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Hybrid Montessori Education: Teacher Reflections on the Care and Education of Under-served Black Children

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Hybrid Montessori Education:

Teacher Reflections on the Care and Education of Under-served Black Children

A Dissertation in Education with a Concentration in Curriculum Studies

by

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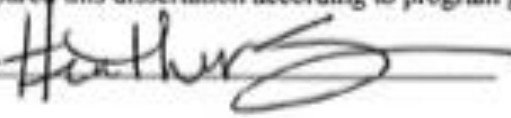
Certification of Authorship

I certify that I am the sole author of this dissertation. Any assistance received in the preparation of this dissertation has been acknowledged and disclosed within it. Any sources utilized, including the use of data, ideas, and words quoted directly or paraphrased, have been cited. I certify that I have prepared this dissertation according to program guidelines, as directed.

Author Signature  Date 5/10/22

ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study explores how Montessori educators in a public charter Montessori school experience Montessori education for low-income Black children. Using the methodology of a qualitative intrinsic case study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight educators (six teachers and two administrators). The participants are diverse in terms of age (26 to 54), race (three white, six African American), gender (two male and six female) and educational experience (2–25 years teaching). Education for Black children in the United States recounts histories of exclusion and segregation. Montessori education for children in the U.S. over the past 100 years shows a progression from exclusivity to inclusivity with the modern push for Montessori in the public sector. Neoliberal education reform is an important context to consider in the reproduction of injustice in American schools. This study's findings show that participants are responding to this injustice. Negotiating tension, these educators draw on Montessori philosophy, culturally responsive teaching practices, and the tenets of an education for social justice to meet the unique needs of students who are impacted by trauma, inequity, and structural racism. Blending educational traditions to become more responsive to the conditions created by oppressive constructs has created a path through the tension. Prospect Montessori educators enact a hybrid Montessori program that focuses on relationships, communication, and social/emotional learning. This study's educational implications stem from a call for Montessori education to examine its relevancy for under-served Black students.

Keywords: Montessori, Neoliberal education reform, culturally responsive teaching, social justice

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In loving memory of my mother

Dr. Marilyn Kay Moore

Thank you for always propping me up!

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

A Method for Liberation

The Montessori Method is a non-traditional, child-centered, and humane approach to classroom learning that is grounded in a philosophy for life (Lillard, 2017). The term Montessori is multi-faceted, often referring to more than just a method of education. It refers to Dr. Maria Montessori herself, physician, scientist, educator, and social activist, and extends to the Montessori Method, built from her philosophy of human development and child psychology. It also refers to a radical social movement in education spanning almost 115 years.

The guiding principle of the Montessori Method is: "teach me to do it myself" (Pitamic, 2004). This guiding principle emerged from Dr. Montessori's early realizations about child development in the Children's Houses she created in Rome. What Dr. Montessori found there and in other settings throughout her life went against the grain of traditional educational practices. Notions of children as blank slates to be written upon, or empty vessels to be filled with knowledge, were contrary to what she discovered in her observations and interactions with children (Lillard, 2017). Dr. Montessori understood that children possess a predetermined and invisible pattern for their own psychic development (Montessori, 1996). She found that all children (including those with disabilities) are equipped to learn through their own will and with their own hands (Montessori, 1917). She also found that each child has an undeniable need to actively participate in their own development (Lillard, 2017). She observed that for children to thrive, the adults who assist in their development must grant them freedom to participate in the learning process. This is evidence that the value of early and ongoing agency is at the heart of the Montessori Method.

Over time, it has been a great interest to many philosophers, theorists, economists, politicians, educators, and social activists, that agency is at the heart of liberation. Critical theorists in education closely examine the power relationships that are embedded in society (Freire, 1985; Giroux, 1997; hooks, 1994; Kozol, 2005). Giroux (1985) described Freire's cultural politics as "...the struggle against all forms of subjective and objective domination as well as the struggle for forms of knowledge, skills and social relations that provide the conditions for social and, hence, self-emancipation" (p. 110). Maria Montessori saw that self-emancipation can and should begin in early childhood, even infancy. When adults alter their role in the development of children, the power dynamic is shifted (Montessori, 1949).

According to Dr. Montessori, the role of the adult in a child's education is to "...undertake the construction of an environment that will provide the proper conditions for [the child's] normal development" (Montessori, 1949, p. 59). In this "prepared environment," children are not dominated by the adult forces of authoritarian discipline and over-prescribed curricula. Rather, they are guided by the adult as they work with prepared materials. The children construct meaning from their interaction with the materials and with others. They encounter their own challenges and overcome them as they reach milestones along their own individual timeline. In a Montessori classroom, this process is assisted by the teacher from birth through 24 years of age, as each child grows toward maturation as an adult (Montessori, 1989b; Lillard, 2017). In a Montessori-prepared environment, the knowledge, skills and social relations that are the avenues for social and self-emancipation are discovered authentically by the child with minimal adult interference. The child's own process of self-discovery is only delicately nurtured by the adult.

A Method for Social Justice

The Montessori Method was shaped by Maria Montessori's deep and lasting interest in child and human development, and guided by her orientation toward social justice (Kramer, 1976). Prior to the development of her method at the first Casa de Bambini in 1907, Montessori was known as an advocate for social reform and children's rights (especially children with disabilities). She was an early feminist who spoke out for equal rights, equal status, and equal pay for women at international women's conferences in 1896, 1898, and 1908 (Ayers, 2016). Social justice, according to Maria Montessori, was a vision of compassion for the future of humankind that begins in relationships with children (Ayers, 2016). As such, social justice emerges from the human relationships within the community as adults shift their outlook on childhood education to meet children where they are and to learn from the natural tendencies of children. Dr. Montessori's books, *Education and Peace (1944)* and *The Child, Society and the World (1979),* both offer a collection of her writings and speeches expressing the relationship between education, individuality, democracy, and social change (Montessori, 1944, 1979). It is not a surprise, therefore, that her pedagogical lens skews towards altering and refining the forms of assisting human development as a means of graduating to a higher form of humanity.

The Montessori Method emerged from Dr. Montessori's time spent with developmentally and socioeconomically disadvantaged children who, she learned, are developmentally no less capable than their more typically performing and affluent peers. Maria Montessori's method was and is intended to reverse oppressive constructs often found in traditional education. In a Montessori classroom, children are treated as individuals to be assisted and directed rather than vessels for prefabricated curricula, charges to be "dealt with," or laborers to be trained. Today, critical social theory in education works to make visible the hidden forms of oppression found in

schools as it works to understand the human experiences of poverty, racism, and discrimination in our social institutions. Social justice initiatives in education work to see "the day to day processes and actions utilized in classrooms and communities through the lens of critical analysis, action and praxis amongst all educational stakeholders (students, families, teachers, administrators, community members and organizations) with the goal of creating tangible change in communities, cities, nations and the larger world" (Katsarou et al., 2010, p. 139). While Maria Montessori's ideas predate those of critical theorists and social justice advocates of our day, and she is essentially left out of the discussion of critical social theory in education, her work to shift the power dynamic between adults (schools/curricula) and children speaks volumes to the principles of freedom and liberation that are central to critical theory and social justice in education. This is how I came to choose public Montessori education for under-served populations as my area of interest. It seems logical to me that Montessori education continues to come back to its roots, which are grounded in humanistic notions of liberation, justice, and equality at the earliest stages in human development.

The Impact of Neoliberal Education Reform

The Montessori Method has been appropriated across the nation and throughout the world over the past century in numerous settings: from one room school houses of the early 1900's, to private and parochial Catholic Schools of the 1950's, to desegregated public magnet schools in the 1970's, and today in private and public education, this approach is offered as an alternative educational method to families across lines of income and ethnicity. In the United States, the Montessori Method has seen three surges in popularity over the last 115 years. The first and second iterations of interest (in the early 1900's and again in the 1960's) were the result of a white, middle, and upper class desire for alternatives to traditional public schooling. The

third surge of interest is primarily a public-school movement addressing the needs of children in various income brackets and racial groups. The current Montessori initiative is thrust into the public sector and is often characterized by market-based school choice initiatives (Cossentino, 2009).

In the United States today, Montessori education is not ideally situated within the cultural politics of education. Although it is the largest alternative educational model operating as public education in the United States, it still exists as an opportunity for relatively few children (Debs, 2016a). As the Montessori movement works to make Montessori schooling available to more children in under-served contexts, it has become entangled in the mixed values influencing the public education system in this era. Montessori education aims to maintain its integrity and fidelity (to the elements that make it a complete and socially just method) within school environments impacted by neoliberal educational policy reform efforts that contribute in an immense way to the reproduction of injustice in our society (Hirsch, 2010).

Public magnet and public charter schools provide children of diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds more opportunities to engage in the Montessori Method. While access is at an all-time high, public Montessori schools are often hybrid versions of Maria Montessori's original method. As public schools, many Montessori magnets and charters do not operate without being constrained by the same structural inequity that is part of public education in the United States. It is critical to acknowledge Montessori education's position in the hegemonic structure of American public education. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) "underscore the difficulty (indeed, impossibility) of maintaining the spirit and intent for justice for the oppressed while simultaneously permitting the hegemonic rule of the oppressor" (p. 62). In many cases, Montessori programs continue to strive for social justice. In others, however, it is questionable

whether oppressive, neoliberal structures have made it impossible for public Montessori schools to rise above the challenges that these constructs present.

Neoliberal education reform challenges the ideals of liberty and social justice found at the heart of the Montessori Method. It presumes an even playing field for all individuals regardless of their racial or socioeconomic background (Kumashiro, 2008). Neoliberalism "…promotes personal responsibility through individual choice within markets" (Hursh, 2009, p. 496). It "holds that human well-being can best flourish within the framework of individualism, free markets, free trade and competition under which the role of government shifts from regulating markets to enabling them, and privatizing public services (Harvey, 2005 in Sleeter, 2012, p. 563). Neoliberal education reform privatizes schools and challenges them to operate like businesses where high standards are aligned with curriculum. In many privately funded charter school settings, teachers are expected to teach to the test and produce measured results in competitive settings. Children are often comparatively assessed and grouped according to their abilities. Standardized test scores and teacher performance measures play large roles in how public charter schools are rated, ranked, and funded. Funding is often not available for free lunch, busing, after-school programs, and educational support. In addition, a percentage of government funding is siphoned away from public schools and distributed to charter schools.

While racial and socioeconomic diversity in public Montessori schools was the result of Montessori themed programs placed in public magnet schools, Montessori charter schools seem to create more segregation than their surrounding districts (Debs, 2016b). What has been noted in current research is that Montessori Charter schools are either creating "white flight" from district schools (Renzulli & Evans, 2005) or these charter schools are enrolling primarily students of color (Frankenberg et al., 2010). Mira Debs (2016a), the Executive Director of Education Studies

at Yale University, conducted a study of *Racial and Economic Diversity in US Public Montessori Schools*. She found that there is a segregation pattern that occurs as upper and middle-class families find their way into a large percentage of spaces originally created for a mix of communities (Debs, 2016b). For example, in the case of *Magnolia Montessori School for All*, a public charter Montessori school in a low-income, Austin, Texas neighborhood, efforts to create integrated public Montessori programs have been thwarted as affluent, white families queue up to take positions that were intentionally created to mix students from different socioeconomic, racial, and cultural backgrounds (Abamu, 2018). In this case and in others, resisting gentrification reflects a commitment to diversity in schools where the hegemonic structures of neoliberal education reform impose themselves.

In the literature review, I examine further the Montessori movement's position in the socio-political context of education today, which is often dictated by neoliberal policy. Some say that by nature of its history in the United States as a method for some and not for all, the Montessori Method has contributed to the inequities and social injustices of education (Trondson, 2016; Debs, 2016a, 2016b). While this may be, the overwhelming interest of the current Montessori movement is to bring the method full-circle to its foundation as an approach that emerged from a desire to liberate the child as a means of liberating society (Montessori, 1979, NCMPS, 2016). This raises the issue of the extent to which Montessori education today might be a path toward social justice, or whether neoliberal education reform has presented considerable obstacles to that end point.

Problem Statement

Montessori education in the United States continues to evolve as times have changed. In certain contexts, it has retained its original emphasis on the themes of social justice. The current

context of neoliberal education reform offers Montessori education new opportunities to implement the Montessori Method in privately funded, public charter schools. Research indicates that Montessori education in the public sector is becoming more available to diverse groups of children in lower socioeconomic brackets predominantly in public magnet and public charter school settings. The problem that this research study aims to explore is one that faces the Montessori community at large. It is the problem of entanglement between the individualistic corporate interests of neoliberal education reform, which tend to further perpetuate inequities in education, and the driving principles of Montessori education, which are aligned with the values of liberty and social justice. As Debs (2016b) posited, public Montessori schools in the choice environments of charter and magnet schools, "...are at the front lines of the broader debate about school choice as an exclusionary or empowering practice. As such their story is a microcosm of the broader conflicts around public school choice" (p. 16). More succinctly, Labaree (1997) pointed out that Montessori public schools are sites of tension between the public goals of educating citizens and the private goals of serving consumers in a customized choice marketplace. Can the social justice principles that are the bedrock of Maria Montessori's method be retained and practiced in the contemporary context of privately-funded, public, charter schools? If so, how well are Montessori programs addressing the needs of culturally and socioeconomically diverse populations in public schools? More inquiry into how this position of entanglement impacts public, charter Montessori communities is needed to understand the function of Montessori education for under-resourced and culturally diverse populations.

Statement of Purpose

Today, Montessori education is once again seen as an alternative educational philosophy that has the potential to address the needs of children and their families in low-income

communities. Furthermore, interest in Montessori education in the public sector has intensified as more and more public schools adopt a Montessori approach. The purpose of this research is to contribute to a growing understanding of how Montessori education today functions outside of private school environments, as it addresses the diverse needs of children and their caregivers within these environments. This research looks specifically at one Black Montessori community in a segregated, low-income, urban neighborhood. The intention of this qualitative, intrinsic, case study is to examine the possible problems of entanglement present as Montessori exists within public education, while also gaining insight into the unique experience of public, charter, Montessori education for an under-resourced, Black school community. Teachers and administrators at Prospect Montessori School (name changed for purposes of anonymity) were given an opportunity to reflect on their current positions as stakeholders in an educational community whose goal is to seek social justice for students and their families as they practice the Montessori Method in a public charter school.

To begin this research study, I situated Montessori education within the larger discussion of education and educational reform over time. Montessori educational initiatives are contextualized within the greater story of American education in the 20th century, ending with the current thrust for Montessori education in the public sector. The literature review looks at the tension points in the struggle of Montessori education in America. It reveals the variance between the original and idealized intents of the Montessori Method and what has been practiced in various contexts over time. In addition, it juxtaposes Montessori philosophy with mainstream practices in public schools for diverse populations.

While there is research that clearly demonstrates that students in low-income communities who attend public Montessori schools are out-performing their traditionally

schooled peers in the same communities (Lillard & Else-Quest, 2006, Lillard, 2017), there is a lot more to consider in schooling than measures of performance. In fact, many would argue that measuring performance is the antithesis of practicing social justice in schools today (Kohn, 2000; Kozol, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2017; Ravitch, 2016). It was my intent to learn more about how Montessori education, in the context of this school, is currently functioning for the participants of this study.

Research Questions

This research study explored the question: What role does a public, charter Montessori school play in the education of Black children in one under-served community? The following sub-questions work together to break down the larger question and focus on distinct facets:

1. What conditions have shaped the culture of Prospect Montessori School?
2. How are Prospect Montessori School educators responding to the impacts of those conditions?
3. How does Prospect Montessori School characterize and operationalize education for social justice in its teacher and administrator daily practices and overall school culture?

Overview of Methodology

For the purposes of this research, a qualitative, intrinsic case study was employed to examine the individual and collective experience of public, charter Montessori education at Prospect Montessori School as it contributes to the larger collective definition of public, charter Montessori schooling in the contemporary era. A case is defined by Miles and Huberman (1994) as “a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context” (p. 25). The case is the unit of analysis. According to Yin (2017), a case study design should be considered when: (a) the focus of the study is to answer “how” and “why” questions; (b) the researcher cannot manipulate the

behavior of those involved in the study; (c) the researcher wants to cover contextual conditions believed to be relevant to the phenomenon under study; or (d) the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context.

Prospect Montessori School is a bounded context wherein the unique experience of Montessori education shapes the behaviors and actions of those within this community. Prospect Montessori School serves 520 students. Ninety-six percent of the school's families are considered low-income, and 96% of the school's families are Black. Latino families represent 3% of the school, and 1% of the families are other races (School Report Card, 2021). The school exists within a divested community in an urban setting in the Midwest. It was established in 2012 and has grown to include grades pre-K through 8. Prospect Montessori School is an open enrollment, free, public charter school for students living within the city limits. The school particularly encourages families in the local community to apply. An admission lottery is held each spring, and admission from the waiting list is ongoing as space becomes available.

Within the context of a public charter Montessori school serving predominantly Black children from an under-resourced urban neighborhood, Montessori practices are believed to take a new shape to meet the needs of this group. This study includes six teachers and two administrators from Prospect Montessori School. To answer the research question, which aims to unpack how this unique experience looks and feels for this group of participants, these teachers and administrators were individually interviewed. During the interviews, the participants were asked a variety of questions that prompted them to share how the Montessori Method looks and feels within their community and how they may culturally adapt the Montessori Method to suit the specific needs of the students and families served by the school.

A case study produces a detailed description of the setting and participants. It is accompanied by an analysis of the collected data for themes, patterns, and issues (Merriam & Grenier, 2019; Stake, 1995). In this case, the information obtained through interviews and focus groups was transcribed verbatim, peer-reviewed, and approved by the participants. The details of the interview data were then closely examined and coded by the researcher. Coding categories were developed and refined on an ongoing basis, guided by the study's theoretical framework.

Rationale and Significance

Montessori education continues to make headlines in the news as a successful methodology for young children from any background and especially for those in high-risk, low-resource settings. It was beneficial to hear more from educational practitioners within these communities. What was learned from the participants in this study about the application of the Montessori Method at Prospect Montessori School holds the potential to shed some light on how to apply Montessori practices within similar communities across the nation.

In addition, this qualitative intrinsic case study recognizes the constructs of hegemony and oppression in tension with agency and social justice as they play a significant role in the reality of a segregated, public, charter, Montessori school that exists in one of the most divested Black neighborhoods in the nation. There is no way to escape the political and social constructs responsible for poverty and oppression in our nation. These same constructs shape all public institutions of education in the United States. Exploring how these constructs allow for the alternative practices of Montessori education in the public sphere, while simultaneously complicating and sometimes compromising the core values of a Montessori education, is a worthwhile endeavor. This research should be of interest to Montessori advocates and educational practitioners seeking social justice in public education.

Role of the Researcher

According to Ravitch and Carl (2015), "the role of the researcher influences all aspects of the study" (p. 18). The researcher's tacit theories and working conceptualizations stem from their social position and are part of their overall identity (Ravitch & Carl, 2015). At the time of this study, I am a parent to three children who, in the recent past, attended a private Montessori school in an urban setting. I also have experience conducting research in public Montessori schools in this same urban setting. In addition, I serve on the board of a Montessori start-up in a neighboring urban community. Thus, I bring to the inquiry process general knowledge of the urban public and private Montessori experience through the eyes of a parent, researcher, and administrator. While I am not a "native" Montessorian (teacher or student), I do have some inside knowledge that influences my perspective. I acknowledge that my Montessori experiences have shaped the angle from which I view this work.

Ladson-Billings (1995) said that situating oneself as a researcher tells a story about who the researcher is, what she believes, and what experiences she has had that impact what, how, and why she researches. When I was a little girl, I watched my mother carefully. She was inclined to interact with others in a compassionate manner. She would say to me, "Heather, imagine what it would be like to be that person." It could have been a farmer on his tractor in the middle of a field, a mother crossing the street with three children in tow, a heavier person going for a jog, or the only boy in my ballet class. She would always acknowledge the complexity of the human experience, and she always gave credit to anyone who looked like they were trying. While I'm sure my mother had her own built-in biases due to her working class southside Irish upbringing, she was always conscious of others. She taught us the importance of looking past stereotypes. She wanted us to find a way to relate to other people whom we may have perceived

to be different from ourselves on the surface. Essentially, she emphasized the importance of making connections and seeing ourselves in others. Her fair complexion, light hair, and light green eyes allowed her access and mobility in the United States. However, the gift of privilege did not blind her eyes to injustice. As a result, she found her calling as an educator. My mother's first teaching job was in a classroom just outside her own segregated neighborhood, where she guided thirty-five African American first graders through each day. Her actions as an educator, a community member, a sister, a daughter, a wife, and a mother showed my three sisters and me that relationships matter, and that all people are uniquely connected to one another no matter the culture or circumstances to which they are born. She would often ask us to pause and consider our own perspectives and to question them. She tried to give voice to other perspectives to open our minds.

My siblings and I did not grow up with material wealth, but our basic needs were always met. We were raised on a teacher's salary in a college town, and we were economically not too unlike our peers. Although our economic situation was modest at best, it is worth saying that we had a certain sense of privilege that was inherently embedded in our lives and our futures, because we are white. We could exist without racial discrimination in our community. We had options and resources at our fingertips. We were often told by figures of authority that our dreams could be achieved. Although I was raised by people who saw that to live purposefully was to work toward outcomes of equality, it does not change the fact that we are white, and as such, we have enjoyed privileges that are often hard to come by for our racially and socio-economically different peers.

I feel that each day of my life presents a new opportunity to identify and deconstruct possible biases. As an undergraduate, I studied sociology and anthropology. I have traveled to

far-away places, lived as a minority within other cultures, and I have been uncomfortable enough to gain new insight. Mostly, I have learned that there is much that I do not know and that there is even more that I will never know about people and places. I make it my ongoing mission to gain new perspectives from others.

Researcher Assumptions

Based on the research gathered around this topic, four primary assumptions are made. Each one of these assumptions serves as a pillar to support the justification and importance of this undertaking.

First, this research assumes that the Montessori Method has been and always will be far more than an instructional method. When Maria Montessori set out to work with children and families, she set out to dramatically alter the way we assist human development. More broadly, she set out to change the landscape of society using parent education and childhood education as a vehicle. In her lifetime, the Montessori Method evolved to be a philosophy of life that Dr. Montessori believed had the capability to advance humanity.

Second, this research assumes that embedded in the Montessori movement, there remains a desire to work through the method for social justice. In the United States, Montessori education has been largely a method for affluent, white populations. Although Montessori education is implemented across the globe with children and families of diverse socioeconomic and sociocultural backgrounds, it remains on the margins of mainstream education. Various tension points through its 115-year lifespan illustrate the difficulties that the Montessori movement has faced in gaining status as a mainstream movement meeting the needs of diverse groups. Therefore the method has been implemented more often in private school settings, less often serving socioeconomically and socio-culturally diverse communities. Organizations such as The

National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector exemplify the larger desire of organized Montessori educators to seek social justice through Montessori practices.

Third, this research assumes that Montessori education in the neoliberal era has as its goal addressing the unique needs of communities. Today, Montessori education is pushing toward more acceptance in the public sphere and has gained momentum in the era of public school choice. Montessori advocates remain neutral on the privatization of public education as more Montessori programs are emerging in public charter schools.

Finally, this research assumes that public Montessori education provides an opportunity for school communities to engage in an education for social justice. Pedagogically blended traditional public schools and public charter Montessori environments are ripe for exploration as they are not only a mix of political and educational values but also populated by diverse groups with varying cultural and socioeconomic characteristics. Life in these schools reflects society at large. The more attention the research community can give to this phenomenon, the better we will understand the possibilities that the Montessori philosophy can offer in the public education sphere.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Introduction

In this chapter, I explore the Montessori Method, its position in the context of mainstream public education in the United States, and its relevance to culturally and economically diverse populations. First, I bring the unique and radical ideas of Maria Montessori into focus. Considering the literature regarding minimal public knowledge of Montessori philosophy and pedagogy (Murray, 2008b, 2012), it is important to begin by detailing key components of Dr. Montessori's philosophy of childhood and the essential components of The Montessori Method. Second, this literature review contextualizes the struggle for Montessori education in the United States over time. This is critical as the journey from early American adoption of the Montessori Method in the early 1900's to the current surge in interest for expansion in the public sector leaves one wondering why the Montessori Method is not a larger component of mainstream public education in the United States. This history also shows how Montessori education has come to contribute to the imbalances that create and sustain educational debt for racially and socioeconomically diverse populations (Debs, 2016b; Trondson, 2016; Whitescarver & Cossentino, 2008). Third, this review illuminates the possibilities for Montessori education and for society, examining current research that looks at the effectiveness of Montessori programs for diverse populations in public school settings. Current research points to positive outcomes and a need for further refinement (Lillard, 2017). Finally, in a description of the conceptual framework, the review looks at the congruency between Montessori pedagogy, culturally responsive teaching, and education for social justice. This segment comes full circle as I return to Dr. Montessori's original vision of a method that seeks to serve the community in which it is

situated and sets the stage for further exploration of Montessori education as culturally relevant for specific under-resourced and culturally diverse populations. In doing so, this discussion situates the Montessori Movement in a prime position to work for liberation and social justice in education.

Philosophy

A New Education

At the sixth International Montessori Congress in 1937, Maria Montessori spoke humbly of her method, stating that she had not evolved a method of education, but rather that it was necessary for her to discuss child psychology, "for it is the psychology of the child, the life of his soul, that has gradually dictated what might be called a pedagogy and a method of education" (Montessori, 2007, p. 76). The aim of what she called "the new education" was to discover the child and to liberate them (Montessori, 1996, p. 88). To liberate the child meant to see the child, their soul, freed from obstacles, and acting in accordance with their true nature (1996). In this same address and in many other instances, Montessori spoke of the reverse nature of other methods of education, where adults seek to educate the child according to programs dictated by adults. Outmoded ideas in education, such as the school as a factory and the child in preparation for factory work, persist in the 21st century (Lillard, 2017). It was Dr. Montessori's belief that "the child himself, must be the pivot of his own education—not the child as people ordinarily think of him, but rather his innermost soul" (p. 76). To come upon a method for educating the child, Montessori decided that she must allow herself to be led by the child.

Child as Spiritual Embryo

In the spirit of this realization, Maria Montessori constructed a philosophy of psychological development based on her scientific and intuitive observations of children (Lillard,

1972). “This philosophy was in the tradition of Jean Jacques Rousseau, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, and Friedrich Froebel, who had emphasized the innate potential of the child and his ability to develop in environmental conditions of love and freedom” (Lillard, 1972, p. 29). Where Dr. Montessori immediately differs is in her emphasis on childhood as an entity of its own. Childhood was not emphasized in educational philosophies that predated Maria Montessori’s philosophy (Lillard, 1972).

