative study examined the importance of the role of Montessori preschool teachers' (MPTs') perceived efficacy and their methods of teaching and modeling emotion regulation to young learners aged 3 to 6. Rooted in Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory and Gross's (1998) emotion regulation theory, this research aimed to understand how MPTs perceive their role in teaching emotions and the specific ways they model regulation skills. The study employed an in-depth exploratory design to examine MPTs' perceptions of their role in teaching emotions and to determine their methods of regulating emotions during interactions with multi-age preschoolers. The research methodology included 24 open-ended interview survey questionnaires for qualitative data collection. These questionnaires gave insights into two research questions that addressed the teaching perceived efficacy and experience in teaching and modeling emotion regulations to young learners. Analyzing the collected data revealed four significant themes woven into the interpretation of the findings: (a) reflective practice, (b) supportive learning environment, (c) interactive practice, and (d) emotional guide. The results revealed that reflective practice through observations and experiences gave teachers the confidence to understand and respond to students' emotional needs. The study's results contributed to comprehending self-efficacy and regulating emotions within Montessori early childhood education. The findings imply that reflecting on observations is key to effectively teaching and modeling regulation to Montessori multi-age preschoolers.

Meirbekova, A. (2025). *The creative potential of children attending Montessori and play-based kindergartens in Kazakhstan* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Bristol]. OATD. <https://research-information.bris.ac.uk/en/studentTheses/682f7ab8-500a-4f60-a9d5-d318ece29141>

Creativity is widely recognised as essential for navigating and thriving in a rapidly changing world. While traditionally framed as an exceptional trait, this study embraces the view that creativity is a universal potential inherent in every individual. It explores how this potential unfolds in early childhood through interactions with the learning environment, focusing on Montessori and play-based kindergartens in Kazakhstan. Using a mixed-methods design, the study employed the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking (TTCT) to assess creativity outcomes and the Analysing Children's Creative Thinking (ACCT) framework to observe the processes of creative expression in naturalistic settings. Quantitative findings revealed no statistically significant differences in overall creativity scores between the two groups. However, qualitative analysis uncovered distinct patterns of creative behaviours. Montessori settings more supported the expressions of task-oriented, self-initiated creativity, while play-based environments fostered more imaginative and speculative thinking, particularly through social and symbolic play. In both settings, child-initiated activities were especially conducive to the expression of creativity. This study underscores the importance of viewing creativity as a dynamic, context-dependent process shaped by the affordances of the learning environment. By illustrating how different pedagogical approaches enable varied expressions of creativity, the study offers insights for educators and policymakers seeking to cultivate creative potential in all children.

Nishibun, T. M. (2025). *Integrating the Montessori Method into vocal pedagogy: A curated environment for holistic teaching* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Alabama]. PQDT Global. <https://ir.ua.edu/handle/123456789/17015>

Many vocal pedagogues are in dialogue to either adjust or abolish the master-apprentice model. Teachers are increasingly becoming aware of the need for a student-centered approach based in both the development of kinesthetic awareness and empathetic concern. Dr. Maria Montessori developed a methodology for teaching children that emphasizes a student-centered approach by an observant teacher, with respect and responsiveness

toward the student. Montessori's four pillars of Sensitive Planes, Education of the Senses, Prepared Environment, and Spontaneous Repetition are explained and applied to the principles taught in the voice studio for the mutual benefit of the student and teacher in their work with one another, and in the building of a safe social-emotional space for young singers to flourish.

Ravin, M. M. (2025). *The transition from Montessori K-8 to a non-Montessori high school: A narrative analysis* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee]. PQDT Global. <https://minds.wisconsin.edu/handle/1793/96065>

The transition to high school is a critical developmental period, yet experiences of students moving from alternative educational models like Montessori into traditional secondary settings are under-researched. Given Montessori's distinctive pedagogy emphasizing autonomy and intrinsic motivation, potential philosophical and structural conflicts with conventional high schools may create unique transition challenges, particularly in urban contexts. This study addressed this gap, exploring the lived experiences of adolescents and families undertaking this specific educational pathway. Guided by Schlossberg's Transition Theory and Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model, this qualitative, phenomenological investigation utilized a multiperspective approach, gathering data through interviews, focus groups, and surveys with both students and guardians navigating the move from urban Montessori K-8 schools to non-Montessori high schools. Thematic analysis identified salient patterns regarding adaptation processes. Findings revealed significant academic and social adjustments driven by the discontinuity between educational environments. Participants grappled with shifts in instructional style, pacing, assessment methods, and motivational focus, alongside challenges integrating into larger, less personal school communities. The prior Montessori background presented a duality: valuable skills like independence and self-advocacy were assets, yet the learning preferences fostered by Montessori often clashed with traditional high school structures, causing friction. The family microsystem provided essential support but also faced considerable stress, adapting roles and struggling with mesosystem challenges related to less frequent or effective communication with the high school compared to their Montessori experience. Systemic factors, including the pressures of a standardized testing culture (macrosystem)

and inconsistent access to school-based supports (exosystem), further shaped the transition. The central conclusion is that the profound philosophical and structural discontinuity between Montessori K–8 and traditional high school ecosystems is the primary driver of the unique challenges inherent in this specific transition.

