



2025 AMS Whitepaper Series

Pathways to Global Montessori Research

***Belonging in the Cosmic Narrative: Revisiting
the Great Lessons to Ensure Every Child Sees
Themselves in the Human Story***

Volume 1

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Executive Summary

Montessori's Great Lessons frame children's worldview, yet many still lack a sense of belonging in these stories.

From the earliest Montessori classrooms to modern elementary settings, the Five Great Lessons offer children a sweeping narrative: the story of the universe, life, humanity, writing, and numbers. These stories are designed to inspire awe, invite wonder, spark inquiry, and reveal the interconnectedness of all things, which orients children within the cosmos. Maria Montessori (1992) emphasized that these stories must give children “a vision of the whole universe” and help them understand their interdependence with all things (p. 5). However, the way the Great Lessons have traditionally been presented often centers Western science, Eurocentric history, and a narrow arc of human development, sidelining Indigenous cosmologies, African origins, Asian scientific traditions, and oral knowledge systems (Marshall, 2017). When entire peoples and cultures are excluded, children may experience alienation rather than a sense of universality.

Key messages and roadmap for the paper

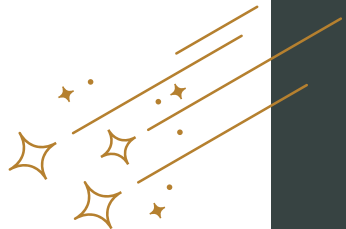
Readers will find both philosophical grounding and practical guidance for embedding belonging into Montessori practice. This white paper offers a dual lens: vision and practice. Readers will be equipped with:

- A deeper **philosophical framework** for belonging rooted in Montessori's cosmic vision and modern scholarship (Grazzini, 2013; Montessori, 1992; Duffy & Duffy, 2002; Stephenson, 2015).
- An **analysis of gaps** in the Five Great Lessons — how Eurocentric framings have dominated and how belonging-oriented storytelling can rebalance the narrative.
- **Case studies and examples** of Montessori classrooms reframing cosmic narratives to include Indigenous cosmologies, non-Western scientific traditions, and historically marginalized voices.
- **Classroom and curricular implications** — how teachers can become storytellers of belonging, how materials and narratives can be expanded, and how cosmic storytelling can connect to children's lived identities.
- **Leadership implications** — how school and system leaders can support belonging-oriented pedagogy, align with district or state goals, and model narrative integrity.
- **Policy implications** — how Montessori and Cosmic Education can serve as models for culturally responsive learning, global competence, and systemic inclusion.
- **Recommendations and action steps** — including resource development, partnerships with communities, professional development, and research agendas to sustain belonging in Montessori cosmic education.



Contemporary research validates Montessori's assertion that belonging is integral to the flourishing of individuals. Belonging is associated with higher engagement, persistence, academic achievement, and overall well-being (Allen et al., 2018; IES, 2024). Conversely, "belonging uncertainty" undermines motivation and performance, particularly for historically marginalized groups (Cohen & Garcia, 2008). Duffy and Duffy (2002) argue that cosmic education should not only orient the child in the universe but also root them in a story of belonging and responsibility.

Montessori's vision of peace cannot be realized without belonging. Only when every child finds themselves reflected in the Great Lessons can Montessori's universality move from abstraction to lived reality.



Introduction

Montessori's Vision of Universality

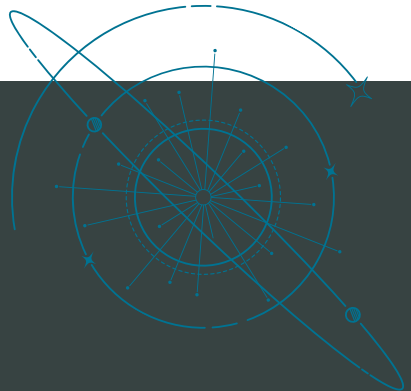
Maria Montessori's educational vision was always cosmic in scale: she saw the child as part of a vast "cosmic plan," where all agents—animate, inanimate, human—hold interdependencies and responsibilities. Camillo Grazzini (2013) emphasizes that Montessori's "cosmic vision" is not metaphorical but a "way of seeing, a way of understanding the world," while "cosmic education" is the operational framework for making that vision real in classrooms. As Montessori herself wrote in *To Educate the Human Potential*, "let us give [the child] a vision of the whole universe...all things are part of the universe and are connected to each other to form one whole unity" (Montessori, 1992, p. 5). This holistic perspective anchors what Montessori called cosmic education—a pedagogy that situates academic learning within a narrative of interconnection, interdependence, and peace.