Maria Montessori suggested that what adults seek to know about the psychic life of humankind can be learned as they observe and assist the psychological self-construction of the child (Montessori, 1996). To explain her thoughts on the nature of self-construction, Montessori expressed her scientific and spiritual conclusion that each human being “must possess within him, before birth, a pattern for his psychic unfolding” (Lillard, 1972, p. 30). She referred to this concept as the *spiritual embryo*. She compared it scientifically to the original fertilized cell in the body:

> Every living creature comes from a primary, simple and undifferentiated cell. The tiny plant within the seed is an embryo. The germ cell, not unlike the human embryo, transparent and devoid of any material design, works and builds in exact obedience to the immaterial order it bears within itself. (Montessori, 1996, pp. 11–12)

In an era when the child was thought of as an empty vessel to be filled with knowledge deciphered by the adult, Dr. Montessori’s notion of the child as possessing a predetermined and invisible pattern for their own psychic development was a radical departure from the status quo (Lillard, 1972).

Essential Elements

Montessori's vision of the child as *spiritual embryo* shed new light on the role of the parent, educator, and school in the child's life. Schooling, according to her vision, can no longer be the imposition of society upon the child (Montessori, 1979). That the mind of the child is different from the adult, and that the child will go through a predictable series of changes, are notions that all but a few child psychologists, educators, and parents recognize as truisms today (Chattin-McNichols, 1992). She further explained that because the mind of the child is different from time to time in the child's life, the educational system must respond to these changes by structuring the model of school around the differing developmental stages in the lives of children. Determining the structure and content of education should consider the child's needs rather than societal expectations (Chattin-McNichols, 1992). Montessori saw that to support children, schools should "seek to protect them, cultivate them and assist in their development" (Montessori, 1966, p. 118). To proceed with educative development, Montessori felt that it would first be necessary to establish the conditions of an environment favoring the natural development of the child. In her work, she repeatedly emphasized three essential elements. It is interesting to note that these elements revealed themselves by chance because of the circumstances surrounding her initial observations of the children's houses in the tenement buildings of San Lorenzo, Rome. Although growing up in poverty with very little by way of resources or adult assistance, these children were like any other children in that their latent developmental potential became clearly accessible when nurtured by the *teacher*, the *environment,* and the *materials* of the classroom.

The first essential element in an environment that favors the natural development of the child is *the humility of the teacher*. Montessori (1966) believed that teachers should be initiated

into a new form of moral and inward preparation, within which one considers one's own defects before considering the child to be flawed or devious in any way. This inner moral preparation is to be thought of in the general sense, and does not require the educator to seek perfection; rather, it asks the adult to be aware of their own tendencies toward pride, intellectual attachment, and subsequent anger directed at children. Montessori (1936) also saw that mental lumber stood in the way of "intellectual calm," "spiritual humility," and charity. She believed that the adult can truly "…see the child and genuinely assist in psychological development only if he has cultivated in himself certain aptitudes of moral order" (Montessori & Carter, 1936, p. 89). Montessori also felt strongly that the adult, without intending to do so, often hinders the development of the child and that the "adult environment is not the life-giving environment" that we suppose it to be, but rather an "…accumulation of obstacles, leading [the child] to a creation of defenses, deforming her efforts at adaptations and rendering her as a victim of suggestion" (Montessori & Carter, 1936, p. 87). Similarly, Delpit (2006) and Yezbick (2007), also support that the teacher's role according to Montessori's philosophy is to seek to know the lives of the children within their charge. For Montessori, understanding the developmental needs of the child included not only a willingness to understand childhood, but also a desire to know the uniqueness of each child as an individual. To do so, the adult guide must step out of her own way, recognizing that she "has come not only to teach, but to live the very life they live, a gentlewoman of culture, an educator by profession, who dedicates her time and her life to helping those about her" (Montessori & Carter, 1936, p. 89).

The second essential element favoring the natural development of the child is *a pleasant environment* where children feel no constraint. The Montessori classroom should be clean, bright, and orderly and should accommodate the size of the children it hosts. If possible, it

should provide access to a safe outdoor lawn or courtyard. The teacher should serve as the custodian of what Montessori called the "prepared environment" (Montessori & Carter, 1936). The freedom of the children to choose their own work must be supported by an orderly environment full of enriching and developmentally appropriate work from which to choose (Eissler, 2009). The original Casa dei Bambini was a modest accommodation for the first children in Montessori's care. An empty room on the ground level of the tenement building was gradually filled in an orderly fashion with simple materials piquing the children's interests. Because there was no furniture available, Dr. Montessori commissioned woodworkers to make furniture scaled to fit the size of the children. In this simple and beautifully organized space, she saw that the order of the physical space aided the children in the process of ordering their minds (Lillard, 2017).

The third essential element favoring the natural development of the child is *the provision of suitable and alluring scientific material*. The materials should provide sensory experiences and awaken concentration (Montessori & Carter, 1936, p. 119). The Montessori classroom is thus arranged in a manner that offers children access to material objects for the exploration of specific subject areas. Objects and tools used in mathematics, language, art, science, and music, as well as materials for use in areas of practical life, are divided according to subject and placed in an orderly fashion on low shelving. Lillard (2017) points out that this approach "contrasts sharply with traditional education, in which learning is derived largely from texts" (p. 20). Thus, in the primary outline of Montessori's educational method, we see the teacher, the environment, and the apparatus as the essential elements.

Principles of Education

Successive internal developments that followed these somewhat accidental yet primary external elements of her method are best described as evolutionary. Montessori referred to this work as the first in human society to be guided by the child (Montessori & Carter, 1936). Because of her unwillingness to impose preconceived notions of childhood and education upon children, the principles of education presented themselves to her at first as unexpected revelations. Dr. Montessori noticed that regardless of ability or environment, specific natural tendencies exist in young children to fulfill their latent programming for optimal development (Montessori, 1966). She felt that where the child was assisted in their development, these tendencies would lead to increased intelligence, creativity, and emotional and spiritual development. These tendencies include a desire for meaningful work, the development of attention, a desire and goal for independence, and ultimately the practice of self-discipline (Lillard, 1972). What she witnessed time and again was the self-construction of the human in childhood.

Lillard (2017) articulated the revelations of self-construction that emerged in the early days of Montessori education. Each principle remains an integral part of the Montessori Method today. Paraphrasing Lillard (2017), the nine principles of Montessori education are listed and described below.

Movement and Cognition are closely intertwined, and movement can enhance thinking. Montessori asserted that our brains evolve in a world in which we move and do. She noted that thinking seems to be expressed by the hands before we can put our thought into words.

Learning and well-being are improved when people have a sense of control over their lives. Montessori noted that children seem to thrive on having choice and control of their learning and

their environment. She envisioned the development of the child increasingly moving away from dependence upon mentors and towards independence in their environments.

The ability to direct one's attention in a sustained and concentrated way fosters an array of positive developments and is itself trainable. Montessori realized that developing the ability to concentrate was associated with changes in the personality called "normalization." In this state, the human is so deeply focused on the task that distractibility falls by the wayside. In fact, in her early work in San Lorenzo, Dr. Montessori could lift the chair of a young child at work and move it across the room as the child continued to work, unaware of the movement, deep in concentration. Research today in developmental psychology supports the positive effects of the meditative quality of work (Csikszentmihaly & Csikszentmihaly, 1990). Children emerge from bouts of deep concentration at peace.

The best learning occurs in authentic contexts of interest. These contexts are sometimes initiated and inspired by Montessori teachers who are trained to give just enough information to pique a child's curiosity. Other times they are initiated by other adult figures and children in a child's life. Dr. Montessori designed instruments based on her observations of the way children seemed to be interested in exploring.

Extrinsic rewards are avoided. The awards in Montessori Schools are internal to the individual child and based on their own personal accomplishments. Montessori found repeatedly that tying extrinsic rewards to an activity negatively impacts motivation to engage in that activity when the reward is withdrawn.

Learning with and from peers. Montessori found that collaborative arrangements can be conducive to learning. Children work in line with what developmental psychologists know about

children's varying levels of need to work in a social capacity as they graduate from primary to elementary to adolescence and beyond.

Learning within context. Rather than learning largely from what teachers and texts say, children in Montessori programs learn largely by doing. *Learning situated in meaningful contexts is often deeper and richer than learning in abstract contexts.*

Teacher ways and child ways addresses how teachers should act with children. This principle urges them to provide boundaries but to set children free within them. This style is consistent with what is called authoritative parenting. *Certain forms of adult interaction are associated with more optimal child outcomes.*

Order in environment and mind. Montessori classrooms are orderly both physically and conceptually because they act as the structure that allows for freedom in intellectual adventure. Order in the environment is beneficial to children (Lillard, 2017, p. 29).

The Montessori Classroom

Differences

Chattin-McNichols (1992b) stated that one of the reasons for the rise and fall of Montessori schooling in the United States is the amount of misinformation that exists. Misconceptions in many cases are the outcome of the historical tensions surrounding Maria Montessori, her philosophy, and her method. Today these tensions still include the belief that Montessori schooling is just for certain types of learners (e.g., students with special needs, students with special talents), that it is cult-like and lacking in diversity, that it is for only the rich or the poor, that it is too structured or too free, that it is not academic enough, and that it is out of date (Chattin-McNichols, 2016). Montessorians have long believed that people outside the

Montessori community lack an understanding of their approach to education (Chattin-McNichols, 1998). However, in a large-scale study examining the general public's perceptions of Montessori education, Murray (2008b) found that "the Montessori community can build off the high level of awareness of the Montessori name in the public as well as fairly positive predispositions toward the Montessori approach to education" (p. 74). Murray's (2008b) study supports that dissonance does in fact exist. Her research provides strong evidence for the need to educate the public regarding several aspects of Montessori education. She found that "this is particularly true for those aspects of Montessori education that are unique relative to other educational approaches" (p. 74). Trondson (2016) took it one step further, saying that one reason why Montessori education is understood by fewer people in non-white and non-affluent communities, in an era of 20-second YouTube clips, is because the movement does not have a concise and clear message that Montessori education can serve any child well. Trondson suggests that Montessori advocates work to highlight Montessori principles that align with what families in various communities are seeking for their children (2017).

The essential elements of the Montessori Method (the environment, the teacher, and the materials), accompanied by the nine principles for classroom learning observed in process by Maria Montessori, create the backbone of the Montessori Method. In the review of Montessori philosophy, we come to understand that learning is a process of self-construction (Lillard, 1996). Montessori emphasized the importance of a "prepared environment" to allow children the freedom necessary for optimal development/self-construction. The Montessori environment is designed to provide children with freedom, structure, materials, and a supportive community. The following is a description of some of the special features of the Montessori classroom that have evolved over time and have been replicated in Montessori classrooms across the world.

Montessori Classroom Features

Montessori schooling is characterized by large, open classrooms hosting children ranging in 3-year age spans (0–3, 3–6, 6–9, 9–12). The children remain with the same teacher for a three-year cycle. In this environment, children can work independently at their own pace or in small, mixed-age groupings according to ability and interest (Charlap, 1999). The tables and bookshelves are sized to match the children working in that space, and much of the day is spent moving about the room from one form of work to another. Children work without much interruption from adults during three-hour work cycles. Teachers are present but can often not be located at first glance as they are not directing large groups at the head of the room but rather facilitating small groups or working with individual children (Lillard, 2017). In well-implemented Montessori schools, children behave as members of a small community. Even the youngest students care for the materials with a show of utmost respect, clean up after themselves, and remind one another to do the same if a child is out of step.

The world of the Montessori classroom is a world that reaches beyond the walls of the school, outward from the minds of the children as they explore areas of personal interest in detail, and with very little direct instruction from adults. In the primary classroom (ages 3–6), the materials of the prepared environment were developed by Maria Montessori as tools to teach math, reading, and skills for practical life. Each set of materials supplies the child with information about their progress in the fashion of auto-correction. The apparatus of the Montessori classroom makes mistakes self-evident. As a result, the child sees their own error, uses problem solving skills to find the solution, and completes the task without the intervention of an adult. Elementary classrooms are rich with tools and reading materials for self-education in language arts, math, and the sciences. The teacher assesses their students through observation

and interaction with the individual child (Montessori, 1964). Even though a large proportion of Montessori schools are preschools, Montessori programs exist for children of all ages ranging from infants (0–3 yrs.) through high school (Lillard & Else-Quest, 2006).

As is made evident here, the Montessori Method is an individualized approach with a long-term perspective (Murray, 2008a). Lillard (1996) explained, that the success of Montessori education is based on the understanding that from the beginning, the child's education must be viewed in its entirety. Goals and methods at each age level must fit together to form a cohesive whole, from birth to adulthood. As one can see, Maria Montessori's philosophy and method of education are much more than a set of ideas about curriculum and instruction tested on children. Cossentino and Whitcomb (2007) found that "what has come to be known as the Montessori Method is a comprehensive, highly elaborated, and fully integrated system of intellectual, social and moral development" (p. 111). Modern research in psychology suggests that Maria Montessori's insight and the system that she crafted is better suited to how children learn and develop than the conventional schooling system that has prevailed in the United States over the past century (Lillard, 2017).

As I turn to look at Montessori education in a historical context, I further examine the factors that have kept this method in the margins and mainly out of public education in the United States, where children of diverse socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds are served. Although recognition for the Montessori Method continues to grow, and research points to the fact that it is well suited to serve the needs of culturally and socioeconomically diverse populations, the Montessori Method remains less accessible to children in low-income settings. As the Montessori Method expands into the public sector, reaching more diverse groups of children, the Montessori community would do well to re-examine itself as a movement

responsible for respecting the different needs of culturally and socioeconomically diverse populations.

Rooted in Social Justice

Maria Montessori's first school, Casa dei Bambini, served the children of a housing development for low-income families in Rome (Bermel, 1976; Standing, 1957). What is not as well known is that her schools multiplied rapidly in similar environments across Rome. These children's houses, as they were called, were situated within tenement buildings and were each operated by a directress living in that very tenement (Kramer, 1988). The schools provided not only a daytime home and physical care for preschool age children but also peace of mind and resources for their families. Montessori delivered an inaugural address following the opening of the second Casa dei Bambini in April, 1907. In her address, she described the Casa dei Bambini as a new kind of educating institution, part of a social program "directed towards the redemption of an entire community" (Kramer, 1988, p. 123). More specifically, Montessori saw that by putting the school within the home (tenement building) maintained by a portion of the rent paid, it had become the property of the community. She felt that this was a beautiful opportunity to reach into the home and modify the environment of the next generation. Montessori described this socialization of the home as a way of freeing women who could now go off to work peacefully, knowing that their children were in the care of the directress and the house physician (Kramer, 1988). As it turned out, it was not just the poor who needed this redemption and equalization. Maria Montessori received many letters from middle-class women whom she characterized as "working with their brains" outside of the home. These women also wanted access to what Montessori called "communizing the maternal function" (Kramer, 1988, p. 123).

A common thread through the history of Montessori education is the emphasis on the holistic care of the child (physically, intellectually, socially, psychologically, and spiritually) (Lillard, 2017). A second common thread is the desire of parents (especially mothers) to have access to this all-encompassing care for their children outside of the home and prior to the standard school age of 5–6 years old. From the tenement buildings of Rome in the early 1900's to the public-school classrooms of the 21st century, Montessori education has provided for children and for their families in ways that address more than the basic needs of the child. The Montessori Method addresses children's relationship to themselves, their peers, their family, and to society. Maria Montessori's lifetime of work evolved to encompass the needs of humanity through the complete education of the child. It is no wonder that this method continues to re-emerge at various points throughout American history as a means of addressing the needs of children and parents within the broader context of society. A brief look at three separate but similar phases of emerging interest in Montessori education in the United States help to identify the reasons for the initial and renewed attention to this alternative model. This overview will also make clear the tensions Montessori education has faced and continues to encounter in the larger educational landscape of the United States in the last century.

The Montessori Method in the United States

A Turn Toward Affluence

At the turn of the century, news of Dr. Montessori's method spread rapidly in the United States due to favorable publications in a popular American monthly magazine, entitled McClure's (Tassin, 1915). The publisher, S.S. McClure, hired respected journalists to do extensive research on their topics in what was then a new tradition called muckraking or watchdog journalism. According to Fang (1997), *McClure's Magazine* helped to shape the moral

compass in the early 1900's. It published a series of articles on Maria Montessori and her "miracle children" of San Lorenzo. These articles written primarily by journalists Josephine Tozier and Ellen Yale Stevens between 1911 and 1914 (Montessori Observer, 2017) provided an overview of the Montessori Method, an examination of Montessori materials and apparatus, the discovery of a new form of classroom discipline, a comparison between American Kindergarten and Montessori classrooms, and several articles devoted to the Montessori Movement in America. At the time of these publications, *McClure's* had a circulation of well over 400,000 readers (Whitescarver & Cossentino, 2008). These articles induced great interest from the magazine's target audience, which was largely urban, middle/upper-class, and of European descent. Those who were impressed by Montessori's ability to teach children to read, write, and care for themselves at such a young age were described by Tozier (1911) as being ready for Montessori's message (Whitescarver & Cossentino, 2008). The reaction to the first publication describing Maria Montessori and her methods was "so intense" that McClure decided to print numerous letters written by readers commenting on the ideas they had encountered in her work. At the same time, he promised to print more articles and made mention that Harvard's Department of Education had decided to translate *Il Metodo della Pedagogia Scientifica applicato all'educazione infantile nelle Case dei Bambini* to "The Montessori Method" (Whitescarver & Cossentino, 2008). Montessori made several visits to the United States to give speeches and meet with influential figures interested in her work.

The first movement in the United States was a picture of rapid growth and excitement. The first Montessori school in America opened in the fall of 1911 in Scarborough, NY in the home of Frank Vanderlip, a leading banker at the time (Whitescarver, 2010a). As time passed and publicity remained favorable, additional Montessori schools opened across the country.

Alexander Graham Bell and his wife Mabel Bell were among some of the strong initial supporters of the Montessori Method. The Bells opened two Montessori Schools, one in Nova Scotia and one in Washington D.C., in the year 1912 (Whitescarver, 2010a).

By 1913, there were nearly 100 Montessori schools in America (Kramer, 1988). At that time, Alexander Graham Bell's enthusiasm motivated him to create the *Montessori Educational Association* formed by a group of Washington parents with Mrs. Bell as the president (Kramer, 1988). While Montessori accepted the association as an organization for the spread of her ideas in the United States, she was protective of her method, for fear that it would be replicated improperly. From her point of view, it did not matter that others were gaining exposure to her work; it was troubling to her that they were using the method and training teachers without her permission or direct instruction. It became clear that Dr. Montessori's influence on the use of her method in the United States was moving beyond her locus of control (Kramer, 1988).

Public Sector Beginnings in the United States

The Montessori Method was not only adopted by the affluent, but it was also beginning to be mainstreamed into public education by those who admired Dr. Montessori's work with the children of San Lorenzo. In addition to two publicly funded Montessori programs for deaf students, Montessori classrooms were started in the public schools of Los Angeles, California and Rhode Island in 1913 (Whitescarver & Cossentino, 2006). In fact, from 1913–1921, as the result of a report written about a successful four-year program run by Clara Craig, a Montessori teacher trained in Rome, the Rhode Island State Board of Education declared the Montessori Method the official educational pedagogy of Rhode Island Public Schools (Coleman, 2011). While it was short-lived, this declaration illustrates the enthusiasm that the Montessori Method

generated in educators and policy makers of this time. It also illustrates the tenuous nature of the Montessori Method's influence on long term academic reform.

While many progressive era reformers lauded Dr. Montessori's new constructive educational approach, there were some who criticized its lofty nature. There were many educators, parents, and entrepreneurs interested in the spread of her method who also found fault with Montessori's need to be a figure of authority. They felt it was "hardly appropriate that an educational method should be made into a closed system with a head of hierarchy having the sole power to determine who could disseminate it" (Kramer, 1988, p. 181). In American culture at that time, Montessori's Method seemed closed off and even church-like (Kramer, 1988). In addition, due to her use of romantic and often overly scientific language to describe her philosophy, Montessori's work was misinterpreted by other educators of the time (Whitescarver & Cossentino, 2008). Even today, misinterpretations of Dr. Montessori's method contribute to its marginalization from mainstream education (Murray, 2008b).

A Harsh Critic, Misinterpreted Intentions

There was one progressive reformer and disciple of John Dewey whose misunderstandings of the Montessori Method and public criticism of Dr. Montessori led to a decline in the initial wave of interest in Montessori in public sector and private education. William Heard Kilpatrick (1914) wrote *The Montessori System Examined* based on his interpretation of the English translation of *The Montessori Method* and a few visits to Montessori classrooms in Rome (Thayer-Bacon, 2012b). He criticized the degree of freedom he witnessed, the prescribed use of Montessori's didactic materials, and the lack of emphasis on imaginative play (Shortridge, 2007). Kramer (1988), who devoted an entire chapter of her biography of Maria Montessori to Kilpatrick's negative impact on Maria Montessori's reception in America,

described Kilpatrick as “the best-known teacher of his generation” (p. 227). He had an immense influence on an entire generation of educators from around the world and used his position to dismantle the good reputation of the Montessori Method. While he claimed to be impartial in his critique of Montessori, it was no secret that he was a loyal follower of John Dewey (Thayer-Bacon, 2012a). Kilpatrick’s criticisms were vague, indicating his lack of understanding of the method. He felt that Dr. Montessori was fifty years behind in her educational psychology, that she had no new or good ideas, and that, if they were good at all, they were better articulated by his mentor, John Dewey. Kramer (1988) also suggested that despite the public’s interest and the high profile support that Montessori received upon her introduction to the United States, her

> …educational techniques were too much at variance with the prevailing American social philosophy of the late nineteenth-century progressive movement, which saw schools as instruments of social reform as articulated by Dewey and his followers in the early years of the 20th century. In this context, Montessori’s ideas did seem to be foreign to the main thrust of American education. (Kramer, 1988, p. 232)

It was not long after Kilpatrick’s review of her work that Montessori education went largely out of favor in the United States. The misinterpretations of Montessori’s intentions, competing conceptions of educational reform, and the power of the academy all played a role in creating tension between Montessori and mainstream American education (Whitescarver & Cossentino, 2008). In 1917, Maria Montessori dissolved the American Montessori Education Association. Apart from one Montessori school for the deaf in Rhode Island, which ran until the late 1940’s, a light had gone dim on the Montessori Movement in the United States by the late 1920’s (Coleman, 2011). This did not stop Maria Montessori from continuing to develop her

method and encouraging the spread of her ideas around the world from 1920 until her death in 1952.

The Revival of the Montessori Method in the United States

A White Middle-Class Movement

The second awakening of Montessori education in the United States happened shortly after Maria Montessori's death in 1952. This revival of interest can be characterized as a suburban, middle-class social movement led by Nancy McCormick Rambusch (Whitescarver & Cossentino, 2006b). Rambusch was introduced to Montessori education as an undergraduate at the University of Toronto in the late 1940's. She was interested in exploring Montessori education further for the sake of her own growing family. As there were no Montessori training programs in the United States in 1953, she traveled to Paris to attend the Tenth International Montessori Congress. There she became acquainted with Maria Montessori's son, Mario Montessori, who was the new leader of the *Association Montessori Internationale* (AMI). Mario encouraged Rambusch to take AMI training courses in London. She took his advice, and as a result she was instrumental in establishing the Whitby School in Greenwich, Connecticut in 1958. Because Rambusch was an excellent promoter, the movement spread like wildfire (Debs, 2016a). She published articles in the Catholic *Jubilee* magazine targeting a group of middle-class, Catholic parents who had become disenchanted with their children's parochial education (Meyer, 1975; Povell, 2009). Cold War propaganda of this era had convinced many American parents that their children were behind Russian children in math, science, and foreign language (Rambusch, 1962). They were open to a new pedagogy that would replace their children's education with one more focused on rigor, discipline, and individualism (Debs, 2016a). In the

private sector, the Montessori Method became the coveted answer. The demand for Montessori education began to outweigh the supply.

At the same time, Mario Montessori named Rambusch as his personal emissary to the United States and strongly supported her endeavor to create the *American Montessori Society* (AMS) (Whitescarver & Cossentino, 2010b). Six months later, with Rambusch at the helm, the AMS was launched as the organization representing AMI in the United States (Whitescarver, 2010). The goal of both organizations was to support efforts in the states to create Montessori schools, develop teacher education programs, and publicize the value of Montessori education (Whitescarver, 2010b).

Once again, Montessori education was highlighted in an article written by an influential publication of the time, *Time* magazine. Nearly 30 years after Kilpatrick and other academic progressives had denounced her work, Montessori was pronounced "the founder of progressive education" (Whitescarver & Cossentino, 2008, p. 2594). While this may have been an overstatement, in retrospect it does illustrate her importance in the progressive movement of the early 1900's and the power of the progressive message on the American public (Whitescarver & Cossentino, 2008). This article and subsequent articles in *Newsweek*, *The New York Times*, *Catholic Reporter*, and *The Saturday Evening Post* continued to capture the attention of the middle-class American public and led to dramatic growth in new Montessori schools (Whitescarver, 2010). Whitescarver and Cossentino (2008) emphasized that Maria Montessori's "utopian vision of social harmony, exemplified by the intentional and peaceful way children, properly taken care of, go about constructing their personalities" (p. 2584), was a perfect fit for middle-class suburban mothers looking for options other than parochial and public schools for their children.

Breaking Away from Tradition and the AMI

From the beginning, Rambusch and the AMS had different desires for American Montessorianism than did Mario Montessori and the AMI. Innovations to Americanize Montessori education by conforming to American professional standards ran counter to European and international goals to preserve and guard Maria Montessori's radical educational philosophy in its purest state (Whitescarver & Cossentino, 2008). Political and personal tensions inherent in the rise of the AMS resulted in a withdrawal of support from AMI. The two organizations parted ways in 1963. In 1979, AMI-USA was established (Whitescarver & Cossentino, 2008). From an ideological perspective, the struggle between the AMS and the AMI was and still is a struggle between liberalism and radicalism (Whitescarver & Cossentino, 2008).