Teien, M. (2025). *Relationships between the characteristics, professional experiences, phases of professional development, and sustainability of selected practicing U.S. Montessori teachers* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin–River Falls]. OATD. <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1793/95724>

Utilizing a cross-sectional survey design grounded in a postpositivist paradigm, this quantitative, exploratory, and descriptive-correlational study examined the sustainability of selected Montessori teachers currently teaching in U.S. classrooms. Framed by Huberman’s theory of teacher development and Bandura’s theory of self-efficacy, this study investigated how professional experience, development stage, and contextual characteristics relate to longevity and intent to remain in the classroom. A national sample of 393 Montessori teachers responded to a 43-item survey distributed through snowball sampling. Descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, Spearman’s correlations, and regression analyses were employed to examine associations among variables. A composite variable, Teaching Experience Profile (TEXP), was developed to reflect experience and future teaching intent. Significant associations were found between teacher sustainability and age at credentialing, income, teacher education program affiliation, and school type ($p < .001$). Regression analysis revealed that years of Montessori teaching ($\beta = .224, p < .001$) and participation in professional development ($\beta = .157, p = .002$) were significant predictors of teacher self-efficacy ($R^2 = .082$). Through Huberman’s teacher development theory, teachers with 4–7 years of experience reported the highest levels of burnout, while those with 8+ years reported the greatest sense of professional fulfillment. Bandura’s model underscored the importance of mastery and social persuasion in building durable self-efficacy. The study recommends practice and future research on teacher preparation, mentorship, leadership development, and systemic supports contributing to Montessori teacher longevity and sustainability.

Van Fleet, S. (2025). *Cardinal virtues in practice: A mixed-method study grounded in virtue ethics and Montessori’s theory of normalization* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin–River Falls]. OATD. <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1793/96309>

This mixed-method study explores how the cardinal virtues—prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance—are expressed, perceived, and interpreted within Montessori elementary classrooms (ages 6–12). The Montessori method emphasizes independence, self-directed activity, and learning through carefully prepared environments. The cardinal virtues are classical moral qualities central to virtue ethics and foundational to human flourishing. A convergent parallel mixed-methods design integrated classroom observations, student surveys, and teacher interviews to address three research questions concerning student behaviors, student perceptions, and teacher interpretations of the virtues. Observations identified demonstrated behaviors, narratives, and artifacts that suggest prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. Survey findings indicated students perceived themselves as possessing moderate to high levels of the virtues, particularly justice. Interviews revealed how Montessori guides interpret and support students’ virtue development within the Prepared Environment. The findings suggest that two primary elements of the Montessori pedagogy, the roles of the Prepared Environment and that of the Montessori guide (teacher) together serve as a promising model for supporting moral development and point to the continued relevance of classical virtue theory in contemporary educational contexts.

Williams, J. E. (2025). *Post racial reckoning: Montessori instructors’ perspectives on teaching through an antibias antiracist lens* [Doctoral dissertation, University of San Diego]. EBSCO Open Dissertations. <https://digital.sandiego.edu/dissertations/1061>

Prior to the racial reckoning of 2020, Montessori teacher education programs (MTEPs) have only narrowly focused on social justice education. Although MTEPs began to respond differently post-reckoning, support for implementing practices like antibias antiracist (ABAR) instruction was often absent. This study sought to understand how the racial reckoning and efforts to include an ABAR lens impacted the teaching practices of instructors in MTEPs. While ABAR-related studies

exist in general teacher education, few focus specifically on Montessori teacher education. The study explored how eight instructors in Montessori teacher education (1) made sense of adopting an ABAR perspective post-2020, (2) navigated tensions in implementing ABAR in lectures and assignments, and (3) approached ABAR-aligned lesson presentations. Data from interviews and journal entries provided rich insight into their motivations, victories, and challenges. Six instructors made significant strides in applying ABAR efforts, which required intentional investment, reflection, racial literacy, and cultivating a personal culture of mattering to disrupt whiteness, bias, and racism. Lived experience made full commitment more natural, while limited personal experience posed barriers. Nonetheless, all participants demonstrated the potential to deepen their commitment. Findings suggest that instructors new to ABAR need explicit training for awareness and implementation.

Xiao, K. (2025). *Toward wholeness and freedom: A holistic exploration of choice-based (art) education across TAB, Montessori, and Reggio Emilia* [Doctoral dissertation, Virginia Commonwealth University]. PQDT Global. <https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd/8223/>

This qualitative multi-case study examines how choice-based (art) education is philosophically grounded, theoretically framed, and practically enacted across three student-centered educational approaches: Montessori education, Reggio Emilia education, and Teaching for Artistic Behavior (TAB). Drawing on classroom observations, interviews, and pedagogical artifacts from three experienced educators, the study investigates how student choice operates within different educational ecosystems and explores the holistic value of choice-based education from a comparative perspective. Guided by two research questions, the study first analyzes how choice-based (art) education manifests similarly and differently across the three approaches in their philosophical, theoretical, and practical dimensions. Comparative analysis reveals a fundamental distinction between approaches grounded primarily in individual choice (Montessori and TAB), reflecting subjectivity, and those grounded in communal choice (Reggio Emilia), reflecting intersubjectivity. To address the second research question, the study adopts a holistic interpretive lens informed by holistic education theory and Taoism, interpreting the three approaches as distinct yet convergent efforts to align educational practice with natural processes of human development, learning, and creating.

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