"...let us give a vision of the whole universe... all things are part of the universe and are connected to each other to form one whole unity"

The Great Lessons as narrative gateways

The Five Great Lessons—the stories of the universe, the coming of life, the coming of human beings, the story of writing, and the story of numbers—are the primary vehicles of this vision. They are designed not merely to deliver knowledge but to inspire awe, moral responsibility, and an awareness of one's role in the "cosmic plan" (Grazzini, 2013). Duffy and Duffy (2002) extend this framing in *Children of the Universe*, describing how the Great Lessons position the child as both an inheritor and an active participant in humanity's story.

Yet the Great Lessons, as they are commonly told, reflect the epistemological assumptions of their time. Without intentional revision, they risk becoming static narratives that center on Western perspectives and obscure the full complexity of the human story. To remain faithful to Montessori's universal vision, cosmic education must evolve to ensure that every child finds belonging within its narratives.



Since Montessori's time, the Great Lessons have often been transmitted with a Eurocentric bias: the universe is largely framed through Western astronomy, the emergence of life is presented through a single scientific narrative, and the story of humanity is compressed into a Euro-American arc of "civilization." This narrative overlooks Indigenous cosmologies, African origins and innovations, Asian contributions to science and mathematics, and oral traditions that have shaped human knowledge long before the advent of writing (Marshall, 2017).

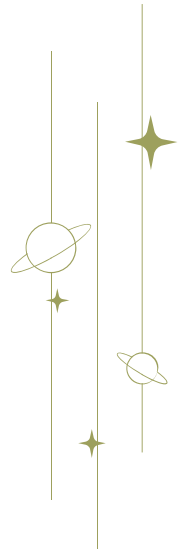
Such exclusions are not merely gaps in content; they signal to children which voices and cultures are recognized as legitimate. Research on culturally responsive pedagogy underscores that when students' identities are excluded from curricular narratives, they experience reduced engagement and a weakened sense of academic self-efficacy (Gay, 2018). For Montessori education, which places narrative at the center of meaning-making, such omissions are particularly consequential. As Stephenson (2015) argues, the goal of cosmic education is to help each child discover their cosmic task—their role in the unfolding human story. That discovery becomes compromised if the story itself erases or marginalizes entire peoples.

Belonging Is the Bridge Between Montessori's Vision and Today's Diverse Classroom

Belonging has emerged as one of the most important predictors of student success in contemporary educational research. Baumeister and Leary (1995) famously argued that the need to belong is a fundamental human motivation. In schools, belonging is tied to improved engagement, persistence, social-emotional well-being, and resilience (Allen et al., 2018; IES, 2024). Conversely, when students are unsure whether they are seen, valued, or fully accepted in school, they experience what Cohen and Garcia (2008) call "belonging uncertainty"—a pervasive doubt about whether they truly fit within academic spaces, which can undermine academic performance, especially for historically marginalized groups.

The Belonging Matters literature review (NCB, 2023) demonstrates that fostering belonging in schools leads to higher attendance and improved mental health outcomes. Nagaoka and Holquist (2021) emphasize that belonging is intricately linked to meaning and purpose, framing it as crucial to adolescent development. Paris and Alim (2022) go further, arguing that belonging must be "rooted in joy," cultivated through classrooms that sustain equity and cultural care.

Children today grow up in a world shaped by global migration, digital interconnection, the climate crisis, and cultural plurality. They must navigate complex identities and learn to collaborate across differences. Educational scholars argue that fostering belonging is not peripheral but central to preparing students for this reality (Ladson-Billings, 2021).