If one is to gauge success by looking at sheer numbers, Nancy Rambusch McCormick and the AMS succeeded at drawing positive attention to the movement. Today, AMS is larger than AMI. In fact, "American Montessorianism is now a leader in its size and influence" (Whitescarver & Cossentino, 2008, p. 2592). Next to China, the United States has the largest number of Montessori schools and training programs (Whitescarver & Cossentino, 2008). Maria Montessori's stronghold to safeguard the fidelity of her method and her son's fears of losing control of content and standards were not enough to keep non-AMI accredited Montessori schools from adapting the Montessori Method. In addition to the AMI and the AMS, there are at least six other organizations through which a school may become an accredited Montessori institution. Because the Montessori Method has never been protected by copyright, schools that wish to label themselves as Montessori may do so without affiliation or accreditation.

The outcome of this lack of unity between AMI, AMS, and other Montessori accreditation organizations is that the Montessori Movement has been unable to work cohesively

to break into mainstream education in America. It is worth noting, however, that the "distinctive cultural practices" of these Montessori organizations discussed in detail in previous sections make them resemble one another more than they reflect the culture of mainstream education today (Whitescarver & Cossentino, 2008, p. 2589). While it may not seem to be a positive outcome for the orthodoxy of the AMI, adaptations of the Montessori Method initiated by the AMS have made their way into conventional education in the United States. This should come as no surprise; Appadurai (2001) stated, "…whenever a set of cultural elements—such as a body of educational principles—spreads across the world, the receiving end will tend to indigenize the practice in its own ways" (in Rudt, 2015, p. 1). Rudt (2015) explained that Appadurai's theory was expressing the inevitability of cultural heterogeneity. The AMS has always supported these adaptations to American culture. Today, this is of great importance as we look at Montessori education in the public sphere.

Montessori as Public Education

Montessori for the "Culturally Deprived"

In her comprehensive historical account of Montessori education in the United States, Debs (2016a) provided numerous examples to show that middle-class and affluent families were not the only demographic targeted by Montessori advocates. The 1960's was characterized by a revival of advocacy for social justice in schools, and Montessori education was believed to pair well with this motivation by those involved. Debs (2016a) highlighted the work of educational policy makers, psychologists, and social activists to bring Montessori education to the less advantaged. Phyllis Povell (2009) underscored the warnings of City College Education Professor John McDermott, in *Newsweek,* that without significant work to create public Montessori schools, "this movement may soon have the dubious distinction of having suffocated itself twice

in a half-century" (p. 76). In turn, advocates for social justice began to wonder if Montessori education would serve the needs of the so-called "culturally deprived," living in underserved communities where schools were failing to meet their needs completely (Debs, 2016a). Debs described how a Los Angeles psychiatrist named Ronald Koegler collaborated with the Central City Community Mental Health Center to create a Montessori preschool for Black children in a poor neighborhood. Behind his efforts was the belief that a Montessori education, "...would not only catch children earlier than kindergarten, but also intellectually resuscitate them" (Debs, 2016a, p. 87). In 1967, soon after Koegler's school opened, Richard Orem published *Montessori for The Disadvantaged* to explain how to implement Montessori education in low-income preschools (Debs, 2016a). In the mid-1960's, these contributions and others were the influence needed by California policy makers to call for Montessori expansion in the public sector—specifically for under-served students. Although there is no direct evidence of programming that occurred as the result of a resolution passed by the California House of Representatives that year, once again this exemplifies the role that Montessori pedagogy has played in an ongoing dialogue surrounding the needs of children in impoverished communities (Debs, 2016a).

Awareness of these efforts makes it clear that in the 1960's, Montessori education had begun to be viewed as an answer to the problems of education by social/educational reformists and advocates for social justice. Montessori education was no longer at odds with prevailing pedagogical trends, and was considered a method that created the educational structure necessary for young children, especially those from under-served neighborhoods. Head Start programs started using Montessori pedagogy, Montessori programs were becoming more numerous in public schools, and private sector Montessori schools continued to multiply. In addition, voices of influence began to diversify.

Montessori within Black Communities: 1960's

Until this time in the history of Montessori education in the United States, the face of Montessori influence was one of European descent. Up until this point, Montessori education for less-resourced communities was rarely the idea of those from within that very community. In the late 1960's, Black educators and parents began to embrace the Montessori Method for their own children. In many ways, their intentions for Montessori education in their communities mirrored Maria Montessori's intentions for the people of San Lorenzo, Rome. What they found in Montessori education, for their children, was a holistic education that would care for the complete (social, emotional, academic, and physical) needs of their preschoolers while they were at work. In addition, they embraced the method for its emphasis on self-discipline and its ability to cultivate a culture of respect, in direct contrast with the racism they felt within the school systems of this era (Kay, 1969).

The work of Mae-Arlene Gadpaille serves as a great example of Montessori education embraced by a Black educator for low-income children. Gadpaille, a Howard graduate, had an ambitious goal of starting a movement for quality childcare in low-income communities (Golann & Debs, 2019). She worked to receive a $20,000 grant from the Ford Foundation to start The Roxbury Montessori Family Center in Boston. Gadpaille envisioned a utopian community—a three-million-dollar design for 150 Black-owned homes centered around Montessori schools for children from birth through 18 years of age (Golann & Debs, 2019). Despite another grant from The Ford Foundation and the unwavering support of collaborating architect, R. Buckminster Fuller, there was not enough capital to bring Gadpaille's utopian vision to life. Her community center remained open only until her retirement in 1990 (Golann & Debs, 2019).

Gadpaille's school was just one of a series of Black-run Montessori schools in the 1960's. Medhu Trivedi and Hakim Jamal (Malcolm X's cousin and a member of the Black nationalist community) of Los Angeles ran and funded the Malcolm X Montessori School in Compton until 1970 (Jones, 1968). The Central Harlem Association of Montessori Parents (CHAMP), led by Roslyn Williams, ran an integrated Montessori preschool for poor children in New York (Grimstead, n.d.). In 1973, Milwaukee school activist Maxine Jeter, with a racially diverse group of parents, created a racially integrated community preschool called Cosmic Montessori. It was housed in a church basement, and tuition for parents was $25 a year (Jacques, 1973). These same parents later lobbied for a public Montessori elementary school in Milwaukee and were joined by other civil rights activists to open Highland Montessori Community School in one of Milwaukee's poorest neighborhoods in 1969 (Jeter, 1995). These programs have been diminished due to lack of funding, or they have evolved to serve the needs of the broader community with more resources.

It is worth noting that the voices of these Black educators and parents who worked to develop Montessori schools in their communities are virtually omitted from Montessori writings and are rarely recognized by the movement today. The challenge according to Debs (2016a) was,

> ...while black, white, Latino and Native American Montessori pioneers were all starting schools in the 1960s, white Montessorians were able to access capital to build facilities, creating established programs, some of which are now celebrating their fiftieth anniversaries. In contrast, many of the start-up schools led by Montessorians of color had limited funding and were short-lived as a result. (p. 91)

What was becoming more and more clear was that Montessori education in the United States could be implemented by those who saw the possibility of this alternative model for their own

children. Where there was a spark there was often a fire, and with sufficient economic support, this method had proven itself capable of encompassing the needs of children and families from increasingly diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Desegregation to Re-segregation: 1970's–1990's

The next wave of Montessori growth has been characterized as dynamic (Debs, 2016). In the late 1960's and early 70's, emphasis was placed on combating racial segregation and urban poverty through magnet desegregation programs funded by the federal government. The inclination of "free-spirited" white parents to send their children to progressive and diverse schools in urban settings, created the perfect climate for the spread of Montessori public education in America. Montessori Magnet schools were particularly successful at meeting their desegregation quotas as they attracted families from diverse backgrounds, especially white families who had recently been fleeing cities in large numbers (Debs, 2016). Many of these Montessori Magnet schools had free preschool, free lunch, and busing programs (Vincent, 2014). Nearly half the Montessori Magnet schools had waiting lists that were typically over 200 names long. Schools reported children as more accepting of one another's differences, and more able to talk about racism in their lives and the world surrounding them. Magnet programs hosting Montessori programs were breaking down barriers that had troubled public schools in the past. The success of these public-school programs led to support from the larger public and from Montessori institutions. More public Montessori schools were opened across the nation.

This era was not without its challenges, however. In 1974, when districts began to shift funding priorities away from desegregation in response to the rollback of court-ordered desegregation, public Montessori schools offering free pre-school, free lunch, and free transportation, no longer had funding to do so (Debs, 2016). Those who were most impacted by

this rollback were the poorest families, who relied on these benefits to make this alternative possible. Middle-class, white families were not as heavily impacted by these cuts, and they continued to enroll in public Montessori schools. In addition, due to lack of funding for transportation of white middle-class children to poor neighborhoods, many magnet Montessori schools located in low-income communities across the nation were relocated to more affluent white neighborhoods or were consolidated (Cortez & Brimberg, 1995, Hubler, 2002). Many parents of color tried to hold on to what they saw as a successful school setting for their children in Montessori public education. They organized, donated the limited funds they had, protested, and even went to court to prevent the relocation of their children's schools to gentrifying neighborhoods (Debs, 2016). Most of their efforts went ignored, and their treasured Montessori schools became nearly impossible to access.

In contrast, there were some in lower-income African American communities who felt conflicted and even threatened by Montessori programs being thrust upon their neighborhood schools. In some cases, Montessori schools began in traditional public schools and expanded out from partial to full programs within the school (Benham, 2010). When this phasing method is executed with the support of the community, it has proven to be successful (Kamine & McKenzie, 2001; Van Acker, 2013). However, in other cases, the students and teachers participating in the traditional programs in low-income communities were moved out without their consent (Kahn, 1990, in Debs, 2016). Skepticism and anger were the result of a lack of communication between Montessori reformers and community members. It is evident that among other considerations, early and ongoing communication between groups is a key to the success of conscientiously mainstreaming Montessori programs in neighborhood schools.

Montessori in the Mainstream: 1990–2022

Trials and Tribulations

Today, Dr. Montessori's contributions to education have materialized across the globe in over 20,000 private and public schools in 110 countries (Whitescarver & Cossentino, 2008; Montessori Foundation, 2022). According to the *National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector* (NCMPS, 2016), 5,000 of those schools can be found in the United States, of which more than 520 are public schools—district, magnet, and charters (National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector [NCMPS], 2016). In addition to the programs mentioned above, which intend to use Montessori philosophy and practices, many mainstream grade-school classrooms across the nation have steadily incorporated elements and structures of Dr. Montessori's method over the last 50 years. It is not uncommon in mainstream education to see such elements and structures as mixed-age grouping, child-sized furnishings, individualized instruction, and the use of manipulative materials for learning, all of which originate from Dr. Montessori's scientific observations of children that led to principles of classroom learning (Lillard, 2017). It is less common but equally important to acknowledge that some of our nation's public schools are beginning to adopt Dr. Montessori's more philosophical principles of education, such as choice, self-construction, self-discipline, democratic practices, stewardship, and learning in context as they create alternative educational models in mainstream settings.

In the United States, the Montessori Movement's most recent tension is derived largely from its prominence in private, tuition-based school settings that typically serve middle- and upper-class children of European descent. As the Montessori Method continues to expand into the public sector, the Montessori community is faced with re-examining the educational movement as one which has contributed to what Ladson-Billings (2006) referred to as

"educational debt." This debt describes the cumulative social, economic, and, as a result, psychological disadvantages weighing on non-white communities in this country (Ladson-Billings, 2006). In her research on Montessori and social justice, Trondson (2016) shed light on Montessori practices and non-practices that have quietly yet consistently perpetuated bias, racism, and exclusion. Trondson (2016) suggested creating more welcoming environments for non-majority participants, providing anti-bias training for Montessori teachers of non-white students, working on better public relations to clarify the meaning behind a Montessori education for those parents who are marginalized, and shifting the debate away from fidelity and toward integrity (how to interpret Dr. Montessori's intent under different circumstances). Her research suggests that a lack of knowledge about these shortcomings has prevented Montessori advocates from appropriately serving poor and minority students and their families (Trondson, 2016). Currently, there remains disequilibrium within the movement. As Montessori advocates work to maintain the integrity of the method while simultaneously seeking to provide access to culturally and socioeconomically diverse populations, they are evolving as they gain knowledge about how to assure that the varying needs of unique communities are nurtured in the process.

Ideological differences, unique cultural practices, disagreements over implementation, and limited socioeconomic representation all play a role in the movement's inability to cross the boundaries to mainstream education in solid unification. What also seems to be at play is an acknowledgment that to move forward is to embrace heterogeneity in all its complexity. Despite their differences, the AMI and the AMS have agreed to come together to work for the larger good of the movement, which is twofold. First, a new emphasis is being placed on expansion to the public sector (NCMPS, 2016). This is a mission for social justice. Access to Montessori schools for those who typically do not have alternatives is driving this expansion. Second,

because more and more Montessori schools are supporting economically and culturally diverse communities, recent emphasis is being placed on the cultural relevance of the Montessori method for under-resourced communities and culturally diverse students (Debs, 2016).

While the implementation of Montessori education in public-school settings presents opportunity, the literature tells us that there have been problems creating and sustaining these free and low-cost Montessori programs since the first Montessori school opened its doors in the United States in 1911 (Chattin-McNichols, 2016). Debs (2016) reported that public Montessori reach is hampered by various factors. In addition to the philosophical "buy-in" required by administrators, teachers and parents, startup costs are high due to the need for specific materials, modifications to space, and staff training. Because the Montessori classroom is a delicately functioning ecosystem, teachers must be well-trained, and they must hold special talents for maintaining balance in the classroom. In addition, training is expensive and, in all but a few cases, it is situated outside of the university setting. This inhibitor results in a predominately privileged, white, female teacher pool (Debs, 2016). And, although many districts have been willing to bear the costs to implement Montessori programs, they want assurance that their investments will produce the necessary academic achievements demanded of them at state and national levels (Manner, 1999). Also, due to the lack of autonomy Montessori programs encounter in the public sector, the option to situate Montessori schools in public charters has warranted deliberation.

School Choice and Diversity

For over 25 years, public funds have been available to parents in the form of school vouchers. This allows for some choice in where they send their children to school (Ayers, 2017). This shift in autonomy has brought about significant change in the array of public school

choices. Magnet schools and charter schools are the most common school choices for alternative models like the Montessori Method (Kahn, 1990). In her research on racial and economic diversity in U.S. public Montessori schools, Debs (2016) found that the primary concerns of the Montessori community are expansion and fidelity. The broader literature around school choice is more concerned that choice options like public Montessori are leading to the very segregation that the movement is trying to avoid (Daoust & Suzuki, 2013; Furman University, 2015a, 2015b; Kahn, 1990; Kostin, 1995; Lillard, 2012; McKenzie, 1994; Van Acker, 2013, 2014). White and more advantaged students are choosing to leave their public schools for specialized programs such as Montessori (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2012; Renzulli & Evans, 2005). Often, Montessori programs are placed in schools in predominantly white neighborhoods or in neighborhoods that are far from the homes of applicants, requiring parents to be more involved in transportation (Becker, 2017). Many do not provide free lunch. These factors perpetuate inequality rather than diminish it. In addition, "racially and socioeconomically diverse parents feel challenged by Montessori education's appeal to middle-class, white families" (Debs, 2016, p. 75). To add to the uncertainty, until recently public Montessori teachers have inadequately responded to charges that Montessori education is not beneficial to low-income students of color (Debs, 2016).

It is still worthwhile to consider what some politicians, theorists and educators have argued. It is their sense that charter schools can be a successful means of providing access to a high quality, free, and public education (Cotner, 2017; Kwalwasser, 2017; Whitescarver, 2017). As previously noted, today there are over 520 public Montessori schools serving 130,000 children, making Montessori the largest alternative model operating in the public sector (Whitescarver, 2017). Whitescarver (2017) pointed out that while the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector (NCMPS, 2016) is intentionally agnostic on the virtue or vice of

charter schools, Montessorians offering an opinion on the matter of charter schooling would be wise to consider two realities. He said,

> [T]he dramatic expansion of Montessori education in the public sector is reliant upon the charter movement because of the autonomy it provides this vastly different model for educating children. Second, the very purpose of bringing Montessori to the public sector is grounded in deep dissatisfaction with the prevailing assumptions and characteristics of the public-school system. Every effort to mount Montessori in the public sector is a challenge to the status quo. (p. 6)

As we can gather from Whitescarver's considerations, to secure the necessary level of autonomy that will preserve the fidelity of the Montessori Method, Montessori schools do well to work through the charter system. In this sense, it seems that Montessori education in the public sector is somewhat entangled. Montessori educators in public charter schools must abide by district and state standards that stem from neoliberal education reforms in order to also remain autonomous enough to preserve the fidelity of The Montessori Method. This entanglement, in many cases, can only be overcome through hard work.

Contemporary Research on Montessori Outcomes

The next portion of the literature review focuses on the research that explores Montessori outcomes and data that helps to reinforce claims made by the Montessori Movement for the expansion of Montessori into the public sector. According to Montessori advocates across the nation, Montessori education is an ideal avenue for addressing the developmental needs of the whole child and reforming education in the 21st century (AMI, 2018; AMS, 2018; NCMPS, 2016). This section of the literature review is another opportunity to explore Montessori education as an option for under-served populations across this nation. Examining the current

research regarding Montessori outcomes in the public sector allows for a look at how Montessori education is often thriving outside of the private sector.

In 2005, Jacqueline Cossentino, a Montessori administrator and researcher, made note that she was "baffled to discover that despite its geographic and theoretical reach, the Montessori Method and the Montessori Movement remained largely unstudied by mainstream educational researchers" (Cossentino, 2005, p. 212). Whitescarver and Cossentino (2008) found that "while rich insider literature has existed since the start of the movement, the first century of Montessori's influence has been witness to only a handful of scholars within the mainstream establishment" (p. 2591). Angeline Stoll Lillard is one of these scholars. Lillard undertook a comprehensive review of research in both her 2005 and 2017 editions of *Montessori: The Science Behind the Genius*. She noted several research studies that found positive outcomes for Montessori students in public school settings (Dohrmann et al., 2009; Lillard & Else-Quest, 2006; Lillard & Heise, 2016) and others with less positive outcomes (Krafft & Berk, 1998, Lopata et al., 2005). In her 2017 edition, she evaluated current research studies on Montessori outcomes and found them to be unsatisfactory. She identified three fundamental problems with the existing research aiming to study Montessori outcomes. The first problem is non-random assignment, the second is "fidelity" or quality control, and the third problem is small samples yielding "fluke" results (Lillard, 2017). In other words, did the Montessori students in question obtain said skills in question through the Montessori experience, or were the students attending these Montessori schools different from the sample group from the outset? Next, did these schools implement programs similarly across the board? And finally, within the sample is there some kind of uniformity (length of time spent in similar Montessori classrooms with similarly trained teachers with children from similar backgrounds to the control samples)? Lillard has

since performed two analyses which do well to control for age, race/ethnicity, gender, childhood SES, and private schooling. In 2017 she published a longitudinal study that followed preschool children who were admitted to one of two AMI-recognized magnet schools in Hartford, CT or were waitlisted. Although the children were homogenous in terms of income, parent education, age, race, and gender prior to the study, the Montessori students outperformed the non-Montessori students in academic achievement and in social cognition by the time they reached kindergarten (Lillard et al., 2017). Lillard's most recent study in 2021 predicted important life outcomes from happiness to health and longevity in association with a Montessori education. This study found that Montessori pedagogy has some features that predict well-being in adulthood (Lillard et al., 2021).

Based upon a wealth of data, developmental psychologists believe that parents are the only true meaningful influence on children's outcomes as they confer their genes and create the child's environment, including home, school choice, and neighborhood (Lillard, 2017). The quality of the school program is minimal in its influence on the child, according to a large study of daycare programs where the children were tracked from birth to age 15 (Vandell et al., 2010). Montessori programs can often stray quite far from what Montessori wrote as her one true method. Lillard refers to this as "Montessomething" (2017). There is a lack of consistency in Montessori schools across the nation, as there is no one affiliate that monitors how the method is implemented (Chattin-McNichols, 2016b). The question becomes, once one can narrow the sample and control for the problems of non-random assignment and small samples mentioned, how much fidelity is necessary in Montessori programs to yield positive outcomes? Lillard (2012) and Lillard and Heise (2016) addressed this research question in two studies in which outcomes suggest that children grow more in their executive functioning, reading, and math in

classrooms that contain only Montessori materials. This finding suggests that fidelity of implementation does appear to matter for Montessori outcomes (Lillard, 2017).

Lillard also made mention of the following studies, each addressing Montessori climate and motivation. Rathunde and Csikszentmihalyi (2005a; 2005b) examined the differences in social climate and motivation in Montessori and conventional middle schools. In the first of the two studies, compared to the control group, Montessori students reported more flow, energy, intrinsic motivation, and undivided interest than the control group attending a conventional middle school (Lillard, 2017). In the second study, students reported feeling more teacher support and emotional safety. These same students reported a sense of classroom order. They also reported more time spent on academic work in both collaborative work scenarios and on individual projects than their control group peers (2017).

There is evidence in the research that the Montessori Method provides positive outcomes for students who are not thriving in traditional school environments (Dohrmann et al., 2007; Harris, 2007; Lillard, 2005; Rathunde & Csikszentmihalyi, 2005a). Public Montessori schools have shown positive outcomes for students from diverse racial and class backgrounds (Ansari & Winsler, 2014; Brown, 2016; Dohrmann et al., 2007; Lillard & Else-Quest, 2006; Mallett & Schroeder, 2015). Hall (2019) reported, “scholars from disciplines of education, psychology and sociology, contend that African American students require a range of instructional methods to be successful” (p. 2). Hall and Murray (2011) makes clear that there are many intersections between the learner-centered, socially-mediated setting of a Montessori pedagogy and the scholarship that provides educators with a real understanding of the social and educational needs of Black children (Hall & Murray, 2011). Yezbick (2007) grappled with the complexity of serving diverse groups of students in a Montessori public school. She explored culturally responsive teaching

practices in a public Montessori school setting. Findings suggest that inequity can be addressed in the classroom if teachers look critically at themselves, step outside of their comfort zones and engage with their students. This finding is aligned with the role of the teacher as Maria Montessori would have described it. Finally, in their study of social justice education in an urban charter Montessori school, Banks and Maixner (2016) pointed out that recent studies (Brown & Steele, 2015; Stansbury, 2012) highlighted racial disproportionality in school discipline in the Montessori classroom. While the racial disparity was less robust in the public Montessori setting compared to traditional public schools, findings suggest that Montessori education is not immune to the effect of school experiences on social identities (Brown & Steele, 2015).

Overall, there are more quantitative research studies than qualitative research studies on Montessori topics. Much of the existing research available measures the success and/or outcomes of Montessori Programs (or elements of Montessori Programs) as compared to more traditional pedagogical models or to other alternative models. Existing qualitative research has addressed specific topics such as the professional identity of Montessori teachers (Malm, 2004), student-teacher relationships (Massey, 2006), pupil independence (Lockhorst et al., 2010), cognitive development and music (Holland, 2007), inquiry development (Ireland et al., 2012), program inclusivity, and pedagogical approach (Hazel & Allen, 2013). Although it is evident that the qualitative research examines important topics across the spectrum, there remains very little published peer-reviewed, qualitative data addressing the overall cultural experience of Montessori schooling serving socioculturally and socioeconomically diverse communities. Two recent dissertations (Debs, 2016; Trondson, 2016) and two unpublished master's theses (Massey, 2006; Stansbury, 2012) examined the intersections between Montessori schooling, race, and cultural identity. These thoughtful and comprehensive research studies provide great insight as

well as a jumping off point for continued exploration of the cultural responsiveness of Montessori programs and the relevance of Montessori programs for students of color.

Montessori education has become a more noticeable part of urban public education over the past 30 years; in fact, a publication in Montessori Public announced a $3.3 million Montessori research study funded by the Institute for Education Science (IES) and American Institute for Research (AIR). This is the first federally funded Montessori research study initiated by IES. As interest from federal research institutions grows and access to Montessori schools increases, qualitative inquiry into the lived experience of Montessori education by the people who populate these school communities (African Americans, Latinx, and other minorities) should be a priority for researchers interested in the success and replication of successful programs.

Conclusion

The Montessori Method began as any great experiment would begin: with trial and error, observation, revelation, and reflection. In her efforts to care for the unique and diverse needs of young children, Dr. Montessori observed the ongoing physical and psychological development of the child. From the earliest stages of development to maturation as a young adult, she discovered that the purpose of her work was to benefit the child and, in turn, to benefit society. The Montessori Method has always been much more than a method of instruction. What Montessori brought to life through her observations and pedagogical applications was an awareness of human development that honored the unique potential of the individual and their purpose in relation to the world (Montessori, 1989a).

As it was then, the Montessori Method today is often an educational and developmental resource for children, their families, and for the betterment of the communities in which they

exist. Although culturally and economically homogeneous at its very origins, today Montessori education spans the globe, simultaneously addressing the needs of children and families from vastly different socio-cultural and socio-economic backgrounds (Association Montessori Internationale, n.d.). The Montessori Method often serves children within their own communities, providing invaluable resources to families who take on the work of supporting the self-construction of the child, facilitating independence and democratic thinking (Montessori, 1989b).

The Montessori Method, while traditionally housed in private schools across the U.S., has also held a notable presence in public schooling over the past 50 years. Some Montessori schools are found in public magnet schools, but with the thrust of market ideologies upon public education, there are an increasing number of public charter Montessori schools within a variety of districts across the nation (Debs, 2016). Montessori pedagogy, blended with the traditional pedagogical practices of public schooling and socio-culturally/socioeconomically diverse populations, makes for a compelling body of experience that could benefit from more examination by the research community. Researchers have begun to explore how well Montessori schools are faring in mainstream environments, whom they are serving, and how relevant a Montessori education is to the communities practicing this alternative to conventional education. Exploring the alternative pedagogical practices of Montessori education in a variety of public school settings presents an opportunity to understand the cultural experiences of Montessori education for participants from various socio-cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. If worthwhile, this type of exploration will also seek to answer the larger questions regarding the continued application of this radical, socially just, and often warmly embraced educational philosophy, for students and families of color living in poverty across our nation.

Conceptual Framework

Culturally Responsive Teaching

The Montessori Method originated in a different time and place. It is possible that the socio-cultural and socioeconomic homogeneity of the original Montessori communities in Rome, and subsequently in middle- and upper-class private school environments in the United States, have played a larger role in the success of the Montessori Method than has been emphasized in Montessori scholarship to date. As mentioned, there is some research that calls into question the relevance of the Montessori Method for children from culturally and socioeconomically diverse backgrounds (Debs, 2016; Massey, 2006; Schonleber, 2006; Stansbury, 2012; Trondson, 2016; Yesbick, 2007). This research has found that children who do have access to Montessori programs are subject to a method of education with distinctly European roots and middle-class values which may or may not appropriately address the developmental needs of all children. Providing diverse populations access to Montessori education is only one part of the equation. According to these scholars, to succeed in nurturing students and communities, Montessori schools must make a commitment to culturally responsive teaching.