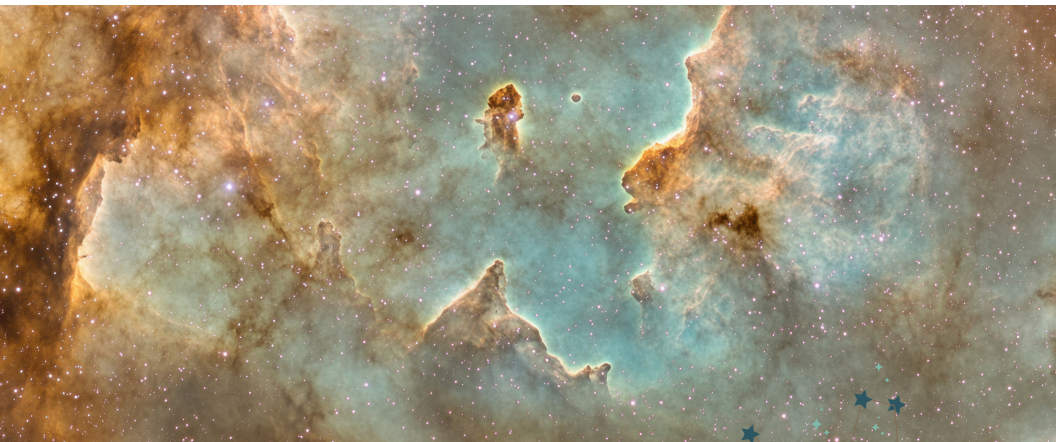
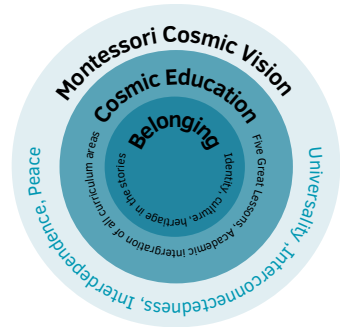
In Montessori classrooms, revisiting the Great Lessons with belonging at the center ensures that children can see themselves and others reflected in the cosmic story, cultivating empathy, agency, and resilience.

For practitioners, this means reconceiving storytelling as an act of care and justice.

For leaders, it means orienting systems to support narrative fidelity and cultural depth.

For policymakers, it means seeing Montessori not as a niche alternative, but as a powerful ally in cultivating globally competent, identity-affirming educational systems.

This white paper, therefore, calls for a renewal of cosmic education: one that honors Montessori's original universality, integrates contemporary research on belonging, and equips children for the demands of a diverse, interconnected, and contested world.



Framing Belonging in the Cosmic Narrative

Belonging as a fundamental human need

Belonging is widely recognized in the social sciences as a fundamental human need, akin to safety and nourishment (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). In educational settings, belonging is not only about being present in the classroom but about feeling recognized, valued, and integral to the learning community (Allen et al., 2018). When students instead perceive themselves as invisible, or when their identities are excluded from classroom narratives, they encounter the “belonging uncertainty” described earlier—a persistent doubt about whether they are accepted and valued members of the academic community (Cohen & Garcia, 2008). This uncertainty is associated with decreased motivation, lower performance, and disengagement.

In Montessori classrooms, belonging assumes a deeper dimension due to the role of the Great Lessons. These original stories are not merely curricular entry points; they shape a child’s orientation to the universe and their place in it. If children do not see their identities and cultures reflected in the cosmic story, they may internalize a sense of disconnection rather than universality. Belonging, therefore, becomes not an optional extension of Montessori education but its very condition of possibility.

Montessori’s cosmic vision as a philosophical foundation

Montessori’s writings repeatedly emphasize universality, interconnection, and the child’s role within the cosmic plan. In *To Educate the Human Potential*, she asserts that “all things are part of the universe and are connected to each other to form one whole unity” (Montessori, 1992, p. 5). Cosmic education, as Grazzini (2013) explains, is not metaphorical but a framework for “understanding the unity of knowledge, the interdependence of life, and the child’s moral responsibility.”

Michael and D’Neil Duffy (2002) further articulate this in *Children of the Universe*, where they argue that Montessori’s cosmic narrative is designed to give children “a sense of belonging to the universe and a sense of responsibility for its care” (p. 3).



**“All things are part of
the universe and are
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to form one whole
unity.”**

Stephenson (2015) extends this interpretation, emphasizing that cosmic education helps children identify their “cosmic task”—their unique contribution to humanity’s ongoing story. Yet, as scholars note, if the cosmic story itself is incomplete, children’s ability to discern their task is compromised (Marshall, 2017).

Thus, while the philosophical foundation of belonging in Montessori lies in her vision of universality, this universality must be actively constructed by integrating narratives from diverse cultures, sciences, and histories to avoid exclusionary tendencies.

Empirical evidence on belonging and student flourishing

A robust body of empirical research supports the importance of belonging for student outcomes. Meta-analyses confirm that a strong sense of belonging is associated with higher levels of motivation, persistence, engagement, and achievement (Allen et al., 2018; Korpershoek et al., 2020). Recent analyses by the Institute of Education Sciences identify belonging as a key noncognitive factor associated with both academic performance and socioemotional development across grade levels (Institute of Education Sciences [IES], 2024).

Experimental and quasi-experimental studies further suggest that brief, well-designed interventions that normalize academic struggle and affirm students’ place in the learning community can yield durable gains, particularly for historically marginalized populations (Cohen & Garcia, 2008). At the systems level, schools that cultivate inclusive, identity-affirming cultures tend to report lower disciplinary referrals, stronger attendance, and improved mental health indicators (NCB, 2023; Nagaoka & Holquist, 2021).