Geneva Gay, a prominent figure in education, has developed the theory of *culturally responsive teaching*. Her ideas have offered many educators new opportunities to focus on culture, race, equity, and the success of students traditionally marginalized by the educational system (Mensah, 2021). Before further exploring her framework, it is important to mention Gloria Ladson-Billing's framework of culturally relevant pedagogy, from which culturally responsive teaching stems. Ladson-Billings (1995) stated that culture is central to learning. Her ethnographic work examined the intersection between culture and teaching while capturing the pedagogical excellence of successful teachers of Black students (Mensah, 2021). Culturally

relevant pedagogy addresses student achievement, affirms cultural identity, and develops critical perspectives that challenge inequity in schools (Ladson-Billings, 1995). In her book, *The Dreamkeepers* (2009), Ladson-Billings looked carefully at student achievement and its relationship to deficit views of Black students. This pedagogy is designed to problematize teaching as it encourages teachers to think more carefully about their relationships with students, the curriculum, the school culture, and society at large (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Embedded in this approach is the strong belief that students of all backgrounds can achieve academically.

Culturally responsive teaching is often referred to as a derivative of culturally relevant pedagogy as they share many similar features and are often used interchangeably (Mensah, 2021). Most importantly, they are both concerned with liberatory teaching, and they both aim to improve the success of low-income and marginalized populations. Gay's work shares common goals with Ladson-Billings' work. These goals include raising critical consciousness and emphasizing cultural connections (Mensah, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has emphasized gross inequity and disparity for students across the nation. As a result, it has become increasingly important to commit to these goals both in and out of schools. Mensah (2021) emphasized that approaches that "foreground, support, and value student culture and identity are critically important, particularly now" (p. 10).

Geneva Gay (2002) built upon the work of Ladson-Billings and other anthropologists and educators in the field of culture and education. She "insists that a different pedagogical model is needed to improve the performance of underachieving students from various ethnic groups" (Mensah, 2021, p. 11). Gay believes that culturally responsive teaching is both routine and radical (Mensah, 2021). She explained that this approach to teaching is routine because it does for low-income and marginalized students what traditional ideologies and curricula do for

middle-class white children by filtering curriculum content and teaching strategies through new cultural frames of reference to make the content more personally meaningful (Gay, 2018). She said that culturally responsive teaching is also radical because it makes explicit the role of culture in teaching and learning, legitimizes marginalized cultures, and insists on the viability of improved learning outcomes for these groups (Gay, 2018). According to Gay (2002), teachers who aim to be culturally responsive should:

- be critically conscious of what is portrayed in books and what is visually portrayed in their curricular materials.
- acknowledge the impressions and distortions of ethnic groups in the media.
- exhibit cultural caring as they use students own cultural experiences to expand their intellectual horizons.
- be partners in action as they use knowledge and strategic thinking to decide how to act in the best interest of others.
- emphasize holistic and integrated learning.
- recognize differing cultural communication styles.
- recognize differing patterns of task engagement.
- match teaching styles to learning styles.

In short, culturally responsive teaching recognizes the importance of including students' cultural references in all aspects of learning. It refers to the more dynamic/synergistic relationship between the home and community culture and the school culture.

As one will learn from the findings of this study, all of Gay's suggested practices are visible as the educators at Prospect Montessori School use the Montessori Method with students and their families. Trondson (2016) and Massey (2006) found that while there is a strong

relationship between Montessori practices and culturally responsive teaching, there is only a small collection of research on their shared qualities. The literature review suggests that the potential for Montessori education to properly serve students of color in low-income settings will expand with future research examining parallels between culturally responsive teaching and Montessori principles and practices. Further research will aid advocates as they consider Montessori classrooms as alternative educational settings where culturally responsive teaching can be established (Trondson, 2016). This empirical case study was an opportunity to further examine these parallels. In this case, the researcher examined educators' reflections on their practices, relationships, and perspectives as stakeholders in a low-income, public, charter Montessori school serving primarily Black children. It was an opportunity to work with Montessori educators who know how important it is to be culturally responsive. Culturally responsive teaching is therefore a coherent lens for thinking about this study. And, while culturally responsive teaching is enacted, educators often find that they are also participating in an education that brings about elements of social justice for students.

Education for Social Justice

Nieto and Bode (2018) defined social justice as "a philosophy, an approach, and actions that embody treating all people with fairness, respect, dignity, and generosity" (p. 8). Mills College (2019), a progressive higher education institution for women, explained education for social justice as: "a commitment to challenging social, cultural, and economic inequalities imposed on individuals arising from any differential distribution of power, resources, and privilege" (para. 5). Educators like Maria Montessori, who have dedicated their lives to bringing about change and reform in childhood education, have redefined what it means to enact educational equity. The Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF, 2021) defines equity as "the state,

quality or ideal of being just, impartial and fair" (para. 6). Equity should be thought of as a structural and systemic concept. In the system of education, equity and equality often get confused. Equity aims to ensure that individuals get the support that they need to thrive. Equality, on the other hand, operates under the pretense that fairness and justice can be achieved if all students are provided the same experience (AECF, 2021). However, this only works to help children thrive if they all start from the same place and need the same things.

Social justice in education demands equity for all students. This is not a new idea. There are many educators who have been working tirelessly to ensure that education is built on equity, activism, and social literacy (Ayers et al., 2009). Equity begins to grow when there is diversity in groups. Variety in personal experiences, values, and worldviews that arise from characteristics such as race, ethnicity, class, age, gender, sexual orientation, or religious beliefs can enhance the learning experience for teachers and students alike and create equity. In a school that prioritizes justice and equity, teachers are empowered to incorporate students' backgrounds as strengths rather than viewing them as hurdles to overcome (Mills College, 2019). As such, there is a re-orientation toward teaching to the individual child rather than teaching to the group, which assumes a common jumping-off place. Social justice frames this research as it is imbedded in the method created by Maria Montessori and can be identified in the philosophy and approach at Prospect Montessori School.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

Introduction

In the following section, I provide a rationale for the research paradigm and methodology around which the study was designed. Next, I describe the history and background of the research setting and explain how the setting played a large role in the issues germane to the research problem. Following this section, I describe the research sample and data collection process, and outline the ethical considerations pertaining to the participants. The next section describes and justifies the use of all data collection methods, tools, instruments, and procedures, followed by a section that will do the same for data analysis methods. I then take up discussion of the measures used to enhance the validity and reliability of the study and, finally, identify potential weaknesses, limitations, and delimitations of the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018).

Rationale for Qualitative Research Design

Qualitative research is grounded in a constructivist philosophical position (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). It assumes that there are multiple constructions and interpretations of reality that evolve over time. As a qualitative researcher, I am interested in understanding what those interpretations are in the context of a public, charter, Montessori school in a low-income, Black community as it is impacted by neoliberal education reform in the contemporary era.

With the intent of examining a social situation in a holistic manner, qualitative researchers collect data in the field, at the site where participants experience the issue or phenomenon under study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Cardano, 2020; Williams, 2019). The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection (Creswell, 2009). As the goal of qualitative research is to understand interpretations of reality, it is helpful that the human instrument (researcher) can be responsive and adaptive, picking up on non-verbal cues and

immediately checking their own understanding of participant responses. Additionally, the human instrument (researcher) must be prepared to reflect on their own subjectivity as they contribute to making meaning in the field. The researcher must identify how personal biases may be shaping the collection and interpretation of data (Merriam, 2002). In the case of this critical qualitative study, identifying personal bias is imperative, as the researcher is an outsider to the community.

It is also important to note that this study is not an examination of the performance of Montessori education in this community, but rather an exploration of how Montessori education is working for the people of this community. Qualitative research is suitable in this case as it strives for depth of understanding where the final product is a rich description of the nature of the setting and how this context informs the phenomenon under study. Meaning is discovered in both inductive and deductive manners as participants and the researcher gather information, recount experience, and reflectively "shape the themes or abstractions that emerge from the process" (Creswell, 2009, p. 175).

Rationale for Case Study Methodology

According to Creswell (2013), a case study is both a methodology (a type of design in qualitative inquiry) and an object of study. "A case study is an exploratory form of inquiry that affords significant interaction with research participants, providing an in-depth picture of the unit of study" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018, p. 46). Merriam (1998) stated, "the interest of a case study is in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation" (p. 19). To gather data that represented a realistic picture of lived experience within a specific context, I have employed a qualitative, intrinsic case study to make new discoveries. Of the three variations of case analysis, an intrinsic case study focuses on the case itself, as opposed to one issue or concern in a bounded case. This is so because the case presents

a unique situation worthy of examination (Creswell, 2013; Gregory, 2020). Prospect Montessori is a unique case in that the Montessori Method is practiced within a public, charter school where 98% of the students are Black, and 97% come from low-income households. The segregated nature of this setting presents a unique situation worthy of examination.

Research Setting and Context

Prospect Montessori School is located on the South side of a large Midwestern city in the Billstone neighborhood (name changed for purposes of anonymity). In the mid 1800's, Billstone was the location of the crossing lines of a railroad. Its early settlers were mostly German and Irish who came to work in the truck farms and on the railroad. During this time, the neighborhood began to thrive. Ten acres were annexed from the surrounding city to build a teacher's college and its surrounding residences. In 1870, a high school was built to serve the growing population of Eastern and Western European immigrants of the late 1800's. Horsecar lines, electric trolleys, an elevated railway and the second busiest shopping district in the city were evidence of a thriving community.

Apartment buildings built in the 1910's and 1920's were the first sign of problems with density and economic segregation in this area of the city. After the Great Depression, things changed significantly. Many of the small businesses shut down, there was a decline in real estate values and an increase in the population of African Americans looking for lower-income housing. After World War II, there were limited materials available to rehabilitate the almost 40-year-old buildings in the Billstone neighborhood, and conditions deteriorated. At that time, the discriminatory lending practice of redlining was applied to African Americans seeking home loans in the neighborhood. This practice had pernicious effects on the neighborhood (Frenger, 2006). Essentially it is this form of racial discrimination that sealed Billstone's fate as a low-

income community with declining housing stock. The university and larger businesses were moved to other neighborhoods in the 1960's and 1970's. The population shifted. Due to expressway construction and urban renewal, many Black Americans were displaced from local neighborhoods, and they came to settle in Billstone. Black residents increased from 1.3% in the 1930's to 68.9% in the 1960's to 99% in the 1990's. More than 50,000 whites left the neighborhood over time. Billstone's population declined to 59,075 by 1980 and to 30,654 by 2017. Despite the 200 housing units built by the Antioch Baptist Church and some publicly funded apartments for elderly and handicapped persons, few communities have lost as much population or housing stock in the twentieth century (Encyclopedia of Chicago, 2018).

Today, Billstone has one of the highest crime rates in the country. Whole blocks are strewn with abandoned or torched homes (Schmidt, 2012). Although the community has not given up, the population has dwindled from 97,000 in the early 1900's to 30,000 in 2017 (Statistical Atlas, 2018). There have recently been four neighborhood high school closures that were replaced by one $85 million-dollar high school campus in summer 2019. Community members protested the school closures on grounds that the neighborhood schools had good ratings and that students knew these schools to be a home within the community. Although a new high school campus is an investment in the neighborhood, the community message to the school board is that many of these students will have been left behind even with the new school in place (Dwyer et al., 2018).

Prospect Montessori Charter School is also an example of the hope that local community members and school advocates in the larger city have for the Billstone neighborhood. As a result of the efforts of educators working in a local public school Montessori program, a Montessori based charter application was submitted to the local school board. The first charter proposal was

met with opposition, and ultimately denied. According to a school administrator involved in the process, there was a public school perspective that Montessori was not for black boys. This outlook is often the case (Debs, 2016; Stansbury, 2012). After neighborhood parents and community members caught wind of the efforts to open the Montessori school, they joined forces with the teachers and administrators who initially applied for the charter. It was a push and pull process, but in August of 2013, Prospect Montessori opened its doors as a public charter Montessori school located in West Billstone for an entirely Black student body.

Prospect Charter Montessori particularly encourages neighborhood residents to apply. However, because it is a public charter school, applicants are randomly selected through a computerized lottery. This system draws students from other communities to attend the school. Therefore, the student body does not absolutely reflect the population of the neighborhood in which it is located. Still as of 2020, 92.7% of the students attending Prospect are Black, and 94% live in low-income settings (School Info, 2020). This is a segregated community, and the school reflects this condition.

Prospect Montessori enrolls close to 350 students in grades preK–8. Worth noting is that the charter was renewed in 2018. The school received a School Quality Rating of 1 on a scale of 3 to 1+ during the 2017–2018 school year. The School Quality Rating Policy (SQRP) is a five-tiered performance system based on a broad range of indicators of success. It includes, but is not limited to, student test scores, student academic growth, the closing of achievement gaps, school culture and climate, attendance, graduation, and preparation for post-graduation success (CPS Performance, 2018). A score of 1 means that the school is one level below a highest-performing national level school. It also means that the school needed minimal support to maintain its positive qualities. Over the past few years, however, that rating has decreased to a 2+ score.

While ratings for attendance remain high, and students appear to be showing growth in math and reading, the children in grades 2–8 are reporting to have low attainment of material on NWEA Maps tests. According to teachers and administrators, improving these scores is something that the school is addressing through direct instruction with large and small groups. Often this work is done in place of the Montessori Curriculum.

Research Sample and Data Sources

A purposeful sampling procedure was used to select the sample for this study. Purposeful sampling is quite typical of case study research (Patton, 1990; Silverman, 2011). The purposeful selection of the research sample (participants, sites, documents, visual materials) helps the researcher to understand the problem and the research question (Creswell, 2009). The criteria for the sample selected in this case study were as follows:

- Each participant must have had at least two years' experience working as a teacher or administrator.
- Each participant must have had at least one year working at the selected school (Prospect Montessori), which is a public, charter Montessori School attended by African American children in an under-resourced community.

The delimiting time frame of two or more years was decided upon to ensure that the participants had adequate experience working as teachers or administrators with a population of students in a Montessori school matching the characteristics of the research question.

Miles and Huberman (1994) identified four aspects to consider when selecting a sample: the setting, the actors, the events. and the process. The researcher traveled to the school setting to collect most of the data. The school's head administrator was asked to help select the participants (actors) in this study. She served as a gatekeeper for this case study as she was instrumental in

providing the researcher open access to the school staff (Bailey, 2007). To recruit the participants, the researcher sent an email to the gatekeeper to pass along to the school faculty. The researcher offered a $25 gift card to a local retail store to each teacher or administrator willing to be interviewed for one hour during summer teacher preparation. The interviews and observations served as the two sources of data in this case study. A total of eight volunteers came forward to participate in a one-on-one, semi-structured interview. Each of the interviewees was asked to sign a consent form to participate in this research. Of the interviewees who participated in a recorded interview, one teacher has had experience at the primary level (PK–K) and now serves as an admissions director, another two teach at the lower elementary level (grades 1–3), two are from the upper elementary (grades 4–6) and one is from the middle school level. In addition, one administrator from the special education department was part of the study.

Data Collection Methods

First the sample was purposefully determined, and permission was granted by the CPS research committee (a district committee whose purpose is to review outside proposals for research within the public school system). Next, university Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained. At this point, the school gatekeeper at Prospect Montessori School granted permission for the researcher to contact the participants and begin data collection. As mentioned, this study employed two data collection methods: interview and observation.

I selected one-on-one interviews with teachers and administrators from Prospect Montessori School as the primary method for data collection in this case study. Each one-hour interview took place within the Prospect Montessori School building in an empty classroom or private office. My primary reason for doing so was because interacting with people is an opportunity to gather authentic data. Patton (1990) claimed, “qualitative interviewing begins

with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit" (p. 278). Interviews "foster interactivity with the participants, elicit depth and perspective and facilitate the discovery of nuances in the school culture" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018, p. 252). Although I selected the interview for the strengths it offers this case study, it is also important to acknowledge the limitations associated with interviews. The researcher kept in mind that each interviewee is a unique individual, and that not all interviews were conducted equally as a result. The interview process also required skill and practice. Finally, interviews are not neutral tools for data collection as the data collected is the result of the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee (Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

The interview questions of this case study were organized into eight categories that corresponded with components of the research questions. Participant interviews (Appendix 1) were conducted at the school in the natural setting of the classrooms and the offices of the participants. Each semi-structured, qualitative interview was conducted in person and lasted approximately one hour. The interviews were recorded only after the participant consent form had been signed. Following the interviews, data was transcribed by the researcher, and the transcripts were offered to the participants for their review. Participants were able to determine authenticity. One edit was made to one interview as a result. Personal memos and notes regarding the researcher's thought process were taken throughout the data collection process. To protect anonymity, each participant was given a pseudonym. Following transcription and review by participants, coded data was entered into a template (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). All recorded and transcribed interview data was filed with password protection. It was not used outside of this research study and was destroyed after completion of the study.

Data Analysis Methods

To identify preliminary categories, I read, coded, re-read, and reviewed the data, scanning for the proposed preliminary themes and identifying and clarifying new categories. Each nugget of data from the transcripts was identified and labeled with a code (Elliot, 2018; Adu, 2019). During the next phase, I began the reduction process. I worked toward identifying common patterns in the data as I used the preliminary analytic categories, but I remained open to development of new conceptual categories that emerged from the initial findings. Once these codes were clustered into categories, I began to reduce what I had labeled and collected into a smaller and more manageable spreadsheet. As there is no single correct way to categorize and analyze one's data, it is important to practice inter-rater reliability (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). I asked my advisor and a colleague to review a few of my transcripts. This helped me to determine whether my initial codes corresponded directly with my research questions.

Once I was certain that my codes were reliable, I transfered my findings into a template organized by the research questions and the names of participants. The template progressed to a findings statement, then an outcome or consequence of the finding, and then the analytic category of the finding. Throughout this process of organizing the data into the summary templates, I made notes and memos in a separate document. Strauss (1987) described *memo-ing* as the act of making notes to record certain elements of vital interest throughout the process of organizing data. Strauss explained that these memos can help the researcher to access their own internal dialogue when returning to review their work. I also engaged in conversation with a colleague throughout the data analysis process, which contributed to the trustworthiness of the findings and analysis.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Distinct, fundamental steps must be taken in qualitative research studies to assure that a study is reliable and valid. According to Creswell (2009), validity and reliability carry different connotations in qualitative research. Qualitative validity requires that the researcher employs certain procedures to assure accuracy. Qualitative reliability indicates consistency in the researcher's approach (Gibbs, 2018). To assure that this study was trustworthy, authentic, and credible, various procedures and approaches were employed. Bloomberg and Volpe (2018) proposed four criteria for evaluating the trustworthiness of qualitative research. Evidence of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability are described in the next section as they each supported the trustworthiness of this study.

Validity is one of the strengths of qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Credibility and transferability provide internal and external validity in qualitative research. Credibility refers to whether the researcher's portrayal of the evidence is true to the participants' perspectives (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). Transferability is about how well the study matches another research context. Qualitative research is not generalizable to all other settings, but it is likely that lessons learned in one setting might be useful in a similar setting (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). The credibility of this study was achieved by journaling throughout the processes of data collection and data analysis, thick description of the setting and events, seeking negative instances to tell the whole story, peer debriefing with a colleague and writing coach, and member checking with participants when needed. Transferability was achieved in the study through purposeful sampling, thick description to communicate a holistic and realistic picture, and the use of detailed information offering an element of shared experience (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018).

Dependability helps the researcher to ensure that the research is logical and traceable (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). It refers to how the researcher tracks the processes and procedures used to collect and interpret the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). Research strategies that ensured dependability in this study included the use of an audit trail and peer examination. An audit trail is an explanation of how the data were collected and analyzed. In the case of this study, data were collected during observations and interviews with classroom teachers and administrators. I kept a data collection journal that served as an audit trail for each interaction. This audit trail became part of the analysis process and helped me to communicate the experience to a colleague and writing coach during peer examination.

Confirmability refers to the objectivity of the study. It is concerned with establishing that the findings are derived from the data and requires that the researcher demonstrate how conclusions have been reached (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). In this study, conclusions were reached as a result of an audit trail, triangulation, and journaling. In addition to the audit trail and journaling process, I triangulated different data sources to build justification for themes. By taking the raw transcripts back to the participants for review, I determined the accuracy of the findings prior to engaging in analysis.

Yin (2003) suggested that the procedures of a case study be thoroughly documented for qualitative reliability. For the purposes of this research, a notebook was designated as a detailed case study protocol. Each effort toward the final draft of this dissertation was documented by date and description in the notebook. In addition, Gibbs (2018) recommended several reliability procedures that were employed as part of this research process. As mentioned, transcripts were checked for mistakes. Codes were cross-checked by a peer reviewer and by the dissertation chair

as drafts of the transcripts and findings were submitted for review. The codes were defined and constantly compared to the data to assure that they did not drift in definition over time.

In qualitative research, the researcher is an instrument for data collection. I am aware that my insights and positionality could have compromised my ability to remain open to new perspectives from participants. I have remained committed to ongoing critical self-reflection by way of journaling and through dialogue with professional colleagues and my advisors. In addition, I have addressed my subjectivity and strengthened the credibility of the research by triangulating my data sources and performing reliability checks with my participants. As the researcher, I have invested in building relationships, as I hope to give life to the experience of Montessori education at Prospect School. Additionally, I have been committed to interrogating my own personal biases through the process of self-reflection. This process has been honest, transparent, and ongoing through all stages of the research process. This reflective process required the act of debriefing with peers and colleagues. Speaking about the process of engagement outside of the research context with individuals have who remained present throughout the process has aided in the reflective journey and has also enhanced the accuracy of the account shared (Creswell, 2009).

To foster a respectful and collaborative relationship between researcher and participant, it is important for the researcher to be transparent about their history and social position within our larger society. According to Bailey (2007), a researcher's ability to connect with their study participants for the purposes of gathering information depends largely on their "history, personality, values, training, and status characteristics—gender, race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation and social class" (Bailey, 2007, p. 6). In many ways, I am like those I have engaged in this process, and in other ways, we are different from one another. Ultimately, this shared

experience brought forth a new and more complete reality for both researcher and participants. My background information, provided in Chapter 2, will help the reader to understand my position as researcher in this context.

A qualitative, intrinsic case study helps the researcher to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, and the perspectives/worldviews of selected participants (Merriam, 2002). Qualitative research attempts to understand and make sense of phenomena through the eyes of the participant. Yet, the meaning that is gathered is "mediated through the researcher as an instrument" (Merriam, 2002, p. 6). While this is a qualitative, intrinsic case study, it has always been my intention to be reflective about how I interpret the data. I am cognizant of the fact that I have contributed to the process of making meaning as I interacted with the participants during the interview process. It was my wish to be transparent and reflective during this process. Using thick description and an inductive strategy for analysis, I reveal recurring patterns and common themes that arose from interviews, observations and collected documents.

Limitations and Delimitations

By nature of the fact that it is a qualitative, intrinsic, case study, the study had limitations and delimitations. A limitation is " an imposed restriction which is essentially out of the researcher's control" (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019, p. 156). Imposed restrictions may still impact the design, results, and conclusions drawn from the study; therefore, any restrictions should be clearly acknowledged by the researcher (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). This case study is limited by researcher bias as well as participant reactivity. The researcher has given careful thought to ways of accounting for these limitations to minimize their impact. A key limitation of this study is the issue of subjectivity and potential bias regarding the researcher's own involvement in Montesori education through her children. The researcher was careful not to

interject her own opinion into conversations with educators during the interview. However, there were times when the researcher felt that the semi-structured nature of the interview lent itself to brief but casual conversation regarding parenting and educating that could have changed the way participants responded to the interviewer and interview questions. For example, there was a moment during one of the interviews when the researcher's eyes welled up with tears in reaction to a story about a very challenging moment with a child at the school. As a result, the interviewee remarked that she really liked the researcher. From that point forward the interview was more casual and free flowing. Related to this limitation is the phenomenon of participant reactivity (Maxwell, 2008). A few of the participants let down their guard and talked more colloquially with the researcher as a result of sharing personal anecdotes before and during the interview.

Delimitations are the boundaries consciously set by the authors of the research (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). The researcher must create parameters so that the study is achievable. Delimitations explain why certain courses of action are rejected while others are pursued (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). This study was delimited by its sample size, sample selection, and techniques for gathering data. Since this is a doctoral dissertation, it was important to keep the sample size to a manageable number of eight participants. The researcher also determined that one 60–70-minute interview with each participant was sufficient for gathering the data that would answer the research questions.

There are also boundaries presented by the scope of the study (Simon & Goes, 2013). The researcher looked specifically at one Black Montessori community in a segregated, low-income, urban neighborhood. As the intention of this case study was to examine the possible problems of entanglement present as Montessori exists within the public sphere, the selected

teachers and administrators at the school were given an opportunity to reflect on their current positions as stakeholders in this unique educational community. The limitations inherent to the research context and well as the delimitations set forth by the researcher have created the parameters of this study.

Conclusion

In summary, this chapter provides a detailed description of the methodology for this research study. A critical, qualitative, intrinsic case study has been employed to understand the role that Montessori education plays in addressing structural inequity and promoting social justice within a segregated, public, charter school in a low-income urban neighborhood. The desired participant sample is made up of eight teachers and administrators within this school community. Data has been collected from eight semi-structured individual interviews, observations, and school documents. The data has been reviewed and coded for categories of curriculum and instruction, assessment, professional development, school funding, community building, and school/classroom culture as they are viewed through the lens of culturally responsive teaching in education for Black children. The data has been analyzed relative to existing literature throughout the process, and reviewed for emergent themes. The reliability, validity, and transferability of this study were accounted for through various procedures including an audit trail, member-checking, cross-checking codes, triangulation of data, the use of rich/thick description, and the reflexive practices of the researcher throughout the study.