Beyond proximal outcomes, belonging is intertwined with purpose and identity development: when school cultures honor students’ voices, communities, and cultural assets, resilience and meaning-making are strengthened (Nagaoka & Holquist, 2021; Paris & Alim, 2022). These findings resonate with Montessori’s emphasis on preparing young people for life in an interconnected, pluralistic world.



Evidence Snapshot: Belonging and Peer Connections

To anchor this discussion in cross-system indicators relevant to children of the global majority, Table 1 summarizes selected PISA 2022 country-note percentages for belonging and related peer-connection signals, with the United States provided as a benchmark.

Table 1. Sense of Belonging KPI Matrix

Country	Belong (%)	Make Friends Easily (%)	Lonely (%)	Outsider (%)
Philippines	84	83	28	28
United States	70	75	22	24
Canada	72	75	21	21
Japan	86	75	10	6
Switzerland	79	79	12	12

Source. OECD. (2023). *PISA 2022 Results (Volume II): Learning During—and From—Disruption (Table II.B1.1.4)*, and *PISA 2022 Country Notes for the Philippines, United States, Canada, Japan, and Switzerland*.

Note. Percentages reflect student self-reports in PISA 2022 country notes (OECD). “Belong” indicates students reporting that they feel they belong at school; “Lonely” indicates students reporting they often/always feel lonely; “Outsider” indicates students reporting they often feel left out; “Make friends easily” indicates agreement with that statement.

Majority-world systems, such as the Philippines, Canada, and Switzerland, report relatively high overall belonging rates (83–84%) while also showing elevated loneliness/outsider rates (23–29%). This pattern may reflect a form of “mixed belonging,” in which a general sense of affinity with school coexists with day-to-day social frictions that can gradually weaken lived connections. The U.S. benchmark reflects lower reported belonging (70%) with slightly lower loneliness/outsider rates, highlighting opportunities to both strengthen overall community cohesion and reduce peer-network frictions.

Belonging can serve as an upstream performance multiplier—a cultural operating system that reduces friction and supports motivation, engagement, prosocial behavior, and achievement (Allen et al., 2018; Korpershoek et al., 2020). Cross-national PISA analyses associate healthier school climates and lower bullying with stronger belonging and more favorable academic and well-being outcomes (OECD, 2019). U.S. YRBS surveillance similarly indicates that students who feel cared for and “part of” their school report lower emotional distress, suicidality, violence exposure, and substance use—with protective effects that may extend into adulthood (CDC, 2023; Steiner et al., 2019).

Targeted “belonging lifts” that normalize adversity and affirm students’ membership are associated with durable gains for marginalized learners, including higher GPA and improved health outcomes (Walton & Cohen, 2011; IES WWC, 2022). PISA syntheses further suggest that first-generation immigrant students often report weaker belonging than non-immigrant peers (e.g., ~41% vs. ~33% reporting weak belonging across countries). This pattern indicates that immigrant background can serve as an important signal for equity-focused inquiry and continuous improvement. In response, systems can disaggregate belonging dashboards by immigrant status, language background, race/ethnicity, and gender, and pair universal, identity-safe practices with culturally sustaining supports (OECD, 2018).

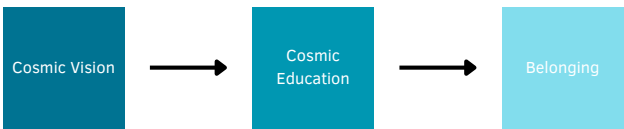
Belonging bridges Montessori’s universality with the lived realities of diverse classrooms.

Montessori’s universality provides a vision of interconnection, but belonging ensures that this universality is lived rather than abstract. In contemporary classrooms, where children bring diverse cultural, linguistic, and historical identities, belonging affirms that all voices are essential to the story of humanity. Without belonging, universality risks becoming homogenization. With belonging, universality becomes what Ladson-Billings (2021) describes as “culturally sustaining pedagogy”—a framework that preserves and values the plurality of identities within education.

Stephenson (2015) highlights that cosmic education’s ultimate goal is to help children discern their cosmic task. This discernment requires narratives that honor global diversity: Indigenous cosmologies alongside astrophysics, African mathematics alongside Greek, oral traditions alongside written scripts. Tzuo and Chen (2013) further argue that cosmic education, when reframed through belonging, aligns closely with sustainability education, cultivating responsibility for both cultural and ecological continuity.

As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, competitive, and diverse, education must equip children not only with skills but with a secure sense of identity and empathy for others. Revisiting the Great Lessons through belonging ensures that Montessori education remains aligned with contemporary research, responsive to diverse student needs, and faithful to Montessori’s original vision of peace and universality. By embedding belonging into the core of cosmic education, Montessori can model what narrative justice looks like in education: telling the full human story, in all its complexity, and inviting every child to see themselves within it.

Figure 2. Belonging as the Bridge



Belonging transforms Montessori’s universality from abstraction to lived experience.



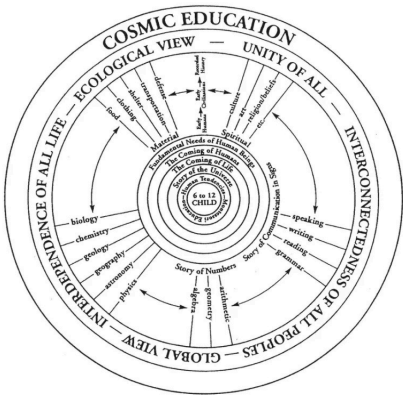
Revisiting the Great Lessons

The Five Great Lessons were designed as impressionistic narratives to awaken children's sense of awe and situate their academic studies in a larger context (Montessori, 1992). Montessori saw them not as dogma but as “keys to the universe”—entry points that inspire research, exploration, and moral imagination (Grazzini, 2013). Yet, as Duffy and Duffy (2002) acknowledge, the stories were crafted within a specific cultural moment, often privileging Eurocentric accounts of science, history, and civilization.

When the Great Lessons remain static, they risk perpetuating belonging gaps. These omissions matter because children draw identity and meaning from narratives. Educational psychologists note that when students see their culture reflected in learning, their motivation and sense of agency increase (Cohen & Garcia, 2008; Gay, 2018). Conversely, when excluded, students may internalize a diminished sense of belonging, undermining learning and self-concept (Allen et al., 2018).

Revisiting the Great Lessons through belonging is thus both a pedagogical necessity and a moral responsibility. It ensures Montessori education reflects the universality it proclaims and positions it as a model of narrative justice in 21st-century education (Marshall, 2017).

Figure 3. Cosmic Education overview—interdependence of life, unity of knowledge, and the 6–12 child at the center.



Adapted from Children of the Universe by M. Duffy & D. Duffy (2013, Parent Child Press).





The Coming of the Universe

Traditional framing: Typically presented through the Big Bang, Newtonian physics, and modern Western astrophysics, often illustrated with dramatic experiments like “the black strip” representing cosmic time.

Belonging gaps: This framing privileges a singular narrative of cosmology. It sidelines Indigenous creation stories (e.g., Diné emergence stories, Māori cosmology, Yoruba Orishas) and ancient traditions like Chinese astronomy or Mayan calendrical systems (Urton, 1981; Aveni, 2001). By ignoring cultural pluralism, children may receive the implicit message that only Western science explains the cosmos.

Opportunities for expansion: The lesson can retain astrophysical accuracy while presenting cosmology as both scientific and cultural. Including Indigenous and non-Western cosmologies honors humanity’s diverse quests to understand the universe. This also fosters environmental belonging, linking cosmic origins to ecological stewardship (Tzuo & Chen, 2013).

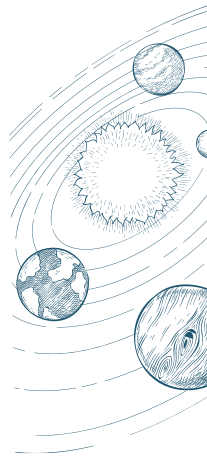
The Coming of Life

Traditional framing: Life is usually presented through Darwinian evolution, starting with simple organisms and culminating in biodiversity.

Belonging gaps: Although evolution is essential, this account frequently overlooks Indigenous ecological knowledge and alternative biodiversity frameworks. For example, Native American traditions emphasize reciprocal relationships with plants and animals (Cajete, 2000). By focusing solely on Western evolutionary biology, the lesson risks teaching children that their cultural heritages offer no valid insights into the natural world.

Opportunities for expansion: Integrating Indigenous ecological knowledge and non-Western perspectives enriches the lesson. For instance, traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) has been shown to enhance sustainability practices (Berkes, 2012). By recognizing these perspectives, Montessori educators can expand children’s sense of responsibility for the Earth, aligning with Montessori’s view of life as interconnected and purposeful (Montessori, 1992).





The Coming of Human Beings

Traditional framing: The lesson typically acknowledges Africa as the cradle of humanity but quickly shifts focus to Europe-centered “civilizations,” technological milestones, and cultural achievements.