CHAPTER 4

Findings I: Conditions

Introduction

The purpose of this research is to contribute to a growing understanding of how Montessori education today functions outside of highly resourced, private school environments that educate mostly white children. More specifically, this research is a close look at one public Montessori school that addresses the educational, social, and emotional needs of Black children. Teachers and administrators (whom I will refer to collectively as educators from this point forward) have been given an opportunity to reflect on their work with Black children and families as they implement a typically Eurocentric method of teaching and learning at Prospect Montessori School. In this chapter (Findings I), the participants' insights illuminate points of tension according to their experiences. The stories that emerge from this portion of data specifically address the racialized conditions of precarity that stem from social injustice. The stories also shine light on the impact that neoliberal education reform has had on teachers, students, and curriculum. Despite the challenges faced by this school community, the stories also illuminate a strong undercurrent of commitment, connection, and positivity.

The findings comprise conditions and responses. This chapter explores evidence presented by the teachers that describes the conditions of social injustice that highlight the intersecting systems of social injustice operating among the school's various stakeholders. The conditions in which teachers and students operate each day at Prospect Montessori School are represented by three primary themes: *Trauma, Inequality, and Racism.* These themes paint a picture of the life of the school and contribute to an understanding of the culture of Prospect Montessori School.

Snapshot: Life at Prospect Montessori School

Very early in my relationship with Prospect Montessori, I was cued in to the precarious nature of daily life experienced directly by the children, faculty, and staff. In one short visit to the school, I witnessed a very sick preschooler with a high fever being held by a teacher while the school principal repeatedly and unsuccessfully tried to reach the child's caregiver. I saw and heard various temper-related outbreaks from children in the classrooms or hallways as teachers tried, in various ways, to support their emotional needs. One angry grandmother arrived at the front office during my visit to pick up her grandson who had already caused enough disruption to be sent home from school before 10 a.m. I saw areas of the school ceiling leaking into garbage cans. These examples of life in the school community accrue daily to create an ongoing climate of trauma and response.

Most of the children who attend Prospect Montessori School are being raised in the surrounding neighborhood. This segregated Black neighborhood is also considered low-income. According to the teachers, some children have more consistent and loving home care than others. I have also learned from the teachers that until very recently (before Michelle Obama's initiative to put grocery stores within reach), the area was considered a food desert. As I listened to the participants, it was clear that many families are fragmented due to violence, drug abuse, incarceration, and death. Gang activity and gun violence add a layer of danger and unpredictability when moving from place to place even just outside the doors of the school. Loss and heavy hearts seem to be the norm rather than the exception.

Despite this very bleak description of life in the school and the neighborhood, positives abound. There are smiling adults and children working hard in their classrooms. Lamps are illuminated in cozy corners of many classrooms. Materials are in working order. Workstations

are alive with student activity. Student art is displayed. Murals are painted on the walls; yoga is happening in an upstairs classroom, and songs are being sung by sweet voices. Children are helped, embraced, and cherished. They are spoken to with respect, and they match their teachers in temperament and disposition when they are able. In my four visits to the school, I witnessed a feeling of overall kindness and loving relationships between teachers and students.

Teachers at the school candidly shared the heartbreaking conditions of social injustice and structural inequity. They told how these conditions are felt by the children and shared by the adult community at Prospect Montessori School. All eight educators interviewed as part of this study shared examples of trauma, poverty, structural inequity, racism, and communication barriers that negatively impact the students, teachers, administrators, and their families. They also shared evidence of communication pathways that have been paved and relationships that have been built and sustained, in part through robust social-emotional learning programs. Some of these relationships are delicate and hard-won while others are solid and enduring. Their descriptions (covered in this chapter and in Chapter 5 – Findings II: From Barriers to Pathways) cover a broad range of experiences that provide the reader with an opportunity to peer into the reality of the school.

Trauma

A Culture of Trauma

The primary finding in this study is that Prospect Montessori School is a trauma-impacted and trauma-sensitive community. The children each experienced some form of first-hand trauma through their exposure to violence, neglect, abuse, food insecurity, stress, lack of sleep, poor living conditions, and homelessness, among other hardships. All of the students have had second-hand contact with the outcomes of trauma as they witness and experience the

consequences of trauma manifest in their peers. As such, trauma was mentioned with high frequency in the data. Participants shared their insights regarding the sheer numbers of children directly impacted by trauma, the variety of traumas experienced, how community trauma impacts the teachers and how, in their attempts to manage trauma, children and adults express themselves in dramatic ways.

Shay, an experienced Black teacher at Prospect Montessori, shared her insights regarding the sheer numbers of children impacted by trauma. Although she has worked in other low-income, Black communities, Shay suggested that this community is more deeply impacted. Shay feels that the culture of Prospect Montessori School is a "culture of trauma":

> [I have worked with] primarily, the African American community. This was still kind of a different experience, just moving into, being in the [Billstone] community. And, I would say, a lot of that goes back to that thing we spoke of, as far as trauma. A lot of the, um, for lack of a better word, the acting out kind of behaviors, I think had to do with…with that [trauma outside of the school environment]. So, behaviors became a very challenging thing. I mean, behaviors with kids are always challenging, but the level and the type of challenging… (pause)…and the numbers, this…this is the other thing I'd say, the numbers of kids that have challenging…challenging behavior was…was much different. Where you're going from a couple of kids in the classroom to, oh, my goodness, this is like half my class. You know that kind of thing. It's a real thing. It's a culture of trauma.

Trauma responses are occurring every day at Prospect Montessori. Many children here have inherited these responses from their parents as well as from events occurring outside of school.

The children are encountering a variety of traumatic experiences due to structural inequity impacting their community.

The Trauma of Poverty

Janelle, another Black teacher who works with the upper elementary students, expressed the variety of traumatic experiences impacting her students including homelessness, hunger, violence, and loss. She reported that the trauma of poverty is impacting the adults that surround the children outside of school. “It trickles down to the lives of the children and often repeats itself,” she said. She told me that it is also not uncommon to witness dramatic adult behavior. She mentioned that the children deal with a lot of extra traumas because of the adults around them in the community. For example, “in the last few years the school has had children who have had parents get shot down, children who are homeless, or even if they have a place [to live], they're not eating.”

In one recent instance, she learned that a young boy was stealing food from the teacher’s refrigerator at the back of the room. She described the incident as a discovery that opened her eyes to an issue. She felt it was an “opportunity for communication with the child rather than a crime to be punished.”

> We would have food and stuff in the fridge, and it'd be our lunches and they will come up missing. We found out it was him stealing them because he was hungry. So, we ended up having a conversation with him and just letting us know instead of stealing our food, say something. Because if we know, then we can help. So, we just started, we would bring our lunch and then we bring extra food or extra snacks…to leave in the fridge. Um, I would go to the store down the street, and we just get those big old packs of lunch meat and have it in there. You know, so we have a lot of kids who are missing out on those

> fundamental needs. And until you get those met, I'm not learning. Cause if I'm hungry, my stomach is grumbling, I'm not focused. I'm tired. Because if you don't eat for a while and you're hungry, you're going to get tired. So, I'm not really paying attention to you.

It is evident that the teachers see hunger as a traumatic experience for children. The impact that hunger has on children is felt by everyone that interacts with that child. The teachers note the relationship between hunger, nourishment, and success in school and in life.

Children also have insecurities when other basic needs are not met due to poverty. Appearance and cleanliness, especially as children mature into middle schoolers, become a point of insecurity that can distract children from learning and interacting well with others. Nia, a newer Black teacher who works with lower elementary students, explained to me that many children do not have enough clothing or access to laundry to properly clean the clothing that they do have. She said that the school gets clothing donations, but children do not want to be seen rummaging through boxes of donated clothing. She mentioned that she and her team were brainstorming ideas that would help children feel more comfortable approaching the donations. "They feel stigmatized," she said. Janelle described her recent conversation with another teacher on the same topic:

> We were actually talking about it before we came over here. We have rooms in the school. If we actually washed the clothes up, hung it up, arranged it by size. Yeah. kids could come in and we have a washing machine downstairs. We have kids come in dirty and the clothes is holey. It don't fit. For you to be able to take that kid downstairs and let them switch out what they got. And then they can wash. Like I said, it's a washing machine. Let them go wash it. Kids who come in and their stuff is messed up. You can

> switch, let them put something else on. Wash what they have and then that's another outfit they have for later, you know?

The teachers are aware of the struggles that the children encounter as a result of living in poverty. The evidence shows that they are often working towards practical solutions to alleviate stress for children.

The Trauma of Violence

Jasmin, another Black lower elementary teacher, mentioned that violence in the surrounding community has an impact on the daily movement in and around the school. Potential violence limits the interaction that the school community can have with the neighborhood surrounding the school.

> We don’t get out in the community, and no one stays around here. All you know is the lockdown code when you are supposed to stay in because there is shooting around. Um, and we’re running out, running in [the building].

In frustration, Janelle gave an example of some parent behavior outside the building that supports the need for the lockdown codes that Jasmin mentioned:

> We've had—about a year ago, we actually had two dads bring guns to the school to fight outside of the school because their daughters were into it. And it's like, are you serious? You're going to put a whole school full of kids at risk because your two preteen girls are fighting. Instead of letting kids be kids, they fight, they argue.

The teachers shared that even though events like these do not occur every day at school, they are part of a shared lived experience surrounding the school that causes elevated levels of stress and anxiety for everyone involved. They also mentioned that there are many families impacted by the

loss of a loved one due to shootings. Six of the eight teachers mentioned knowing children who have suffered at least one loss due to gun violence.

The Impact of Trauma on Teachers

Isaac and Jasmin expressed how trauma in the community impacts the teachers too. Isaac, a white, upper-elementary teacher, explained, "It's an additional layer of stress when thinking about and working with students who consistently have been under-resourced, underserved, and neglected by the government." He told me that it is hard to work with students who experience massive trauma and have had multiple adverse childhood experiences:

> Many of them bring that baggage into school, and it can be very stressful and very challenging. We're all like stressed and frustrated and feel like, I think a lot of times, like overwhelmed and don't know what to do, but, um, I haven't been in many schools in which so many of those children are seen in like a place of love despite having all these very, very, very challenging behaviors.

The second part of his statement is another indication that the teachers at Prospect Montessori are humanizing the problems that come from poverty and other traumatic experiences. The word "love" appeared in many places in the data and will be further explored in Chapter Six, but for now it is worth acknowledging that the data from these interviews shows us, again and again, that Prospect Montessori teachers lead with love and see the students as young people weighed down by circumstances beyond their control.

Jasmin continued along these same lines to describe the sadness and hopeless feeling that can often overwhelm the adults working with children at Prospect Montessori. Teacher attrition becomes part of the equation for the school as large numbers of teachers who are not prepared for this environment tend to have short lived tenures in the school building:

> My class lost five teachers before me. Culturally being like understanding of their [the students'] backgrounds and really like acting in accordance because if you don't get that and you don't do it, then you're not the right fit. And even if you understand the background, it's still hard. Like it's hard for me, like some days you leave here breaking down crying, like what do you do? A kid just came to me and said, rats were running over my head, I didn't sleep. Like, what do you do? Like you get phone calls, and you find out situations and you like, what? You can't save the world.

This overwhelming feeling is part of the cultural experience shared by the teachers and administrators. They are realizing their limitations, and yet many of them continue to apply themselves where they know they can assist. I was told by two of the teachers that the children often accidentally refer to them as mom. In many instances, these teachers behave as second parents to their students. The school building and the classroom are a second home for many of the children; their teachers, a second family. Nia shared with me that she often gets calls from families when there is a crisis situation. She has been asked to drive children home, keep them after school or even keep them at her home overnight. She admits to loving this part of her work, especially when she can host a small group of classmates and provide a safe space for the children to congregate outside of school. Isaac also mentioned that he has driven children home, or taken children to their sporting events on weekends. He feels that this is another way that he can connect with families and show them that he is "on their side working towards the same goals of supporting the children."

These acts of support are evidence of the compassion and the love that fuel the teachers in their daily work with students and families. They seem to be energized with a sense of purpose when families see them as resources. The educators participating in these interviews all

expressed a desire to be available to their students in good times and also during hard times. They all seemed to have an unwavering commitment to their students.

Trauma Response

Jasmin explained to me that when the children act out it is very much perceived as a trauma response by the teachers and administrators. The teachers at Prospect Montessori, who are well suited to weather the storm, understand that behavior is just a response and often a test. "The children are experiencing so much, and they do not know who to trust," Jasmin stated. She made it clear that she believes that it takes the right teacher with the right perspective to stick around:

> When you first get them, they're like, they're going to try you. They might throw a chair, they might, but over time they see that they can trust somebody, and I feel like that goes a long way. You get to see them grow…I think it's important because they have stability, they get to know you, and they have someone stable they can trust.

Due to experience and some trauma-informed professional development called Conscious Discipline (Baily, 1996), the teachers have come to understand that when children are acting out, it is often a show of trust in the adult who is in charge. According to research, one of the most effective ways to deal with trauma is by providing children with resilience skills and practicing them in an environment that offers trustworthy relationships (Bethell et al., 2017). Conscious Discipline is a program that does just that. It offers teachers and students opportunities to reflect, gather strategies and practice them with one another when they are not in the heat of the moment. Among other self-regulating strategies taught by this program, children and their teachers have learned that reaching out to the adults in the building is a resilience skill that children can use for self-regulation. Over time the teachers and students have developed bonds of trust. It seemed to

be 100 percent acceptable to the faculty and staff interviewed to have children visit their classrooms when they feel the need to connect. Nia said,

> I still talk to the kids up here. I have one of my students who, and I was just a para [professional] at this time. Um, she's a kid who used to crawl under the tables, had a lot of anger, and she's up here now. So, when she gets stressed out, she'll still be at my door. *Can and I come in for a while? Okay, as long as your teacher knows, it's fine.* As long as they tell their teacher [they are coming to see me], *Come on in.*

Rose, who is one of the floating special education teachers, made a unique statement that spoke to the culture of trauma in existence at Prospect Montessori as a specific type of freedom:

> I mean when kids here are upset like everybody knows, you know… because they scream at the top of their lungs, and they throw things and tables and chairs sometimes and stuff. But it's like they, it's, they have, and this will sound strange, but it's almost like a type of freedom that they have that I just haven't experienced. And I'm jealous of that sometimes too. It's like—I want that freedom. I think that's it. Even though some people will say that it's just, it's a product of their other environment, like their home life and the community life. But I do think that the students feel safe here.

In expressing her envy of the children's freedom to be emotional, Rose conveyed that there is a high level of emotional security that children feel in the presence of their teachers and administrators. The teachers seem to allow the outbursts if children are not hurting themselves or others.

Shay mentioned the importance of teaching children how to repair their mistakes and recover from outbursts. The idea that we all make mistakes, and we all get a chance to mend them, is a level of acceptance that is embedded into the social/emotional curriculum at the

school. Every classroom teacher mentioned a safe space in the classroom and often they mentioned making time for children to have physical and emotional episodes. Teachers explained that children are observed and supported as needed and can then return to the classroom work when they feel ready. Overall, what is evident is that there is time and space for their emotional recovery within the Montessori curriculum as implemented at this school.

Inequity

Not Just Statistics

Poverty and structural inequality lay at the foundation of the school's challenges. The numbers tell the whole truth. At of the end of the 2020–2021 school year, the racial and ethnic makeup of Prospect Montessori School was 92.7% Black, 6.3% Hispanic, 0.7% White and 0.3% Pacific Islander. Of those children, 94% are considered low-income, compared with 78.8% of children in the district and 48.5% of children in the state. From school to state, these percentage changes in low-income students are drastic. In addition, 22.7% of the school's students are homeless. This compares to a district percentage of 3.4% and a state percentage of 2% (Illinois Report Card, 2020). According to the numbers, most of the children at Prospect Montessori are growing up in poverty and almost one fourth of them do not have a permanent home. What we know is that "poverty impacts the lives of students by creating emotional and social challenges, acute and chronic stressors, cognitive lags, and health and safety issues" (Izard, 2016, p. 5). Poverty is one form of social injustice that has an impact on all areas of a child's development. These numbers raise the questions: How is there anything standard about this group of children? And why are they being measured against their economically secure peers?

Standardized Testing

During the interviews, one of the most touched upon forms of structural inequality was standardized testing. This is because test performance is directly correlated with school funding and school closures. Jonathan, a white school administrator in charge of special education, said that it is almost impossible not to put pressure on the students to do well on standardized tests. The life of the school depends upon it. He said,

> It matters. It matters, you know, and it, it literally determines whether a school stays open, not just a charter school, but any public school [in the city]. And it's so unfair when you think about all the different things that go into place.

Jonathan continued by telling me that he had a conversation with the person in charge of the school ratings system at the local University:

> I tried to get her to explain to me how this was a fair tool to use for students who face trauma, and I couldn't get an answer. And so, it became very clear to me that this [test] was meant for, you know, the well-to-do white schools that…it's very much exclusionary…and that just crushed me. And then the other point that I was, you know, trying to make with her is, can you explain to me how attendance is a factor in this when we have such a high population of transient students?

Isaac, an upper elementary teacher, feels that this equity issue is also complicated by the fact that this is a Montessori school in a low-income setting:

> The realization that despite how flawed these tests are, and how culturally biased they are, um, that they are everything to our funding and ultimately, pretty tied to our students' success, as messed up as that is. Yeah, yeah, yeah, and is not a factor in the

> majority of Montessori schools because they often are, uh, independent schools that don't have to worry about these…realities.

Isaac realizes that this population of students is being further penalized because the tests are not a fair measure of their progress. He is also concerned that ultimately this testing seals their fate in the long term:

> Right, and then, you know, what is the…what is the narrative being pushed? Oh, okay, so, we don't meet these certain numbers on a culturally biased, uh, test that's, quite frankly, becoming obsolete, um, but, ultimately, bounds our children, our students to significant futures. You know what I mean? Like when prison populations are looking at these standardized test scores and determining their population in 20 years.

During the interview, his anger was palpable. He is aware of how the school is caught in a mix of values as they try to provide for the academic, social, and emotional well-being of children who live in uncertainty.

The teachers each took time to impress upon me the beauty of The Montessori Method for these children. Each in their own way, they told me that this pedagogy allows them to practice patience with children as they develop at their own pace according to their innate abilities. This method affords the teachers the ability to properly support the children when they need extra attention, to slow down or speed up according to the needs of the individual. However, neoliberal education reforms such as standardized testing and accountability measures placed on schools, put pressure on everyone to perform at a specific rate and pace. Expecting children to perform at the same level and pace is further replicating the inequity that these teachers are seeking to eradicate in their practices. Janelle provided evidence to corroborate:

> Yeah. They don't need to do the testing [in private Montessori] and the reason for that is because we [Montessori] kids are actually being introduced to that [content] you wouldn't see until you're like six, seventh grade. But they're seeing it first, second, third grade. Because they get that introduction. They get to play with it…the manipulatives and the sensorial. But you're [they're] not expected to master those skills until way down the line. Whereas these tests are saying here, you have to know this by this date, this time. And if you don't, it's something wrong. Which is not accurate. And then we have some kids that can do the work, but then you give them a test and they're not good test takers. But they're [going to be] penalized for it.

This leaves the teachers wondering how to teach the children to value the process of learning at a comfortable pace when test scores are driving the school's ability to provide resources for learning.

Janelle also shared that the test scores are determining funding for everyday benefits as well as providing job security:

> The biggest thing, the biggest thing we have a challenge with, but at the same time it kind of goes back to budgeting is like, we don't have a teacher's lounge. A lot of times we eat in our classroom. So, we're not getting breaks, you know, because if kids are around, they're going to come to you. It doesn't matter if you say, I'm on lunch, I'm not here. They're there. Um, the other thing would be our planning time because we are short staffed, we don't always get the support we need. Making our jobs a little bit more stressful.

The teachers work hard, even harder than most public-school teachers in the same district. Due to ongoing work to integrate Montessori curriculum with common core, the stress of the job is magnified. According to Isaac,

> Regardless of like the, um, student's behavior, I think the workload is really intense. Um, particularly working and trying to align it with the common core and making sure that we're hitting these standardized testing protocols. And just trying to make sure that we're compliant in doing what we need to do to stay open, keep getting funding and, ultimately, allow kids to have more educational opportunities. Um, so, it's a lot of workload, just through the Montessori aspect and balancing that with common core and public schools and standardized testing.

While it is obvious that the teachers could use more support, the system they are operating within appears to work against them. The elitism that characterizes neoliberal reform policies, neglects the needs of those who have fewer resources to begin with. According to these findings, Janelle, Isaac, Jonathan and their colleagues are tangled in the web of neoliberal education reform as it imposes racially and economically biased policies in their school. It does not work in their favor.

Impoverished Conditions

The Billstone neighborhood is an example of how the segregation of Black and Brown people to severely divested, under-resourced environments has created deep structural inequality. Every third or fourth house in the Billstone neighborhood is boarded up. The parkways are overgrown with wild grass and the streets are ill-maintained. Many businesses lay vacant, and most street corners are populated by small liquor stores where young, unemployed men congregate. According to the accounts given by the teachers, many children live in homes where gas and/or electricity has been turned off, food is scarce and adult supervision is minimal. Some

homes have rodent problems. Although the school building conditions are a bit better, they have also contributed to other forms of lived trauma.

Today, Prospect Montessori School has a new campus just blocks from its old building. The original location was shared with another public school in the district. The Montessori charter was housed in an annex to the larger district building. As I mentioned earlier, the original building was suffering from water damage. As enrollment increased, the school was outgrowing the physical plant. In the new location, they all fit very well with additional classrooms for special classes and room for growth. However, the new location is also an old building that is not without its own problems. Janelle explained the difficulty that the school has had with the school district supporting the school's move to a suitable building:

> But like there was an empty school that's actually a little bigger than this one we are in now. I think because we are a charter. You know…so stuff like that. It's like they [the district] were fighting against us. Like they wanted the school to fail rather than trying to help us. Yeah… So, even as far as like the building. This building is old and dilapidated. They [the district] don't want to help fix it. We had in the gym, some of the ceiling falling, and it actually hit a kid. [Repairs for] that had to come out of our budget rather than the district helping pay for it. When if you just go by regular landlord laws, if your building is falling apart, you're a slumlord if you're not fixing it up.

Things like building safety and lack of financial support from the school district, poor living conditions and lack of adult supervision are all symptoms of poverty. They each add to the already long list of oppressive constructs impacting the students and teachers as they gather each school day. What should be alarmingly evident is that the items on this list of trauma-inducing conditions are the result of both economic and racial inequality in schools and communities.

Poor conditions that impact people who are segregated because of the color of their skin are racialized conditions.

Racial Tension

Racial Tension According to Teachers and Administrators

Although I did not directly pose any questions to the participants regarding race, race was a common topic of conversation during the interview. Participant responses to each of the questions posed across categories often circled back to race or racial tension. What I have learned from the participants is that racial tension operates in insidious ways to affect students and teachers of color as well as white teachers.

The insider/outsider lens was often used to depict the difference between those who were or who had been residents in the Billstone neighborhood and those who were coming into the community to work. Insiders' perceptions of the neighborhood were characterized by personal experiences living in the community. Five of the participants (Nia, Tiana, Janelle, Jasmin and Shay) all live in or very near the Billstone neighborhood. Two of them were raised in the community. These five Black teachers each have family and close friends in the school community. They each provided evidence of their acceptance by the children and parents in the community. In reporting the findings, they will be referred to as insiders. Three of the participants (Rose, Jonathan and Isaac) were not raised in Billstone nor do they reside there now. These three teachers are white. Two of them have worked within this community for more than five years. The third is completing a second year at the school. By contrast, these three teachers do not feel as secure about their acceptance as community members. They will be referred to as outsiders.

Insider Perspectives on Racial Conditions

Insiders at Prospect Montessori School seem to benefit from a position of insight and shared experience. They also typically have the trust of other community members to a degree that is not possible for an outsider. In a school community like Prospect Montessori, life experience is unique in that community members experience oppression and varying degrees of trauma. Teachers and administrators who are members of the school community as insiders have common experiences with their students. They know first-hand what it is like to be a child in this community or one like it.

It is interesting to note that while the teachers at Prospect Montessori are aware that the children are impacted by institutional racism and oppression, they are also inclined to advocate for their white colleagues when they encounter racial tension. Tiana shared an interesting response to a student who was reacting to a new awareness around race and discrimination.

> To be honest, there is a lot of racial [tension]. Parents, I would hear, I heard a little girl come and say, “that little white teacher can't tell me what to do.” And I went off on her and said, “I don't care what color she is. If she tells you to go do this, you need to go do it.” But growing up here, that's what you hear. That's what a lot of your parents are teaching you. So, when it came to the school, one of the problems we have with teachers is that our kids would not accept teachers of different colors because the parents did not do it.

I think this speaks clearly to the realities of race in a segregated school employing a handful of white teachers. Leadership positions are shared by Black and white teachers and administrators at Prospect Montessori. Children and parents are guided by both insiders and outsiders. This study shows us that issues of race cannot be glossed over in this setting. It also shows that Black

teachers who are also considered insiders in the community value trying to teach Black children not to discriminate based on skin color.

Shay, one of the long-term Black teachers at the school, talked about the "less than" mentality from which many community members operate. She considers her role in the messages that are sent to children and parents in a school community where members have grown up being told in numerous ways that they are worth less than others:

> Right and…and that whole idea of validation I think, you know, is really, key, and it's key for everybody, but I'm going to be so bold as to say that I really think it's key for our students, for our student population, because a lot of what they are told in subtle and not so subtle ways is that they are less than. That their culture is less than. Um, we talked about parenting. That's one of the things you need to be careful about with parenting. You don't want to say your parenting is less than.

Shay is considerate of this sensitivity and aware that to gain the trust and cooperation of her students and parents, she must first validate their self-worth. According to a few participants, this insight and sensitivity may not be coming from all members of the school community. Janelle mentioned that she does not think that many of the parents respect the school principal or the school in general. At the time that the data was collected, the school principal was a white woman who has worked for over 20 years in Montessori Education and specifically with this school community for the past eight years. She believes in what she is doing and appears to have built trust with her staff and students. Still, this could be a sign that there is still work to be done around building trust between leadership and the parent community.

The lack of trust is understandable and to be expected. Janelle explained what happens every year when the students first learn about slavery in school:

> …when kids learn about slavery, they go through this "They-don't-like-any-white-person-at-all" phase. But it's teaching them, just like we teach them, we don't want people to say, all Blacks are this way, so why are you saying it? Parents didn't get that [perspective]. So, they're not teaching their kids that. So, we, and it took a while and we're better at it now, but they actually had to learn like, hey you, you can't do this either. Because people feel like, oh, if you're not Black, if you're Black, you can't be racist. Yeah, you can.