Belonging gaps: Civilizations outside of Europe—such as the Mali Empire, the Gupta Dynasty, or the Indigenous civilizations of the Americas—are often minimized or presented as peripheral. Oral traditions, art, and spiritual practices are marginalized in favor of written and technological achievements (Stephenson, 2015).

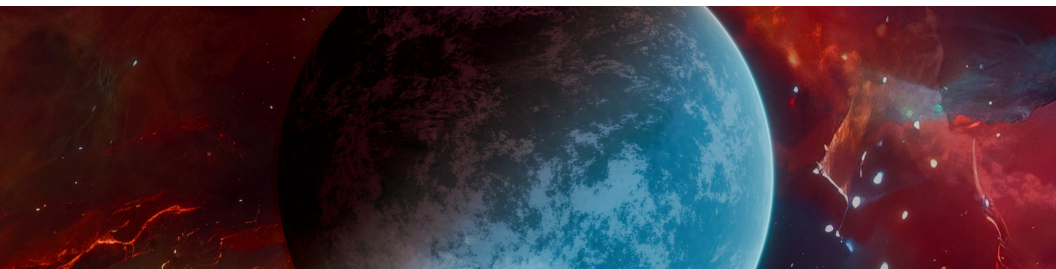
Opportunities for expansion: A renewed narrative would foreground Africa as humanity’s shared origin (Stringer, 2016), emphasize global migrations, and highlight multiple centers of innovation (Abdullah, 2020). Including oral traditions as valid knowledge systems aligns with culturally sustaining pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2021) and helps children see themselves as part of an ongoing, plural human journey.

The Story of Writing

Traditional framing: Writing is often framed as beginning with Sumerian cuneiform and Egyptian hieroglyphics, progressing through Greek and Roman alphabets to modern Western literacy.

Belonging gaps: This trajectory sidelines rich traditions such as Chinese characters (dating back over 3,000 years), Mayan glyphs, Sanskrit, and African symbolic systems like Nsibidi (Obenga, 1992). Oral traditions—long humanity’s dominant mode of knowledge transmission—are treated as “pre-writing,” devaluing their sophistication.

Opportunities for expansion: Incorporating diverse writing systems alongside oral traditions reframes literacy as a global, plural achievement. Recognizing oral literature as intellectual heritage affirms belonging and acknowledges that all cultures have contributed to humanity’s capacity to preserve and share knowledge (Ong, 1982).



The Story of Numbers

Traditional framing: Mathematics is usually taught through Egyptian numerals, Greek geometry, and Roman numerals, with emphasis on Western “discoveries.”

Belonging gaps: This neglects India’s development of zero and the decimal system, China’s early algebra and rod numerals, the Islamic Golden Age’s algebra and algorithms (al-Khwarizmi), and African fractals in architecture and art (Eglash, 1999).

Opportunities for expansion: Including these contributions affirms that mathematics is a shared human endeavor. It also strengthens motivation by allowing children to see mathematics as culturally diverse. Research shows that culturally responsive math teaching improves student engagement and achievement (Gutstein, 2006).

Table 2. Revisiting the Great Lessons Through Belonging

Great Lesson	Traditional Focus	Belonging Gaps	Opportunities for Expansion
Coming of the Universe	Big Bang, Western astronomy	Ignores Indigenous Cosmologies	Include African, Asian, and Indigenous cosmologies
Coming of Life	Evolution timeline	Biodiversity framed Eurocentrically	Highlight the ecological knowledge of Indigenous peoples
Coming of Human Beings	Early humans → Europe-centered civilizations	Silence African origins, non-Western civilizations	Emphasize African origins, global migrations, and multiple civilizations
Story of Writing	Cuneiform, Hieroglyphics	Omits oral traditions, scripts from the Americas, Asia, and Africa	Add Mayan glyphs, Sanskrit, Chinese characters, and oral knowledge
Story of Numbers	Greek/Roman math	Leaves out India, China, Islamic math, and Africa	Integrate zero, algebra, African, fractals, and Chinese math systems

(Traditional framings can create belonging gaps; reimagined lessons offer opportunities for inclusion. Montessori, 1992; Duffy & Duffy, 2002; Grazzini, 2013; Stephenson, 2015).