In the example provided by Janelle, it is observable that Black teachers at the school are concerned that their students are engaging in racist thinking towards white people as a result of their new knowledge of slavery. Scholars point out that a member of a dominant racial group cannot experience "racism" because of the position of privilege and power from which they benefit (DiAngelo, 2018). In other words, a white person can experience someone not liking them because of their race, but that is because historical and structural racism have created a mistrust of white people among some BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) communities. However, the white person can step away from the individual interaction and enjoy their privilege once again, regardless of being liked or not liked. What is evident is that some of the teachers are concerned that the students will carry feelings of hate towards whole groups of people as a result of what they have learned. It seems that the teachers feel that this outlook is detrimental for their students.

Outsider Perspectives on Racial Conditions

Scholars also note that most people in the dominant group are not consciously oppressive (Chesler et al., 2013). In many instances, people in dominant groups have internalized negative messages about other groups and consider their attitudes towards the other group quite normal.

For example, Isaac, a young white male teacher with two years of experience working at Prospect Montessori, operates under the assumption that students and families of color from under-resourced communities are unfamiliar with progressive education. While this may largely be true, it is still an assumption that places white teachers and families in a position of authority on matters of progressive education like The Montessori Method. If students and their families do not understand the nuances of structural/institutional racism and are working to become familiar with a new form of education, they may feel a sense of discomfort and even inferiority as a result. This can lead to a lack of engagement from parents and some pushback from students and parents toward the white teachers.

Rose, a veteran teacher who has worked in low resource, public school communities for over 20 years, expressed her concern in not being warmly embraced by her students' parents. She is yearning to connect and feels that it may be that the school does not know how to build trust with the parents:

> I had one little boy in kindergarten. I used to hang around every Thursday because I knew the mother would come and pick up, you know, her son, and I tried in so many different ways to like elicit conversation. And I mean she was nice too and everything, but it was like I didn't feel like she wanted [to engage with me]. Yeah, at all. And I found that unusual. And I'm, sometimes I wonder if being white separates me, but then, I don't know.

Rose is uncertain. She also wonders if her whiteness is the barrier that keeps her from having better relationships with her students' parents.

Isaac, a new upper elementary teacher, explained that he needs to be aware that his whiteness can be intimidating:

> I think like if you are like an outsider, if you are, you know, like a white person working in this population like I have…I have to be like very aware of that. That my just like my identity alone is…can be threatening and intimidating. So, I have to…I can't come…I can't come into these spaces thinking that, um, you know, [thinking] I know what's best or that I know everything or that everything I say is golden or everything I say is correct. If I have that mentality… And here, it's just…I think that this school has had people with that mentality and continues to have that, and I think that is really, really, problematic.

Isaac pointed out that what Rose calls "doing a better job" could mean being more reflective about the traditional positions of power held by white teachers and administrators. It seems that for Isaac, that means questioning his own assumptions regarding his students and their parents—and not presuming to know all the answers. Isaac and the other white teachers realize that at least a good portion of the disconnection that they are perceiving is in relationship to community members feeling alienated by this new progressive and Eurocentric methodology:

> I think because we are trying to implement this pedagogy that is very Eurocentric and is very privileged. Um, it comes with a lot of baggage and a lot of assumptions and a lot of… privilege, I mean implied privilege. I think it's unique in the sense where we are working with students with a fairly high transient population… as a result of being low resourced and living in poverty and getting kids and families into a Montessori program who may have never been to a Montessori school and may not be familiar with Montessori pedagogy or may not have as much access to Montessori pedagogy or access to Montessori schools. Uh, and then, people come here and they just, you know, hear good things about the school but may not fully understand like …what they signed up for. I think that's relatively unique to us because we are trying to do something different with

> populations of people who haven't had access, who may not have had access to these progressive pedagogies.

Privilege plays a big role in the divide between outsiders and insiders. When one group of people has access to outside resources that serve to improve their well-being, and another group has only itself to lean on to achieve, there is a distance that the two groups need to travel to understand the other's habits, needs and wishes. The distance traveled requires patience and deep respect between individuals embarking upon the journey together. Even Isaac's word choices, "we" and "they," tell the story of the division that exists between those who have come to implement progressive education and those who are there to try something new. Racism is embedded in this construct as a dominant white majority come into a Black community believing that they are there to add value. Isaac is conscious that his presence could be misperceived. He lets his love for the children guide his intentions as he seems to trust those intentions implicitly:

> I also think it…it's really, important that families understand, particularly that like I feel like an outsider to the community…like I am. Um, I think it's important, too, that parents believe and know that when you are contacting them about their child, it's coming from a place of love. Um, and a place of care and, not just calling about all the things that their child is doing incorrectly.

Isaac wants to get past the boundaries that differences impose so he can work on a common goal with parents. He wants to be trusted with the education and social-emotional well-being of the children from 9am–3pm and work in collaboration with parents to realize this goal as a team. Although his intentions are good, how this trust will be built seems yet to be discovered:

> [There are] benefits. The value and like endless gifts and talents and resources that parents can tap into with their kid, and…and in getting them on [board]…and being on

> their team. Uh, and…and that can be like hard to do, um, as a white person… But it's the right thing to do, and it shows. It shows like it really, really, really, makes an impact with a kid when they know that all the adults are on the same page and that everyone is on the same team, and I think that without that [collaboration] you can't do that.

Isaac pointed out the importance of collaboration with parents. His statements provide evidence that consistent and loving communication is the first step. Coming together to work on the same team for the benefit of the child is the overarching goal from his standpoint.

Whether insiders or outsiders in the Billstone community, Prospect Montessori educators are determined to address systemic racism and other inequities in their daily work with Black children. This provides a nice segue to Chapter Five, which details how the educators respond to the pervasive injustice. Their responses are characterized by commitment, collaboration, and reflective practice. Relationships and social emotional learning are a priority.

CHAPTER 5

Findings II: From Barriers to Pathways

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the findings comprise the conditions impacting the learning community (Chapter Four) and the responses that educators have made to these conditions (Chapter Five). This chapter explores evidence presented by the teachers that describes their responses to the challenging conditions that exist at Prospect Montessori School. Educators at Prospect Montessori show commitment to building relationships and remain available for communication with parents and students. This plays a major role in the quality of the overall educator response to challenging conditions. There are both barriers and pathways that prevent and allow for quality relationships and good communication. The social and emotional curriculum is another key component in the response to the challenging conditions in this school community.

Relationships and Communication

Other teachers and administrators echo Isaac in demonstrating their desire to foster a collaborative culture at Prospect Montessori School. There are both barriers and pathways to good relationships and good communication within the school community. The teachers and administrators interviewed felt differently about their ability to communicate with three groups of stakeholders at the school. This theme has been separated into three sub-themes to represent those groups:

- *Relationships and Communication between Parents and Teachers/Administrators*
- *Relationships and Communication between Teachers and Administrators*
- *Relationships and Communication between Teachers/Administrators and Students*

Each sub-theme is broken into two parts: *The Pathways* and *The Barriers*.

Pathways between Parents and Teachers/Administrators

Teachers and administrators at Prospect School feel that the family is a very important piece in the success of the child. Jonathan, the special education coordinator, spoke to the value that the administration places on family engagement and the overall increase in "buy-in" that he has seen in his time at the school:

> That family piece is so important in a Montessori community, but especially in [Billstone] where we want the parents to know that we're not here to pick apart or nit-pick at different things. We really are here to help them and their student succeed. Um, and so getting that buy-in has been a process. But in my time here, I've really seen that we're getting buy-in from our parents.

Jonathan believes that it is important for educators to challenge their assumptions around parent involvement. "One of the things that you'll hear often from some of our teachers is *we don't have enough parent involvement*. Our administration really wants to shift that thinking towards are we making sure that [parents] are as involved as they can be?" It seems that the school is trying to be aware of the limitations that parents have and to work within those limitations to help parents feel good about what they CAN do rather than what they CANNOT do.

Nia also talked about the need to engage parents in the process of educating their child. Nia is a parent in the community as well as a teacher in the school, which gives her comments a certain amount of insight and credibility. She explained that flexibility is needed if teachers expect parents to be involved:

> [With regard to parent communication,] I also think it's really important to be flexible and to be open to having or providing space at, you know, 5 o'clock for instance when

> work is out instead of expecting families to come in at 1:30 on a Tuesday. They may…or may not have access to be able to do that because they have to work. So, I think it requires not assuming, and just like working with families.

Other teachers mentioned that it is not uncommon to have parents who work more than one job and are unable to be involved at all during the weekday. Therefore, the school has decided that it is important to sponsor family events on the weekends. Tiana, the admissions director, told me about an all-school picnic that has become an annual event: "We have our field day every year, and I love field day because field day is like bring everybody, bring anybody. It's a huge picnic. And everyone comes out with their cousins." Tiana is planning other events to draw parents into the school community: "We're doing something a little bit different this year that I'm working on, hopefully to get uh, more families out and involved in different activities around the city. We're working on family day at Soldier Field to see the Bears." Tiana also mentioned that if parents can take a day off work from time to time, they are able to attend field trips with their child's class at no cost. The bill is paid by the school.

Tiana's goal is to continue to help the school grow in every capacity, especially with the families: "I hope that more families feel welcome here," she told me. As evidenced by her comments, the school engages parents in programs which support personal development. The Family and Community Engagement (FACE) Program prepares parents to take a more active role in their children's lives and contribute to the community. She told me that her goal this year is to get men to be a more productive and vital part of the community. She said, as part of the FACE team at the school,

> We try to offer programs that support mothers. This year, I'm trying to also, not only just support mothers in their roles as mother but their role as women. I also want to support fathers, their role as fathers and their role as men.

As an admissions director, Tiana also has insight into the transition that families need to make as they enter The Montessori Community. Many of the parents have not even heard of this method, and Tiana recognizes how important it is to begin educating parents as soon as their interests are piqued. She does school tours to make sure that parents and caregivers understand what Montessori is. Tiana says that if it's during a school year, parents can see children at work:

> Whether we are looking in through the window, explaining, walking into the classroom, they can see the kids working at each level. I can explain how the growth process happens [in Montessori Education] and then I ask them if they have any more questions.

Tiana shared an example of a mother who was very uncertain about sending her child to a Montessori School due to her lack of knowledge about the program. Tiana intercepted her early in the game. Her son was in Tiana's class. He was a challenge. It was all a challenge. Her commitment to educating the child and the family and having patience with his trauma-based behaviors has led to a strong bond between the teacher, the school, and the family. Tiana explained:

> She [the mother] is making a whole life decision on whether or not [she and her] kid want to move to another state because she loves how her child has changed since being here. And she calls me, and she tells me, *Miss [Tiana] thank you for not giving up on my son. He's changed, and he's constantly changing, but you all did not give up on him and his behavior because he was another child that was struggling with understanding grief.* Um, even when we lose kids, it is still a success because we didn't lose the child because they

> didn't want to be here. We lost a child because their family has grown. Or they've grown stable, or they have found a stable place or situation that may not be conducive to being here.

In this case, the relationship was nurtured through the teacher's commitment to the child (and his challenges) and her devotion to helping the parent learn a new way without intimidation.

Jonathan, the director of special education, has been a long-time teacher in the suburbs. He cannot help but compare parent involvement in suburban schools to parent involvement at Prospect Montessori School. He notices that successful communication at Prospect Montessori involves more than just parent/teacher or parent/principal communication:

> Here it can be literally anyone from myself to the principal, down to just the teacher or the classroom assistant, whoever is able to best talk to that parent and deliver the same message, we're going to use because that's what's best for the student.

He seems to be saying that the more people that are willing to form a relationship with the parents in the community, the better. They do not limit themselves to one point person per student. If the parent reaches out to any member of the school community, they are embraced and supported. Nia, a lower elementary school teacher, provided an example of parents seeking connection. She finds that many parents come to her with personal issues that impact their child. While she is aware of her limitations, she is able to provide some direction.

> I know. Like, I'm not a therapist, but I can help you as much as I can help you. You know, I'm just here for the betterment of the child and the family. So, anything that I can do. I might not know what to tell you, but I can probably try to direct you to someone here who can help you.

The teachers carry a heavy load of responsibilities, some that they are not trained to carry out. However, they seem to want to push past the limitations whether they are perceived or not. Isaac has been a teacher at the school for two years. This is his first teaching job out of student teaching. He is enthusiastic about connecting with his parent population regardless of the challenges he faces. His optimism is encouraging:

> I definitely want to continue to involve [parents] not only in my classroom, but the school, as a whole, and that's really, hard to do. Um, I think it's going to take a lot of communication. A lot of that consistent, clear… routines and procedures and expectations and boundaries. I also think it really is going to require seeing parents as an asset. And not being afraid of parents or, uh, trying to withhold information, um, but really, involving families as community stakeholders.

As Isaac pointed out, the pathways that have been created between the faculty and the parents are in direct relationship to how the teachers and administrators "see" the parents. Evidence points to a desire to share the responsibility of educating and nurturing the children, the work toward creating confidence and direction for the parent body and sharing experiences that create a common bond between families, teachers, and administrators. There is consensus that when members of the community are considered an asset, there is room to grow.

Barriers between Parents and Teachers/Administrators

The barriers between teachers/administrators and parents differ from person to person. Taking insight from the previous evidence describing the insider/outsider roles held by various teachers at Prospect, it appears that those who relate to the community as insiders have stronger communication with parents and families than do those who relate to the community as outsiders. It tends to be easier for parents to relate to someone who knows the life that they lead,

who shares a race and socioeconomic background. Nia said, “I do think sometimes parents have fears of like what…exposure of what happens inside of their home.” She explained that parents do not want their inner lives to be exposed to people they do not know yet or trust yet.

Rose, a white teacher at the school, provides evidence of the distance felt between herself and her student’s parents.

> I don't know a lot of the families that I work with. In other schools and every other school that I've ever worked with, I knew the families like really well. But here it's like, there seems to be some kind of, it's not, not as easy of a bridge. And it could be because of the community maybe. But I am getting the sense more and more, it's, it's the school doesn't know how to bring the parents forward.

Rose says she is starting to feel like the “school” is to blame for the distance. When she says this, she is implying that the administration has not done the necessary work to help build the trust between the school faculty and the parent body.

Shay has been with the school since its inception. She is a parent, teacher and community member. Shay told me that the relationship between the school, parents and the community, is “the one area that I just don’t think we’ve solved.”

> I would not say that we have a bad relationship with our parents, because we don’t, but we have struggled to really, make them part of the conversation. Um, you know, there is a parent’s meeting every month and all of that, but, you know, it still, and I know that this is true for every school, but it’s usually going to be the same old parents. It’s just the numbers are so small and, we keep talking, every year about making certain things mandatory for our parents, um, and we have yet to do that. Um, and I know that that’s

> tricky, um, figuring out how to help a parent without sounding like you're telling them how to parent.

The teachers feel that parents could do a better job attending meetings, showing up for classroom activities/field trips, participating in regular communications with classroom teachers. But as Shay mentioned, it is a problem that the school is not sure how to solve.

Nia shares this sentiment. She said that one of the biggest challenges is that parents put their students in Montessori not ever knowing what it is:

> *Where is my student's homework? Where are the books? Why are they on the rugs?* You know, they have a lot of questions, but they never come in for like family nights and try to understand what Montessori is. It's just that, *oh this charter school is open, let me put my child in here.*

According to the teachers and administrators, the school is doing its part to provide parent education, but the parents are not showing up in large numbers.

Jasmin suggested that the school may not be supporting families enough with issues unrelated to education that make life challenging for them. "I just feel like we can do more. There are things that we sugar coat and put under the rug. To bring them out is only going to make us [the school] better." Jasmin was visibly irritated as she made this statement. She grew up in this neighborhood. Her insight allows her to see what is needed to build relationships with the surrounding community.

Isaac feels that patience, commitment, and love will help build relationships over time. He said that he has a "good" relationship with many of the third, fourth and fifth grade parents. But he also wants to make a bigger commitment to having more "direct involvement" with the parents. He said,

> I personally need to go the extra mile with families, especially, with families who are under-resourced. Whether that's helping drive a kid home or just whatever I can do to help, or you know, connecting them with, trying to connect the parents with resources. Uh, I just think it's really, really, important and if we're going to be working within low-resourced populations, then we need to be providing resources that may be at a deficit, and if you're not interested in doing that, then don't work in low-resourced populations.

Isaac said that sharing responsibility for the child's success is hard "because like, that's often not the case in traditional public schools, particularly, in low-resourced, predominately black communities." What he meant is, "a lot of the schools are treated like military schools, and it's a lot of like authoritative power." Prospect Montessori, on the other hand, tries to uphold anti-authoritarian Montessori principles. Isaac continued, "What myself and like my grade level team [do], like we try to share power [with parents and students] because we think that's important, and none of us are walking in here thinking that we have all the right answers." He is looking to learn from students as much as he is looking to teach them. Isaac hopes that this relationship building will be easier in his second year at the school. Mostly, he "hopes that at least most of the parents feel as if their children are loved…. This is a good starting place."

What stands in the way of relationship building are the delicate issues of equality and trust. It seems that the teachers who are conscientious about the obstacles that parents are trying to overcome are looking for new ways to build the relationships first. They know that authentic relationships require effort and commitment. Relationships must be built before the teachers can orient parents to a new holistic way of educating their children. Otherwise, they say that it all feels too authoritative and condescending.

Pathways between Teachers and Administrators

Although there was not a great amount of evidence regarding teacher relationships with the administration, what evidence there is, is significant enough to report. It seems that there are varying opinions regarding the quality of teachers' relationships with the school's administration. The two administrators interviewed feel very supportive of the teachers in the building. Jonathan, the special education coordinator, was emphatic. He said, "the admin[istration] is insanely supportive of our teachers. We do everything we can to support our teachers." His idea of support includes everything from problem solving to searching for funding to overcoming constraints to meet the needs of teachers and students. Jonathan also stated, "One of the best parts about this school is that we are very collaborative." He said that teachers will literally contact him at any time of the day. "I don't hesitate to answer those calls because I know at the end of the day if I'm able to support them, they're going to make my life easier down the road." He also feels that a willingness to collaborate is seen across the board. He says that the teachers are "insanely collaborative" with each other, as well.

Nia, the admissions director, was a classroom teacher before taking on this role. As previously mentioned, she is also a parent of four children who have attended the school. She feels very much in touch with her colleagues. She has worked with almost everyone in the building and expresses a strong connection to school community members as a teacher, parent, and administrator. Nia believes that what she adds to the admissions role is a level of insight that could not be provided by someone just walking into that role. She really knows what the teachers are working for, and that creates a level of honesty in her presentation of the school to newcomers.

Three of the classroom teachers mentioned that they felt well supported by the principal at the time of data collection. She is no longer the principal of the school and has moved to the role of Executive Director. In my three observations at the school, she was available to meet with me once. Her schedule was extremely busy as she is also the head of the Montessori Residency, which trains teachers to work in Urban Montessori Schools. I was hoping to interview her for this study, but she was not available. However, her presence was warm and welcoming. It was evident that she cared deeply about the school and its many facets.

In addition, every teacher interviewed felt a strong connection to the head of African American Studies/Diversity, Dr. James (a pseudonym). This administrator has since moved to the role of school principal at Prospect Montessori School. Dr. James was instrumental in the education of faculty and staff on matters of race and equity. A few teachers provided examples of instances when they came to tell Dr. James of a difficult issue only to walk away feeling humbled and educated. Rose shared one experience with me that showed her admiration for Dr. James. Rose was working on vocabulary with one of the students she regularly assists at the school when the child looked up at her and said, “You know what, we really don't like white people except for you.” Rose felt that the child was being so direct and poignant. She did not know how to respond and said something about not judging others by the color of their skin. On her first opportunity, Rose visited with Dr. James to get some advice. She told me that the advice she got was “something so fascinating.” Dr. James told her, “Do not say don't judge people by the color of their skin. Because…she [that child] will be judged by the color of her skin her whole life, and negatively.” Rose told me, “That is when I fell in love with Dr. James.” Rose felt that Dr. James quickly put her experience into context and taught her something valuable at the same time.

Dr. James is very protective of her community. I can say this with certainty because she served as the gatekeeper to my entrance into the community as a researcher. She was initially cautious regarding my intentions as a white researcher attempting to gain access to a Black community. She wanted me to be very clear about these intentions. She took her time reviewing my research proposal. She asked to meet me in person before granting me any access to the school faculty. I understand the depth of her commitment to the school and to the surrounding community because of that visit. I also came to understand that there was nothing neutral about my involvement with her community. I knew then that I would be expected to be reflective, own my position and work to overcome biases throughout this process if I wished to research the school community. Her administrative role seems to have led to the education of her colleagues and a bond of trust between them.

Barriers between Teachers and Administrators

Although the administration lends a helping hand in numerous ways, some of the teachers feel that it misses the mark on creating a cohesive and healthy power dynamic. Rose expressed that “the leadership structure is so like wishy washy—and changeable.” She further explained,

> [There is] unpredictability for the adults, [and] it makes people that way. I don't think people like intentionally want to be harmful to other people, but, but they become very harmful to other adults. And I think it's because it's shaky. It's like, it's not clear what the roles and the structure of the school are, sort of. And some of that could be, um, it's, it's an emotionally heightened place because of um, the community, and the trauma that a lot of the kids have suffered. It's emotionally difficult to be here, and maybe that's like the way that people deal with that piece, you know.

Rose was referring to a power dynamic that exists in the school where some members of the community exercised perceived authority over others. She also stated that there were too many administrative roles and that the roles changed so often that generally, many teachers did not know who was in charge. Because of the heightened anxiety of the community overall, Rose feels that strong leadership is needed and sometimes not available.

Overall, teachers respect the lead administrators. The consensus was one of ambivalence toward those with smaller administrative roles at the school. Shay referred to the school as a "Type A" setting, which makes it hard for anyone to follow the directives given by a colleague with similar status at the school. She feels that sometimes there are "too many cooks in the kitchen."

Pathways between Teachers/Administrators and Students

Children are the center of Prospect Montessori School. From the moment I was buzzed in through the glass doors, it was obvious that this was a place for children. I was greeted by an adult who was welcoming incoming traffic. He was sitting having a joyful conversation with two middle school children, and he interrupted himself to ask the kids to show me to the office. I noticed along the way that the doors to classrooms were open, and children moved about with freedom and confidence. This was their school. They knew it. They welcomed me with pride.

Immediately I felt as if I had stepped into a family setting. Tiana, the admissions director, said, "It's literally like having a family with 300 kids." She gave me a tour of the school. The classrooms resembled living rooms. Everyone knew each other. The adults were calm and jovial. The children knew what to expect from adults and vice versa. In saying this, however, it is important to point out that the hallways are not always calm and jovial. As with any "family," there are ups and downs. Children have outbursts, and there is misbehavior. Still, from what I

have witnessed during my visits, the adults are accustomed to the children and maintain calm even when there are emotional storms. The school is a safe place for students even during volatile emotional moments.

Nia, a lower elementary teacher, told me that it has been a learning process for her to work in this environment. She says the children have emotional freedom. It's not like the way she was "allowed to act" in school.

> [When] I went to schools, it's like we respected teachers. We did what they said. You know, it's, it's a vast difference from, from that. So, I just had to like take a step back and figure out how do I reach out to all of these kids? What is it that I need to come back for them to understand that it's okay, this is a safe place for you, this is a learning environment and we'll have fun. We'll have quiet time. We'll have learning time. We'll have all of that.

Her reflective and reassuring voice was very telling. Although she has had to adjust to the intense psychological needs of children that stem from poverty and trauma, she is certain that the children's needs are the priority. She works every day to build bonds of trust with her first, second and third graders. Isaac shares the same outlook. His hope is that "the students walk out of his room or walk into [his] room every day feeling safe and loved," though he worries that some of them do not have the opportunity to feel that elsewhere.

Jonathan, the director of special education, said, "we are all here for the kids." He meant in all ways. He told me about the school's mission to lead with "heads, hearts and hands in a commitment to a life of growth and fulfillment." Through their curriculum and instruction, they provide for the holistic needs of children. He spoke about the balance that the teachers and the school curriculum provide for the students to create this fulfillment:

> We truly think about their minds and help them to be intellectually stimulated by using their hands to create. We have a garden out in the back that we have them, um, work with and like help to cultivate the garden, and we have cooking classes. At one point, we had woodworking classes going on here. And then as far as hearts, you know, we have a lot of restorative practices, and we do a lot of social-emotional learning in the classrooms. It's almost like it's just second nature for any one of us. I mean the amount of books that you could go through in any of our libraries that are socio-emotional focused. It's, you know, it's all just embedded with our school's mantra.

The message I gleaned from his comments is that the teachers at Prospect Montessori want to provide for all the needs of these children (cognitive, emotional, social, and physical).

Nia notices that due to the nurturing they receive from their teachers and administrators, the children at Prospect Montessori are starting to realize that they are capable. She said that many of them start off "having no sense of their own abilities or talents. They need someone to believe in them." She told me that "it's like a lightbulb went on when they realize that they can do something, and they just take off…" Isaac said, "I really like the students. I really, really, really like the students. And I try to let the kids be kids." The combination of love and respect paired with how well the teachers identify the specific needs of these children is really something to witness. It appears to be a combination that rewards both the teachers and their students.

Barriers between Teachers/Administrators and Students

One barrier that resurfaces from time to time is an individual teacher's capacity to be reflective about their own outlook and biases. Janelle refers to this as "blending" oneself with a culture that is unlike your own.

> Okay, so, with that blending. I don't think that um, everyone should be, this sounds mean, but not everyone should be allowed to work at this school. If you can't relate or you don't have empathy or you…you think you're coming in here and [you think] I'm going to save a kid. It's the wrong outlook and you cannot meet the kid where they are. Um, you won't have patience.

Insiders do not like the saviour mentality that arrives with some teachers. It is not the right fit for the adults or the children. A few teachers mentioned that there has been high turnover with teachers like this. They can't handle the job because they have the wrong approach with the children.

Love and commitment are only part of the equation according to some teachers at Prospect Montessori. All of this "nurturing" needs to be coupled with rules and boundaries, according to Janelle. "Because if you are too nice, the kids don't want anything to do with you. We need stern teachers with a sense of humor," she said. The children, according to Janelle, are coming into the school used to a more authoritarian style of discipline or they are neglected and/or abused and feel unsafe around adults. "They don't know what they are looking for but they aren't used to this. It's like a square peg in a round hole." Janelle says that over time they acclimate to the "freedom with responsibility model" that Montessori Education puts forth. But it takes time. Shay, the middle school teacher, feels the same way. She says that freedom needs to be "learned and earned." There is tension between what the teachers want to do (give more freedom) and what they feel they ought to be doing (provide more structure) in terms of discipline.

Jasmin, an upper elementary teacher, and neighborhood native, reminded me in her interview that, "there is a real world out there that won't tolerate disrespect or put up with your

mistakes." She worries that the kids are living in a bubble at this school. She said that "they are scared to leave now. They [the 8th graders] are still here." I witnessed this on my third and fourth visits to the school. The children who had graduated were hanging around the garden and trying to help the teachers set up their classrooms in early August. Initially, I perceived this as a compliment to the closeness they shared with these adults and testament to the comfort that they have at the school. However, Jasmin's point resonated with me. "The kids are not prepared for the world outside this small community at school. They are coddled here. They need more than Conscious Discipline. The world won't try to understand their emotions like we do." This puts forth the question of the cultural responsiveness of the practices in place at Prospect Montessori School. In Chapter 5, culturally responsive teaching practices are discussed further. These culturally responsive practices work through curriculum and instruction at Prospect Montessori School to help children with identity development and inter-/intra-cultural awareness. These practices spring from a school philosophy that places importance on the development of the whole child that begins with the social and emotional curriculum.

Social and Emotional Pathways

The participants shared their experiences regarding the relationship between the Montessori Curriculum, their own instructional practices, and the professional development that prepares teachers, administrators, and parents to think differently about educating children. Through reflections on waking up the inner drive in their students, providing a structured but free environment, exercising empathy, creating cultural consciousness, and working as a school community to develop professional skills, it becomes evident that there are social and emotional elements at Prospect Montessori. These elements seem to be a priority for all and a thoughtful response to conditions that challenge the school community.

Waking Up the Inner Drive

Shay is concerned that the value placed on education is something that must come from inside the student, but it is influenced by factors outside of school and usually from the home. She said it is a challenge to convince her middle schoolers to engage with their studies and own their own growth process. It's tough for them, she said, because they don't have a lot of the same resources at home.

> Because, and…and I think, I think, my opinion is that comes from many of them [students] not having a home environment. I wouldn't say where education wasn't important. I think it's important, but where they're not surrounded by the type of things that feed into education in the classroom, if that makes sense… I need to make sure that I'm saying it in various ways, that you don't learn something by hearing it. You learn by doing it. So, me sitting here and saying it, that's fine. But it's not until you work through it that you actually know it, understand it, and it's yours, and so I bring up the whole, uh, home environment to say, that if you're believing that education is this thing that washes over you, and it just happens by the mere fact that you're sitting in the classroom, you're not going to get it.

Shay identified a struggle that is a reality for many children.

Getting to know the children is a top priority for these teachers. They want to know what fuels their fire so that they can feed the flame all year long. Jasmin, an upper elementary teacher, described her thinking regarding waking the kids up to their purpose:

> So, this year we deal with waking up the drive in you like what drives you? With no drive, you don't want to learn about culture, history, anything about education or even be

> in school. So, um, finding one thing, setting goals, what do you want to be in your life and what are you going through at home? We talk about that a lot.

Jasmin wants to know what is going on at home. She wants her students to know that she realizes that life at home impacts life at school. She told me that she wants to be a person that they can open up to and trust. Serving as that person in their lives says a lot about her commitment to the students.

Tiana reinforced that this is a very trauma-sensitive environment, situated in a very trauma-sensitive society. She made it clear that the teachers and the school as a whole need to put their focus on understanding. She explained how teachers work to bring children to a place of self-awareness. This calls for trust in the adults around them. “I think we offer something that's not offered everywhere. And we try to offer understanding, and not just it is your fault or pointing the blame in different [places].” Isaac explained that building trust and developing awareness in children is about allowing students to be expressive and then teaching them to take ownership of that expression:

> Yeah, I, in, just in my own family like I see, often, where when you’re not allowed or there isn’t a place or a format for expression, then, we suppress and then that comes out later. Right, I just feel like, as an adult, if I do something wrong, I have to acknowledge it. I have to apologize. And then, I have to make a commitment to, a conscious commitment to, you know… [own it and correct it]. You know, I don’t have to have my boss called on me. I don’t have to be isolated from people. I don’t have to have things taken away from me. I just need to own up and make a commitment to do better.

According to the teachers, the punitive measures that are instituted in other school environments are not a part of the philosophy at Prospect Montessori School as they are not part of Montessori

Philosophy in general. Teachers take time to think through matters of discipline before pointing fingers and punishing. Building self-awareness and delf-determination in the child requires partnership from the mentors in their lives. The teachers here want to provide that mentorship to help the children find their way in the world.

Structured Freedom

Many of the teachers interviewed hated the traditional model they experienced growing up which treats students like empty vessels to be filled with information. They love how Montessori education gives children more freedom and flexibility as they learn. But a few of these teachers are struggling to figure out why this freedom is sometimes too much for their students to manage. Shay, a seasoned educator who has been with the school since its inception, believes that there are cultural reasons for this struggle.

> I'd like for us to have instantly figured out some of the things that it's taken us a while to figure out, and those things would be more the kind of cultural things that we've struggled through. And I say that because some, um, it's taken us a while to get at, sometimes, it feels like we're not being very Montessori. And that the kids aren't putting their hands on as many things, and there's a variety of reasons for that, but some of them…some of them are absolutely cultural reasons and…because kids aren't going to learn anything unless you've got the environment set up the right way, and I don't just mean the physical environment, but I mean having those routines and procedures in place. And that's been challenging because you've got behaviors that you didn't expect. And so, sometimes it just feels like we're not doing all this. We've also had the challenge of having teachers that weren't trained.

Shay brought up two challenges. She feels that there are times when her classroom is not "Montessori enough," and this troubles her. She would like to be further along with her students, along the freedom and responsibility spectrum, but she cannot force them to be ready. She feels strongly that "routines and procedures" need to be part of daily classroom life. When she referred to "behaviors that she did not expect," it leads one to believe that she hoped the children would be more ready for the freedom that her classroom has to offer. But she is not downtrodden. She is hopeful that with firm expectations and practice, the students will get there. It seems it is an internal struggle with her own high expectations and the realities of life in the community.

Shay also feels that it is a challenge to implement the Montessori Method when some of the school's teachers have not been trained yet. If teachers are properly prepared, then they can prepare their students for what comes next. Shay said that the school is still working on getting their own culture in place.

> This is just the struggle we had to go through, as far as having enough, uh, teachers trained. Having our culture in place, so that, even those of us that are trained, you know, I mentioned it before, that freedom and responsibility thing goes hand-in-hand. So, we've had to pull back on the level of freedom we can give them. As far as being independent and exploring and all of that because the behaviors were what they were, and so, we had to pull the reins. So, um, you can't set them up for failure in that way.

It is apparent that she does not blame the students for what she feels to be a shortcoming. She just feels that the school faculty has work to do to get there, and she wishes they were further along.

Empathy

According to Jones (1990), empathy is the "insight into the motives, feelings, and behavior of others and the ability to communicate this understanding" (p. 19). Noddings (2010) added, "Today it is widely acknowledged that empathy involves what earlier thinkers called sympathy, an attitude of 'feeling with' another" (p. 6). Empathetic understanding is seen as an important trait of the successful learner and citizen at Prospect Montessori. As such, they have implemented a program called Conscious Discipline (a conflict resolution focused program started by Becky Bailey in 1996). According to Bailey (2015, 2011, 2000, 1997, 1996), Conscious Discipline is a trauma-informed, social and emotional learning program which provides strategies for responding to the individual needs of children and adults using brain research. It has been proven to increase self-regulation, sense of safety, connection, empathy and intrinsic motivation in both children and adults (Bailey, 2022). Overall, Prospect Montessori educators feel that it has been a great help for their school community. Some of them spoke of how childen have come to "feel with" one another as a result of the strategies they have learned by participating in this program.

Tiana provided an example of how the work that the school community is doing with the Conscious Discipline program is helping children to exercise more empathy toward one another.

> I believe that we offer …with us having conscious discipline and teaching them [the children] about their emotions and understanding their emotions and how to handle that and then having a space to go to. So, every classroom has a safe space. And it's a place where you can go and de-escalate. But every classroom also has the jobs. And it's someone's job to check in on the person that needed the safe space. And say, are you okay? Do you need some tissue? Do you want a hug? Do you need…? I mean, and it's

> teaching kids empathy. And I feel like that's something that's missing—not only locally but globally. Like, we're missing that empathy.

The safe space and the student jobs are some of the tools that the Conscious Discipline program teaches children to use. Exercising these tools has helped some children to self-soothe and reflect. As these tools are used by students, other students begin to understand how they can be helpful to each other. Tiana explained further that teaching children to use empathy manifests in their behaviors as a small classroom community:

> The children actually notice that one bouncy child, and they have a relationship, they'll walk over to the child and sit next to them. They'll sit next to them and tell them—and encourage them, like, "hey don't do that. And I am going to sit next to you. You can hold my hand if you feel like you need to fidget." And things of that nature, and I don't say anything.

Shay reinforces this observation. She has worked at every level in the school, and she said,

> I have found this in almost every classroom. Our special needs kids, they are so, in general, so accepted by the rest of the…the gen ed, I mean, and they [the children] know them. When I say, know them, they know their little idiosyncrasies they might have and, you know, you can just see, they're so accepting of them.

Tiana said that this is what she loves about Montessori:

> [We're] trying to take the teacher out of the equation and let the kids practice using the skills that they have been taught. I tell kids all the time, and they laugh, but they get it done. I say, either you want me to handle it, or you can handle it. If I handle it, it comes with consequences. If you handle it, it's just done. They handle it.

Teaching empathy within the community builds the strength of the community. The teachers reported that there is visible evidence that the children feel more empowered to manage their own conflicts as they progress through this social-emotional curriculum.

Tiana described the reasons why teachers and administrators who work at Prospect Montessori School are in the practice of reaching out to build bonds with families too. The parents often require the same empathy that is practiced in the classroom:

> When there's an issue, we try to address it on the child-level and the family [level]. So, that everyone can understand that we're here for the whole family and not just the individual child, because what happens at home comes to school. So, if we can't help fix what's happening at home, we're going to have to deal with it in school, and we are teaching both the parents and the child how to speak differently, how to understand their emotions and understand that they are valid. But how not to live their emotions. Because a lot of reactions in people in general are pure emotions. I feel this way, so I am going to react this way. So, that's the uniqueness we see, because in this community they have—they are faced with a lot of violence, but we're showing them how to navigate through that. Navigate through the emotions that come with it and the disappointment and the hurt and the pain that comes along with all of that. Therapy. I mean, most of the time, if you go to those appropriated channels, uh, child development is in that. And general psychology if you do it in college is what you have to take. Because dealing with people in general is also psychology.

Conscious Discipline is grounded in psychology. It is trauma informed, evidence based, social-emotional learning for all ages and positions (Bailey, 2021). The teachers often spoke of this

training in the interviews as it has helped them feel more prepared to work with this population of children and adults.

Sometimes teachers feel that they cannot offer what a parent or caregiver is able to offer to the children. Isaac, one of the young, white, male teachers at the school, explained that it is a challenge to be a teacher who is an outsider to the community.

> I think involving families and community members is crucial, you know, um, tapping into these really, really, really, wonderful resources that can explain things and relate to things in a way that like, me as a white male, never could. And never will I be able to. Which once again involves relying on the people in this community and families within the school, to…to try to, um, enhance the relevancy [of school] to our students.

At the time of this interview, Isaac was about to start his second year of teaching at Prospect Montessori. It is Isaac's hope that in the coming years, he will be viewed as a more trusted member of the school community and that he will have stronger relationships with the parent body as a result. He is a reflective and empathetic practitioner. His examples show that he exercises culturally responsive practices in his classroom that exhibit a sense of care and insight that are beyond his years in age and experience. One gets the sense that he is invested in his work because he feels a stong connection to his students.

Cultural Consciousness and Cultural Responsiveness

The Prospect Montessori School puts culture at the center of teaching and learning. These educators help to develop cultural consciousness in the children because it helps children see themselves as embedded in rich and valuable cultural history and traditions. They also practice culturally responsive teaching pracrices. Educators at Prospect Montessori feel that self worth is partially derived from this practice. The teachers share some of the ways in which they

develop cultural consciousness in the students at Prospect Montessori. Celebrations of culture often occur, students' histories are reflected in curriculum and the literature, and children are presented with opportunities to think about their cultural and socio-political positions.

Jonathan told me about an annual celebration called Sankofa. "Every February, we have what's called Sankofa, and during Sankofa, every single classroom has to come up with some kind of celebration of their culture, their heritage, and present it to the school. Last year my classroom did spoken word because I personally love Maya Angelou." Jonathan told me that this celebration is one of inclusivity as it teaches alternate histories and experiences. He said, "It gives children an opportunity to see themselves and others in curriculum. And it recognizes differing cultural communication styles."

Shay's middle schoolers have African American Studies incorporated into all subject areas throughout the year.

> [Studying their heritage] is part of what they do, and even, the civics, of course, have to take the Constitution and Illinois Constitution, we're trying to do it from the lens of looking at different, um, for the lack of a better word, areas of struggle for the African American community and looking at the civics from that lens. It's our whole approach to African American studies. World history was done from the, um, it was centered around Africa because, when we do world studies, we, usually, start someplace, and we kind of go out from there, and it's like…ancient civilizations.

The students learn about the history of their ancestors in relationship to the history of the world. Their history is at the center of the conversation rather than being portrayed as an alternate history.

Isaac assured me that throughout the school they have, "[made] sure that kids have access to books with characters who look like them and sound like them and have similar experiences in life. "He feels that this is so important for his students. Tiana explained that her 5th and 6th graders read a book called "The Hate You Give" that helped the children grapple with racism, police brutality and activism:

> So, when they read, "The Hate U Give," it goes back to justice. We talked about how children influence and help reform in different places, because we also had to talk about the civil rights movement and those counter sitters were children. They were teenagers and high school students and college students who wanted to be a part of the change.

Although the school did not engage in a protest of their own, the teachers feel that the children are learning from the literature that experiences like this are occurring and that people can stand up and use their voices to protest.

In addition, Jasmin shared with me that the middle schoolers are often engaged in respectful dialogue with the school administrators about issues that impact the school community such as the nutritional quality of school lunches and safety after school. She says that the students have learned to find their voices and are advocating for their rights. She felt that this could be the result of a half day civics program that the school offered to the adolescents. A legal volunteer came to the classroom to talk to the students about their rights in the legal system last year. She said this activity woke everyone one up to the struggles of Black people in this country and created a new form of consciousness in the children about injustice and their human rights.

Professional Development

Prospect Montessori is a hub for urban educators to gain their Montessori certification. The school becomes a Montessori training center each summer. This training center was

conceptualized and brought to life by the school's CEO. She is a long time Montessori educator who has worked in the community for over 15 years. Her educational vitae is long and populated with Montessori administrative experience in more and less affluent communities. She believed that the need for Montessori training was and is a priority as the Montessori movement works to bring Montessori schooling into mainstream education in the U.S. In addition to the training center, teachers are provided grant money to attend college. Jasmin enthusiastically mentioned, "We have training, and they [the school board] are paying for my degree."

Isaac shares that teacher preparation and training does make a big impact on the quality of classroom instruction:

> There are some classrooms who are really doing, really, really, um, "by the books Montessori" like classroom Montessori and, um, there are other teachers who are not, uh, quite trained. So, the Montessori emphasis isn't as strong, but they're still having really, meaningful impact with the kids. So, it kind of varies from classroom to classroom, and a lot of that is dependent on teacher preparation and teacher training.

Isaac described a few classrooms where the Montessori Method is "done beautifully," and he felt that the teachers are getting great results with the kids. He hopes to one day feel that well-trained and find that kind of success with his students too. The school has the elements in place to help the teachers gain that sort of self-assuredness.

Ultimately, what is the most helpful to the teaching community at Prospect Montessori is a feeling of belonging and the sense that they can collaborate with other teachers. The teachers and administrators are building bonds over time. One way that bonds are nurtured is through planned professional development that offers encouragement and builds confidence. Nia shared an account of one of these sessions:

> We have a whole list of institutes, so to welcome the new people in to have discussions in our end of the year institute, we wrote down notes on a piece of paper [about each other]. Like everyone had a name on there, and when you see the name, [you write] what you think of first. And it just went around in a circle. And then we had one where it looked like they gave you [Head's Up] 7-Up, where you put your head down. People that had their head down, they made a statement that's like, touch the person that you think or people who you wouldn't mind going on vacation with, who always gave you encouraging words, who would always give you a hug. I mean, just really small stuff. And then—right, so you're feeling it, but you don't see it because you don't know how you've impacted these people that were touching you.

It was obvious from the way she shared the story with me that Nia was touched by the activity. Learning how her colleagues felt about her and what they appreciated about her increased her feeling of closeness with others. Professional development at Prospect Montessori adds to the professional and social-emotional growth of the community. It helps to build the bonds between teachers that are needed to manage all that comes their way throughout the school year. It also prepares them to work with students and families. The school requires all the teachers to participate in a trauma informed, social and emotional training program, called Conscious Discipline, as well.

Conclusion

The teachers and administrators at Prospect Montessori School have provided evidence of the conditions that are present at the school. The findings show us that trauma is pervasive. The findings also show us that this community is deeply impacted by poverty. It is not an even playing field for any of the children or their families as trauma, poverty, and racism are

interwoven into the fabric of everyday life in this community. Living in a segregated and oppressed community creates instability inside the community. Mistrust of individuals and cultures outside of the community is commonplace and understandable.

While teachers and administrators work to educate children under these conditions, what they have come to understand is that relationships must be built before any learning can happen. Working to earn the trust of their students and their families, the teachers and administrators place relationships and communication before all else. As such, the social and emotional programs are a priority. Teachers find that there is a great need to wake up the inner purpose in their students. Many of these children do not yet believe in themselves because they have not experienced what it means to succeed. According to the teachers, with the right encouragement, the structured freedom of the Montessori Method, empathy from all angles, and a curriculum that helps students learn to be conscious of the value of their own culture, the children begin to light up. Through their own professional development, teachers work to nurture the source of that light, the light that comes from within each child.

Chapter Six presents a closer examination of what it means to keep that light burning for the teachers and the students. For Prospect Montessori Community members, a Montessori Education for social justice is a mission and an approach. It is a multilayered hybrid education that works toward the unique goals of this school, which has at its heart the needs of the children. Looking at the layers and seeking to understand the impact of this approach on those involved offers insight into the possibility of Montessori Education.

CHAPTER 6

Discussion

The findings reveal how teachers and administrators perceive their experiences and respond to oppressive conditions created by socio-economic inequity, racism and neoliberal education reform. In the case of Prospect Montessori School, there exists tension between the mission of the school as it is driven by Montessori principles and the neoliberal policies that require public schools to adhere to district imposed curricula and standardized tests, which are tied to school funding. Tension points emerged from the evidence as unfair circumstances conflict with an overall mission for the construction of a child-centered, culturally responsive education at Prospect Montessori School.

The challenge that educators at Prospect Montessori face is how to go about changing the damaging narrative that structural racism has embedded in public education. These educators seek ways to address trauma. They work every day to remove obstacles of structural racism that lay in the path of success. They work diligently to overcome neoliberal education reform policies that negatively impact their curriculum and instruction. They respond to cultural identities and support identity development. They build pathways for better communication with students, other educators and families as they make a commitment to deconstructing their own biases.

Chapter Six is an opportunity to look more closely at what teachers are experiencing in relationship to the overall mission of the school. What has developed in response to the unique needs of the student population at Prospect Montessori School is a hybrid Montessori approach. This approach is a response to the realities of life in this school and an ongoing attempt to change the narrative. Participant responses have highlighted many of the nine principles of the Montessori Method, tenets of culturally responsive teaching, and elements of an education for

social justice. The discussion first takes a look at the school mission and how it is supported. Next it defines education for social justice with relationship to the genesis of the Montessori Method. Following this I revisit the nine Montessori principles and the tenets of culturally responsive teaching. All of this is laid out in an attempt to illustrate how the three traditions frame the hybrid educational experience at Prospect Montessori. There is some overlap between the three traditions. It is there in the overlap that I examine the theoretical, pedagogical, and academic congruence between Montessori pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching.

The School Mission

The mission at Prospect Montessori is "to create a learning community where members trust one another to use their heads, hearts and hands to commit to a life of growth and fulfillment" (TMSOE Website, 2021). The educators at this school operate under the belief that all children have innate talents and abilities. According to the head of special education, the children tend to be underappreciated and misunderstood as they come into the school. At Prospect Montessori School, the mission is to seek the light within each child and bring forth their unique intelligence and talent. The educators at Prospect Montessori believe that children's intelligence "should be reinforced through a quality, affirming and engaging education that ensures that their light remains ignited" (School Website, 2021). As one can imagine, keeping that light ignited is a challenging and multi-layered task. According to the teachers, sometimes it takes a lot more than just an exciting curriculum. That may be why this school community is "intentional about building and maintaining a team of educators that carries the dignity of the students' cultures and values" (School Website, 2021). According to the teachers, the school should feel like another home to the children, a place that belongs to them, represents them, and supports them.

Supporting the School Mission

Supporting the children first requires support for the team of educators around them. Financial support is hard to come by. The school is funded by the public school system of which it is part. However, Prospect Montessori School is a charter school. So, the funding it receives from the district is less than a typical public school would receive. The school receives some external funding. Currently the school board holds annual fundraisers for programs, salaries, and materials.

In terms of academic support, the school is invested in the Montessori training of all its teachers. The Nine Principles of a Montessori Education, according to Lillard (2017), are activated in the classrooms. Each classroom is well equipped with Montessori materials. Most prominently, the school has an in-house Montessori Training Center which was developed by the principal of the school. This center hosts teachers from inside and outside of the community. The center has a deep focus on training teachers who are interested in becoming Montessori lead teachers in similar urban environments.

As evidenced in the findings, culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2013) is a key element in curriculum and instruction, and is supported with professional development which follows the school's mission to "carry the dignity of the students' cultures and values." Additionally, the trauma informed program, Conscious Discipline (Baily, 2011), has been implemented to provide social and emotional support to educators, students, and their families. Each of these layers of support contribute to an overall culture of care within the building. While the problems exist, these educational traditions draw attention to root causes and emphasize the importance of repair and recovery. They also place children and their unique needs at the center of the whole process.

Education for Social Justice

Social justice appears in the school's mission statement and beliefs about educating. The systems in place show action for social justice. But what does it mean to educate for justice and how is it done? Nieto and Bode (2018) define social justice as "a philosophy, an approach, and actions that embody treating all people with fairness, respect, dignity, and generosity" (p. 8). They continue to describe social justice on a societal scale:

> This means affording each person the real—not simply a stated or codified—opportunity to achieve to her or his potential and full participation in a democratic society by giving each person access to the goods, services and cultural capital of a society, while also affirming the culture and talents of each individual and the group or groups with which she or he identifies. (Nieto & Bode, 2018, p. 8)

While this is an immense task at any level, there is no one clear path for implementation at such a large scale. Real opportunity to achieve one's potential requires an actual democracy and equal access to all that success requires. The vast inequity in our country requires a seismic shift in resource allocation and an overall paradigm shift.

Yet, education is an avenue for social justice. This avenue has been explored and examined for many years by educational theorists and practitioners who have worked to expose the deep inequities that exist in schools as they replicate the inequity that exists in their surrounding communities (Acker, 2006; Adams et al., 1997; Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994; West, 2014). While a paradigm shift is not on the horizon and resources remain hidden in the pockets of the wealthy, hard work by educators, community leaders and other advocates is the hope that lifts individuals and communities out of oppression. In the microcosm of a small elementary school, the path to success (however incremental) is a bit more tangible than it is at a societal

scale. The fairness, respect, dignity, and generosity of which Nieto and Bode speak, are real at Prospect Montessori School.

Examples of exercised fairness, respect, dignity, and generosity have emerged from the data. Teachers at the school express personal interest in helping to provide resources to families in need. They often provide clothing, food or transportation for students. Some teachers take children into their homes for care and supervision. These educators feel that connecting with families and providing help where there is a need is imperative for teachers who see themselves becoming a part of this community. An interest in providing for those who need it and an understanding of why it is important to do so, sit at the top of the list of criteria for who will be a good "fit" for the school. A few of the teachers felt like some of the teachers could be doing more. Their sense is that the school is a better place for everyone when teachers and administrators work collectively to engage parents and to allocate resources. Acknowledging disparity and acting on it are two ways that begin to bring justice to this community.

Despite some barriers, Prospect Montessori educators are committed to fostering pathways for communication. Furthermore, students are integrated into classrooms where inclusive approaches to teaching and learning are practiced, and students learn from the curriculum and from one another. Making connections to students' backgrounds, experiences and prior learning is consistent with social justice principles (Ciechanowski, 2013). These connections make learning meaningful and authentic, increasing opportunities for understanding the concepts taught in the lesson and providing a solid foundation for future learning (Echevarría & Graves, 2010). In effective education for social justice, critical thinking and self-reflection are partnered with questioning the power imbalances of the status quo (Spitzman & Balconi, 2019). Educators at Prospect Montessori engage in critical thinking, self-reflection and questioning of

power imbalances. As often as possible, power is shared by teachers and students. The teachers point out the need to question the authoritarian approach that many Black children are submitted to in public institutions (Boykin, 2020; Hall, 2019). Many of them feel that the need for a shift in the power dynamic inside and outside of schools lies at the foundation of an education for social justice. The teachers at Prospect Montessori are working to make egalitarian practices the norm.

In an education for social justice, teachers should also include students' stories in lessons or reading assignments (Spitzman & Balconi, 2019). When students' lives are represented, they are often more engaged in instruction. Additionally, this exposes students to diverse perspectives. By placing importance on students' unique backgrounds, the teacher demonstrates and models a respectful attitude to diversity and encourages students to do the same (Yoon & Kim, 2012). Enacting an education for social justice also requires that teachers analyze the social act of language, particularly how language use is a critical component of representation (Fan, 2013). Both language use as an accurate representation of identity and language use as a manner of communicating one's culture and heritage fall into this critical component of education for social justice. Prospect Montessori School builds upon this emphasis on culture and identity in social justice for education by implementing pedagogical practices which respond to individual identities as well as cultural identities.

In the next two sections, I will revisit culturally responsive teaching and the principles of a Montessori Education. In doing so, I will briefly describe how culturally responsive teaching activates elements of an education for social justice through thoughtful preparation of curriculum and well-intentioned practices of instruction. I will also reiterate the Montessori Principles with the intention of opening the conversation to the ways in which the Montessori Philosophy is built

to accommodate the adaptations needed for children in various environments and addressing how this is also a form of education for social justice.