Implications and Recommendations

Teacher Preparation

The renewal of the Great Lessons cannot occur without a parallel shift in teacher preparation. Montessori teacher education programs (TEPs) have historically emphasized fidelity to Montessori's original presentations, but must now balance fidelity with cultural expansion. Training in culturally sustaining pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2021), narrative justice, and global competence (OECD, 2018) equips new guides to expand the Great Lessons responsibly and inclusively. Practical steps include:

- *Embedding coursework on global history, Indigenous knowledge systems, and culturally sustaining pedagogy within Montessori TEPs.*
- *Providing case studies of Great Lesson adaptations that honor belonging while remaining faithful to Montessori's methodology.*
- *Developing supplementary guides, digital archives, and resource libraries to support teachers in presenting culturally inclusive narratives.*
- *Incorporating reflective practice so that teachers examine their own cultural assumptions in storytelling.*

In this way, Montessori teacher preparation becomes a model for integrating global perspectives, ensuring that guides are prepared to foster belonging across diverse classrooms.



Classroom Practice

Montessori classrooms thrive on narrative, impressionistic lessons, and child-led inquiry. Yet if the Five Great Lessons remain Eurocentric and static, they risk excluding the cultural knowledge of many learners. Research confirms that culturally responsive pedagogy fosters higher student engagement, academic persistence, and achievement (Gay, 2018). Allen et al. (2018) also demonstrate that belonging interventions in the classroom positively impact motivation and well-being.

For Montessori guides, this means approaching the Great Lessons as living narratives. Guides can introduce multiple cosmologies alongside astrophysics, highlight Indigenous ecological knowledge when presenting the coming of life, and integrate African, Asian, and Indigenous contributions in the stories of human beings, writing, and numbers. In practice, this could look like:

- *Presenting the Big Bang alongside Diné or Māori cosmologies, inviting students to compare how humans across cultures explain origins.*
- *Linking biodiversity studies with Indigenous ecological knowledge systems (Cajete, 2000; Berkes, 2012).*
- *Expanding the traditional stories to include Indigenous cosmologies, African origins, Asian contributions to mathematics and science, and oral traditions as legitimate knowledge systems.*
- *Embedding global migration maps into the story of humanity, showing the interconnectedness of civilizations.*

By doing so, guides foster not only knowledge but belonging, ensuring that every child finds a place in the cosmic narrative.



Leadership

Montessori school leaders are pivotal in sustaining belonging-centered education. Leadership studies emphasize that a culture of belonging must be modeled from the top: when leaders commit to belonging and equity, teacher retention improves and student well-being rises (Nagaoka & Holquist, 2021). For Montessori schools, leaders should include:

- *Allocating professional development resources for curriculum renewal and belonging-centered teaching.*
- *Facilitating school-wide dialogues about the Great Lessons as living texts.*
- *Equipping leaders with tools for engaging families, sustaining teacher well-being, and aligning Montessori practice with district SEL and equity goals (Nagaoka & Holquist, 2021).*
- *Creating structures for family and community engagement, integrating local cultural narratives into the life of the school.*

Such leadership transforms belonging from a classroom-level practice into a whole-school culture, aligning Montessori with broader district SEL frameworks and global educational goals.

Policy

Montessori organizations and networks have the opportunity to advocate for belonging-centered education as aligned with public education priorities. Many states have introduced literacy mandates and social-emotional learning standards that emphasize equity, inclusion, and cultural responsiveness (NCB, 2023; IES, 2024). Positioning Montessori as a model for integrating literacy, SEL, and belonging strengthens its credibility in public-sector contexts. Policy implications include:

- *Anchoring the Great Lessons in belonging science: meta-analyses linking school belonging to motivation, engagement, prosocial behavior, and achievement.*
- *Requiring districts to report on both global-competence activities and belonging trends to show culture-of-learning coherence.*
- *Indexing funds to belonging, bullying, and attendance metrics; requiring evidence-based belonging/values-affirmation practices and quarterly improvement cycles.*
- *Pairing universal climate strategies with culturally sustaining supports, and publish annual dashboards to drive accountability and continuous improvement.*

By engaging in policy advocacy, Montessori organizations can expand access to belonging-centered education, ensuring that cosmic education contributes to both individual flourishing and social justice.

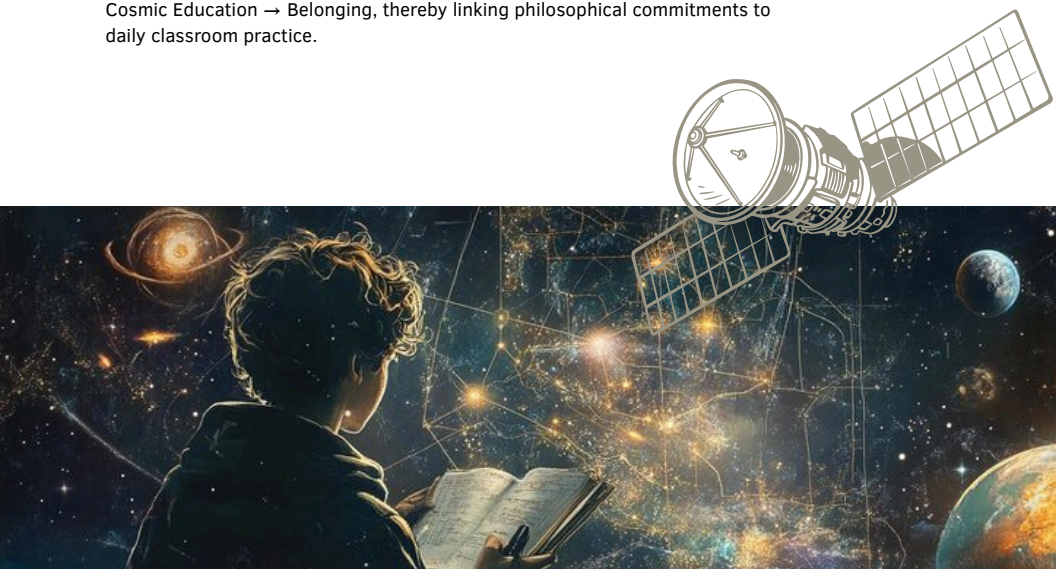


Conclusion

Revisiting the Great Lessons through belonging renews Montessori education for the twenty-first century. Montessori's universality—long envisioned as a pathway to peace—becomes a lived reality when children encounter themselves, their communities, and their ways of knowing within the cosmic narrative. Embedding belonging into these foundational stories affirms identity, cultivates empathy, and prepares learners to navigate an interconnected world. Convergent evidence links school belonging with motivation, persistence, engagement, achievement, and socioemotional well-being (Allen et al., 2018; Institute of Education Sciences [IES], 2024; NCB, 2023; Korpershoek et al., 2020).

Cross-system analyses from PISA show that schools with lower bullying and stronger school climate report higher belonging and better conditions for learning (OECD, 2019, 2024). U.S. surveillance (YRBS) further indicates that feeling cared for and “part of” school is associated with lower emotional distress, suicidality, violence exposure, and substance use, with protective effects that extend into adulthood (CDC, 2023; Steiner et al., 2019). Intervention studies also highlight that identity-affirming, membership-normalizing practices are linked with durable academic and health gains, particularly for historically marginalized students (Cohen & Garcia, 2008; Walton & Cohen, 2011). Taken together, these findings position belonging as an upstream performance multiplier—one that can reduce friction in learning systems and support compounding benefits across outcomes.

This renewal is not merely curricular but also ethical. Narrative justice requires that every child inherit a cosmic story that acknowledges their place in the human journey (Paris & Alim, 2022; see also Nagaoka & Holquist, 2021). A belonging-infused approach operationalizes this ethical charge by aligning Cosmic Vision → Cosmic Education → Belonging, thereby linking philosophical commitments to daily classroom practice.



Directional indicators from PISA 2022 also highlight equity friction points: first-generation immigrant students often report weaker belonging than non-immigrant peers (OECD, 2018, 2022). Accordingly, systems should hard-wire disaggregation by immigrant status, language background, race/ethnicity, and gender into local dashboards and improvement cycles—pairing universal, identity-safe practices with targeted, culturally sustaining supports. In doing so, Montessori's peace project moves from aspiration to execution: a cosmic narrative where every learner is seen, every classroom hums with connection, and outcomes rise together.

Publishing this white paper (a) establishes a shared scholarly frame that integrates Montessori philosophy with current belonging research; (b) translates vision into implementable design principles consistent with the prepared environment; (c) standardizes directional indicators and disaggregation routines to guide continuous improvement; and (d) sets a research and policy agenda for partnerships that can expand the Montessori evidence base (Allen et al., 2018; IES, 2024; OECD, 2022).

Cross-system variability and measurement constraints warrant caution in generalizing belonging effects; ongoing work should include subgroup analyses, longitudinal designs, and mixed-methods studies that integrate student voice (Nagaoka & Holquist, 2021). Future research should examine how specific Montessori practices (e.g., multi-age structures, grace-and-courtesy, prepared environment) mediate the relationship between belonging and academic and well-being outcomes.

In summary, centering belonging within the Great Lessons provides a philosophically faithful and empirically supported pathway to cultivate resilient, purposeful learners—advancing Montessori's peace project while meeting contemporary educational demands.

At the heart lies a question children carry with them: Where do I belong in the human story?

You Belong Here!



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