Revisiting Culturally Responsive Teaching

To nurture students in under-resourced, Black and Brown communities, Montessori schools must make a commitment to culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive practices in teaching (Debs, 2016; Massey, 2006; Schonleber, 2006; Stansbury, 2012; Trondson, 2016; Yesbick, 2007). According to Gay (2018, 2021), culturally relevant pedagogy requires that teachers are prepared for culturally responsive teaching. As we learned in Chapter Four, the educators at Prospect Montessori exhibit an ongoing commitment to culturally responsive teaching.

According to Gay (2018, 2021), teachers who implement culturally responsive teaching practices should be critically conscious of what is portrayed in books and other classroom materials and what is visually portrayed in their curricular materials. They should also take care to acknowledge the impressions and distortions of ethnic groups in the media (Gay, 2018, 2021). Not only should teachers exhibit cultural caring as they use students' own cultural experiences to expand their intellectual horizons, but they should also be partners in action as they use knowledge and strategic thinking to decide how to act in the best interest of others (Gay, 2002). An emphasis should be placed on holistic and integrated learning using differing communication styles. Educators should also match their teaching styles to students' learning styles as they recognize differing patterns of task engagement by students (Gay, 2002). The educators at Prospect Montessori provided examples of the wealth of diverse materials available to children and teachers, engaging students in dialogue regarding distortions of Black culture in media,

actions taken to create an openminded and caring community, and varying communication strategies and differentiated instruction to meet the students where they need to be met.

Revisiting Montessori Pedagogy: Essential Elements and Nine Guiding Principles

The essential elements of a Montessori Education are the *humble and reflective teacher*, the *peaceful and pleasing environment* and the *didactic and scientific materials* (Lillard, 2017). At Prospect Montessori, all three of these elements are present. Teachers are asked to meet regularly for professional development which helps them to be reflective practitioners. It is their goal to create an environment that belongs to the children, is pleasing to the eye, and is user friendly. According to the administrators and teachers, each classroom at the school is outfitted with the Montessori materials appropriate for that age group. The teachers have worked carefully to learn how to use the materials and present them to children.

To meet the diverse needs of the students, educators at Prospect Montessori also use the nine principles guiding the practice of a Montessori program. The principles are as follows: 1) Movement and Cognition are closely intertwined, and movement can enhance thinking, 2) Learning and well-being are improved when people have a sense of control over their lives, 3) The ability to direct one's attention in a sustained and concentrated way fosters an array of positive developments and is itself trainable, 4) The best learning occurs in authentic contexts of interest, 5) Learning situated in meaningful contexts is often deeper and richer than learning in abstract contexts, 6) Extrinsic rewards are avoided, 7) Learning with and from peers, 8) Certain forms of adult interaction are associated with more optimal child outcomes, and 9) Order in the environment and in the mind are beneficial to children (Lillard, 2017). According to the participants, all nine of these principles can be witnessed in the classrooms. Teachers at Prospect Montessori find these principles to be the guideposts for implementing a Montessori education

that provides freedom for children as they learn to exercise responsibility. There is evidence in the data that these principles also inform the practices of teachers as they learn to teach in a new way.

Montessori Hybrid

Maria Montessori travelled the world and worked in many cultures. Her writing on education and peace suggests that were she alive today, she would be advocating for the needs of those who suffer the greatest forms of oppression (Montessori, 1944, 1989b). I believe that it would be fair to posit that the visionary in Maria Montessori saw the need to create a method that would evolve with the times and continuously be able to meet the needs of children.

The Montessori Method, as practiced at Prospect Montessori School and other similar schools across the nation is doing just that. It is a hybrid version of the original Montessori Method. As the educators at Prospect Montessori work to meet the needs of the children from this under-resourced community, they take on the same mission for social justice that Maria Montessori took on in her very early attempts to create the Children's Houses in the tenement buildings of Rome at the turn of the century. Meeting the real needs of children and their families is at the heart of this method for instruction. It was built on a vast understanding of not only how children develop (physically, socially, emotionally, and academically) but how their environments and caregivers can and do influence that development.

The teacher, the environment and the materials are still the essential elements of the Montessori Method. The nine principles remain effective and trustworthy as the children develop from infant to adulthood. But, within that structure there is room for adaptation to fit the culture in which the method is implemented. For example, teachers shared that adolescent Black children at Prospect Montessori School are learning their rights from legal experts while

beginning to understand the power dynamics at play that have prevented so many people, they know from rising out of poverty. Across the world, Afghani children who receive Montessori Education in an orphanage in Kabul are learning life skills and being nurtured by adults who seek to understand how the children have been impacted by violence and loss in a war-stricken area of the world (Sallah, 2016).

Montessori Schools need to be responsive to the cultures and communities in which they aim to educate. Culturally responsive teaching can provide Montessori educators with the tools necessary to teach for social justice. Prospect Montessori School is working toward this goal every day through its curriculum, instruction, and professional development. In the next section, we look at how these three facets of teaching and learning speak to the ways that the Montessori Method is blended with culturally responsive teaching practices to create an education for social justice supports children and their caregivers. We begin to see how the social-emotional curriculum is a priority. (For quick reference to the the nine principles of the Montessori Method, culturally responsive teaching practices and elements of an education for social justice, see the chart in Appendix C).

A Culturally Responsive Montessori Education for Social Justice

As mentioned in the Literature Review, there is some research that calls into question the relevance of the Montessori curriculum for children from culturally and socioeconomically diverse backgrounds (Debs, 2016; Massey, 2006; Schonleber, 2006; Stansbury, 2012; Trondson, 2016; Yesbick, 2007). Massey (2006) and Trondson (2016) found theoretical, pedagogical, and academic congruence between Montessori pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching. In many ways, due to the nature of the Montessori philosophy, Montessori schools engage in culturally responsive teaching practices. Montessori Schools with integrity have already made the

commitment to identity development and inter-/intra-cultural awareness. The two pedagogical models align as they both work to develop within the individual a sense of emotional and educational self-determination. They also align in their goals to foster self-awareness for all community members. In addition, both models encouraged teachers to assess their students through interaction and observation (Massey, 2006; Trondson, 2016). Using these models, both curriculum and instruction are focused on community building through cooperative learning. Students are engaged in real-life learning contexts driven by student interests and instruction is differentiated to meet the differing needs of individuals. Praxis is constructive, aimed at drawing knowledge from the child rather than filling children with prescribed curricula driven by neoliberal mandates calling for increased high stakes testing. In addition, both models place importance on developing in the child a sociopolitical consciousness before encouraging socio-civic activism. Prospect Montessori educators' daily efforts are well documented in Chapter Four. The following section will discuss how Prospect Montessori School uses a blended educational approach which articulates tenets of the Montessori Method and culturally responsive teaching.

Supporting Self-Determination

A Montessori Curriculum is different from a traditional curriculum in that it puts the child at the center of the curricular process (Lillard, 2017). Through careful observation, a teacher follows the child's interest and unique development (Montessori, 1996; Lillard, 2017). The teacher can determine the child's readiness for new concepts and materials as well as social-emotional advancements. In the Montessori classroom, self-determination and self-awareness are social emotional advancements that emerge in children as they are modeled by more experienced mentors in a child's life.

Self-determination theory places emphasis on people's inherent motivational propensities for learning and growing and how they can be supported (Ryan & Deci, et. al, 2021). However, inherent motivation and the proactive tendencies toward learning, mastery and connection with others are not automatic, according to Ryan and Deci (2021). Healthy development requires that autonomy, competence and relatedness, be fostered in the classroom. Shay shared with me that many of her adolescent students were lacking self-determination. She said that the students who struggled were lacking a feeling of purpose. She felt that it needed to be awoken in them. It seems that their sense of autonomy and competency as well as their feeling of relatedness to the work before them would be places to begin exploring with the students in order to wake them up to their purpose.

In conversations with the eight educators, it became obvious to me that teachers are working every day to inspire in these children the internal realization that the opportunity to engage with one's work is a meaningful possibility. It is evident that these teachers realize the importance of knowing oneself first. Modeling the act of self-reflection helped Isaac and Johnathan to motivate individual children and learn more about the diverse interests within their classrooms.

A Focus on Community Building and Cooperative Learning

The teachers and students at Prospect Montessori remain together in the same classroom for a three-year cycle. As a result, the relationships they build are familial in quality. If a child is initially struggling to make the connection with the teacher or with other students, there is time to build trust and let the barriers fall away. Several teachers mentioned that they have been trained to use trauma-informed practices from a social-emotional curriculum, Conscious Discipline (Bailey, 1996). This program teaches parents/children and educators/children,

children/children how to best communicate around conflict. It requires that adults understand the children they parent and teach, have knowledge of how children develop, be accountable as models, maintain self-control, see from the child's point of view, exercise clear, assertive communication, view discipline as teaching, realize that relationship is key to cooperation, and seek solutions, not blame (Bailey, 2021). The tenets of this program are not unlike the Montessori principles or culturally responsive teaching practices. Teachers and parents must be on board for a reflective practice, and they must take note of how their actions impact those around them. Once they have true sense of the developing child and control of their own emotions, they can serve as positive role models for the children in their charge.

As a result of this program and Montessori principles exercised in the classroom, it is apparent that children often feel empowered to act within their classroom communities and the school community at large. The blended approach of Conscious Discipline paired with the Montessori Method builds a classroom community that values thinking about what others' needs are and how to help. Every one of the teachers shared evidence of children helping one another succeed in the classroom. It is evident that the children at Prospect Montessori feel that school is a safe space where they can advocate for themselves and others. Additionally, the school understands the advantage of working with families. Cooperation is happening across the board. Conscious Discipline, culturally responsive teaching and the Montessori Method emphasize caregiver involvement. The faculty have learned that it can be an uphill battle if the school does not work with the family to support and nurture the child.

Freedom with Responsibility

Montessori education offers freedom to children to find their way. This freedom comes with ground rules and expectations that are laid out ahead of time. If children can handle the

responsibility that comes with the freedom, they are allowed to navigate the classroom environment without much hand holding. Freedom within limits is empowering for children (Lillard, 2017). Creating freedom within limits for children means setting clear expectations and ground rules ahead of time. It means making and sticking to (flexible) routines. It also means that adults create secure, loving, and trusting relationships with children. In a classroom where children can exercise freedom, adults create age-appropriate choices and opportunities for self-mastery and independence, and that they facilitate as children work (Lillard & Jessen, 2008).

At Prospect Montessori School, the educators assume that children are capable explorers who can make many decisions for themselves. Teachers assume the role of director, facilitator, and observer. They are also responsible for preparing an organized environment for students to navigate with some guidance. The benefits of this arrangement are immense, but it takes careful preparation and training to successfully implement a prepared and inviting environment. Teachers at Prospect Montessori School love the classroom arrangement and the structured freedom that they can offer to their students. In many instances, teachers told me that they would have loved to be a Montessori student as a child.

Teachers also find that students in this community come to school without much preparation for the freedom that this school offers. In many cases, students have become accustomed to a more authoritarian style of schooling or parenting. Over time, the children begin to understand how to work in a more egalitarian capacity with their teachers and peers. But it does not happen overnight. The teachers are dedicated to developing a sense of responsibility within their students so that they may exercise the freedom that comes with that sense of self-

ownership. Programs such as Conscious Discipline provide some structure as the community supports children in this transition.

Sociopolitical Consciousness

According to Watts and Flanagan (2007), "sociopolitical consciousness is the ability to critically analyze the political, economic and social forces shaping one's life" (p. 779). At Prospect Montessori School, Dr. James, the head of African American Studies (who is now the school principal), is and was an advocate for the community and an agent of change within the school. Teachers have shared stories regarding eye-opening moments inspired from conversations with Dr. James. When the school added her position, they were looking to employ a member of the community who would assure that socio-political consciousness became embedded in curriculum, in instruction and in professional development.

While young children are still not ready to analyze the forces shaping their lives, they are exposed to content at early ages that represents their history and a collective experience shared by members of their own culture. Teachers said that the children begin to see racial injustice at an early age when they learn about slavery in America. The adolescent program offers children an opportunity to analyze the forces of politics and economics in relationship to their own lives. They continue to work with adults to critically analyze these forces through 8th grade. According to a few of the teachers, media and music on topics of injustice have been impactful for students as they work to situate themselves in the world.

Scholars report that helping young people to develop a sociopolitical consciousness can foster outcomes such as resilience (Ginwright, 2010; O'Leary & Romero, 2011), academic engagement (Ramos-Zayas, 2003), professional aspirations (Diemer & Hsieh, 2008) and civic and political engagement (Diemer & Li, 2011). Students at Prospect Montessori are engaged

with one another around a broader collective struggle for social justice. The adolescent students are concerned with how they portray themselves to others and how they perceive others in the community. The school is developing its own socio-political consciousness. This carries over into curriculum and instruction as the students learn about the history of their ancestors in relationship to the history of the world. In Montessori curriculum, history begins with the child at the center of the conversation rather than being portrayed as an alternate history. Beginning with their own story and working outward from that place keeps with the Montessori Philosophy (child at the center). In the same way, culturally responsive teaching uses students' own cultural experiences to expand their horizons.

Professional Development

Teaching other people's children requires educators to explore their own beliefs and attitudes about children, their families, and their communities (Delpit, 2006; Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994; Shor, 1986). A conscious, anti-bias education requires those involved to examine their own cultural identity and develop competencies for working with cultures other than their own (Stansbury, 2012). Stansbury (2012) found that the Montessori schools successful in nurturing the cultural identities of their children exhibit the following structures: a strong central focus on teacher training programs that develop cross-cultural awareness, regular instructional supervision by well-trained administrators, ongoing quality professional development, and a culturally diverse faculty who have preferably spent time living abroad (Stansbury, 2012). According to her research, the training of the teacher/facilitator plays the largest role in determining the cultural relevance of Montessori programs.

Prospect Montessori School has done well to provide opportunities for its teachers to find personal and professional growth. As described in the findings, the teachers and students have

received training in Conscious Discipline, a trauma informed social emotional training program created by Becky Bailey (2011). There is evidence in the findings showing how this program has helped teachers to become more reflective practitioners and had aided students as they navigate the their social and emotional lives inside and outside of school. They also often take part in professional development which helps them think about the cultural and social implications of their work with children. Teachers at Prospect Montessori have praised these opportunities as worthwhile opportunites that come to them at no cost. In addition, several years ago, the school employed a director specifically devoted to equity and diversity. The eight educators interviewed agree that appointing this administrator has better informed educators about best practices to use with students. The teachers receive academic training in Literacy (Lucy Calkins), Math (Montessori Method), and how to use Montessori materials with children. The school also hosts the Chicago Montessori Residency, which is an in-house Montessori training program. Although the program attracts some diversity, it was created with the intent to help more Black teachers obtain their Montessori Certificates to work in urban schools.

Conclusion

Chapter Six is a discussion that considers the layers of commitment that have emerged from the data as the educators at Prospect Montessori respond to the tension that exists. It is evident that these points of tension, paired with the educator response, characterize the culture of Prospect Montessori School. Where there is community trauma and personal trauma, there is also the acknowledgment of its existence, loving adults to offer daily support, and curricula that help the community properly respond to the social/emotional needs of those impacted. Where the context of neoliberal education reform continues to gloss over the structural racism embedded in its policies, educators here work to change the narrative and remove the obstacles to child growth

and development by creating alternative pathways influenced by Montessori Philosophy. Where there are constructs preventing full curricular and philosophical implementation of The Montessori Method, there are educators who are evolving their practices to overcome these obstacles. With the help of schoolwide professional development and the application of culturally responsive practices, the school is seeing children for who they really are and operationalizing education for social justice. While there are communication barriers between school community members, there is also a willingness on the part of educators to connect with one another and to engage with parents in discourse that aims to break down traditional biases.

In an effort to align their practices with their overarching mission of an education that carries the dignity of the students' cultures and values, educators at Prospect Montessori School engage in a blend of educational traditions. These traditions include The Montessori Method and culturally responsive teaching. As such, the Montessori experience at this school is unique. It is a developmentally focused method designed to encompass both academic and social-emotional growth with a focus on identity development. Although the school is impacted by the persistence neoliberal education reform and is conflicted by the pressures that standardization and assessment present to this population of children, the Montessori Method as practiced at Prospect Montessori School appears to be a path through the tension.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

Revisiting the Assumptions

The assumptions underlying this study that were stated in Chapter One were based on professional experience and preliminary research on Montessori origins and Montessori education in the public sector today. The four basic assumptions are discussed here in relationship to the analysis of the findings. The first assumption underlying this research assumes that the Montessori Method has been and always will be far more than an instructional method. This assumption held true in the case of Prospect Montessori School. The participants expressed, with gratitude, that the Montessori Method has allowed for more than just instructional, academic work with children. On my first visit to the school, the principal told me that Montessori education has created room for the teachers and administrators to tackle the larger social and emotional issues that impact the children. Being able to hit the pause button with a child while the rest of the class is happily engaging with self-guided work, is the "room" that is needed almost every day of the week. Providing room for emotional growth is a priority for the educators at this school.

The second and third assumptions go hand in hand: that those who participate in Montessori Education have a desire to work through the method for social justice and that public Montessori education provides an opportunity for school communities to engage in an education for social justice. These assumptions also turned out to be valid. Each participant expressed their support for the mission of the school through justice-oriented work with children. They each provided examples of personal experiences advocating for and with children and families. There

were multiple layers of advocacy taking place at the school at the personal level (teacher to child, teacher to parent) and communal level (committee work and all-school efforts).

The research also assumes that Montessori education in the neoliberal era has as its goal addressing the unique needs of communities (Debs & Brown, 2017; Majure, 2019; Whitescarver, 2017). At Prospect Montessori school, this is absolutely the case. Children are viewed as individuals with differing needs. Teachers are reflective practitioners who are constantly looking for ways to better understand their students and relate to their experiences. The teachers and administrators commit themselves to training in and out of school to better provide instruction and social-emotional connections for students. Teachers realize that to improve the lives of children they must work in collaboration with parents. Each teacher seemed to go the extra mile to understand family needs and assert themselves into the community.

Researcher Insights

When I began this research, I set out to learn if the social justice principles that are the bedrock of Maria Montessori's method could be retained and practiced in the contemporary context of a privately funded, public, charter school that is impacted by neoliberal education reform. I wanted to know how this Montessori program was addressing the needs of Black children in an under-resourced public charter school despite the limitations exacerbated by government-based policies that tie funding to school report cards. I saw that Montessori theory and practice are at odds with the standardized curricula that assumes all children work from an even playing field and that all children must achieve in a standard manner. I witnessed the position of entanglement impacting these public Montessori school children and teachers. I wanted to see more clearly the function of Montessori education for the this particular community and to know whether it was beneficial for those involved. To learn about the

Montessori culture at Prospect Montessori, I interviewed eight educators. Their shared accounts of classroom life and school community engagement have led me to several conclusions based on the findings of this research.

I have concluded that above all, the educators at Prospect Montessori operate from a place of love and compassion. In addition, Montessori education in this place is dignifying and humanizing for those involved. Furthermore, I concluded that working towards emotional well-being is the priority at this school, and academic success is contingent upon emotional well-being. Finally, I have concluded that the hybrid Montessori experience in operation at Prospect Montessori School is more than just functional. It is an education for social justice.

Operating from Love and Compassion

I have learned that regardless of tension created by neoliberal educational policies, social injustice, and racialized inequity, the educators within this school rise to meet the challenges with open hearts and determination. In seeking to know what role a public, charter Montessori school plays in the education of Black children at Prospect Montessori School, I have learned that education, here, is an act of love and compassion that creates a path through the injustice (Arrastia, 2018). Freire (1997), in writing about his time in exile, stated, “In one’s fight for justice, one neglects seeking a more rigorous knowledge of human beings” (p. 29). He suggested here that in many cases the fight for justice can distract from the necessary human relationships that are at the heart of the fight. Well-meaning educators and child advocates often work for justice without seeing that the changes begin in the relationships they form with children. Prospect Montessori educators actually begin by building and nurturing the relationships they have with their students. Teachers here work tirelessly to facilitate learning using the developmentally appropriate principles of the Montessori Method, which require them to first

observe the child and create an environment which is conducive to their success (Montessori, 1944, 1964, 1967, 1979). To observe, in this place, is to seek to know the child and all that their life entails. There are examples in the data that show the creativity of teachers who have worked to respond to the individual needs of their students. Very often they are matching their practices to the needs of their students and creating environments that support their overall well-being.

It is worth noting that dedication can also be observed as these educators find their work complicated by state and district imposed testing protocols that must be administered as a means of gathering data about student performance. These measure do not often match the daily Montessori content and activities. Rather than succumbing to the demands that a standardized system presents to classroom curriculum, the teachers work even more diligently to adapt Montessori materials to help children learn the language of tests with the hope that they can translate the knowledge they have gained using Montessori materials and practices. The teachers know that the children are thriving, and they refuse go back to rote learning in order to match their teaching to the test. The teachers work twice as hard so that their students can continue to engage in self-directed and student-focused learning opportunities.

What we know from educational literature is that children learn better in classrooms and learning communities where teachers and practitioners are engaged in caring and loving practices (Freire, 1970, 1972; hooks, 1996; Lampert, 2003; Love & Love, 1995). As with all children, the social and emotional well-being of Black children must be of the highest priority (Wright, 2019). In American classrooms, studies show that Black children (especially Black boys) are more likely to be seen from a deficit perspective—as disruptive and less likely to be considered ready for school. Wright (2019) states that "proactive, culturally competent teachers can work to counter these misconceptions and create classroom environments where Black children feel

welcome to learn, dream and be themselves" (p. 20). The findings of this case study provide evidence that children at Prospect Montessori are seen, heard, and treated with respect. Montessori practices paired with culturally responsive practices assure that teachers seek to address unconscious biases, see children for their strengths, support and promote positive identity development, and encourage children to use their own voices to advocate for their unique needs both inside and outside of school. The love for Montessori education draws teachers to this school, and the commitment to the children creates bonds between educators and students that are long lasting. According to the data, these educators seem to be particularly committed to children whose circumstances are most challenging. The children return to the school even years after graduating from eighth grade, just to spend time with these teachers who loved them and who are still invested in their well-being.

Social critic and public intellectual Cornel West (2011) famously said in a speech at Howard University, "Justice is what love looks like in public." He has described what he means by love in the public sense—not just in the sentimental and private way we reserve for intimate relationships, but in a courageous, empathetic, and open way that brings justice to the surface (West, 2014). Classrooms are both public and private spaces. These spaces should place as much importance on justice as they do on tenderness and compassion (West, 2014). In the case of Prospect Montessori School, we see that love for the children is visible in the actions of educators as they seek to know the lives of their students and seek to awaken them to their own histories and traditions. These actions are driven by a public kind of love that initiates justice for these children.

Humanizing Education

Next, I have come to see that while the school is impacted by the racialized neoliberal constructs that marginalize Black children, it is also a place where the practices of social justice counteract and interrupt the impact of these constructs. Social justice, according to Maria Montessori, was a vision of compassion for the future of humankind that begins in relationships with children (Ayers, 2016). The stories shared in this case study provide evidence of the tenderness and compassion found in relationships with children and families. They have described how children are seen, heard, and embraced, and how parents are considered essential to the community. Meaningful relationships between teachers and their students seem to be embedded in the fabric of this school culture. There is a willingness by these educators to be open-minded to differences and to challenge their own biases. One can feel that there is an overall belief that the developmental, physical, social, and emotional needs of these Black children are at the very center of the whole educational process at this school.

Ladson-Billings (1995) suggested that "successful students of color experience academic success at the expense of their cultural and psychological well-being" (p. 475). This does not seems to be the case with Black children at Prospect Montessori. An emphasis on culturally responsive practices at Prospect Montessori School considers the recognition and celebration of color, race, gender, ability, and so forth as key to the student's well-being. The Montessori Method emphasizes human development where no one child is treated the same as another. They are each valued for their unique assets and helped with their unique challenges. As often as possible, children are measured against their own milestones to priortize their own growth. At Prospect Montessori, it is evident that children are seen as human beings who have great influence in their own futures. The adults and children alike are challenged to see themselves as

caring members of a community and also as individuals with something to offer to one another and the world.

Prioritizing Emotional Well-Being

I have also come to understand that the Montessori philosophy at Prospect Montessori School has created the much-needed room for the teachers and administrators to address the larger social and emotional issues that impact their students. Social and emotional growth is the priority at this school. Although the interview data did not go into much detail regarding academic progress, it was evident that the school sees the academic potential of children increasing when emotional health within the community is prioritized. As a result, the educators in this place engage in building the health of the school community before all else. We can see that there are multiple layers of support in place to help at the personal level (teacher to child, teacher to parent) and communal level (whole school professional development). In addition, teachers have come to realize that they must work in collaboration with parents if they would like to support long term emotional health and well-being in children. The participants have all asserted themselves in the community as resources for children and families. Educators are also engaged in professional development with one another, which aids them as they take on the newness of challenges presented by the hardships these children face. As a result of these efforts, Prospect Montessori School can be viewed as emotionally and culturally responsive.

Embracing Hybrid Montessori Education

This model for Montessori Education is a hybrid model that emphasizes liberation and social justice. Social justice initiatives in education work to see "the day to day processes and actions utilized in classrooms and communities through the lens of critical analysis, action and praxis amongst all educational stakeholders with the goal of creating tangible change" (Katsarou

et al., 2010, p. 139). At Prospect Montessori, we may not see complete integrity and fidelity in the implementation of the Montessori Method as it is defined by the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) or the American Montessori Society (AMS). But what we do see is daily analysis, action, and praxis that address the needs of these children and work toward the larger goal of creating tangible change within their lives.

While the school culture is not perfect and the challenges continue to present themselves, the significance of this case study lies not in the frustration of hardship but rather in the possibilities that exist for this community and others like it. Montessori education, in this case, provides educators with a framework through which to address the hardships that children in this community face. This hybrid model of Montessori Education is instrumental in helping to create a more even playing field for the children of this community and could serve as a model for other similar communities.

Recommendations

The recommendations that follow are based on the findings, analysis, and conclusions of this study. These recommendations are for those who work in public Montessori Schools as well as those who advocate for Montessori in the public sector. The recommendations are also valuable for any educators seeking justice in the education of young people in this country. The evidence in this study has described the conditions of injustice that disrupt the school environment and the educator responses that seek to acknowledge this injustice. The recommendations are based on what has worked for the educators at Prospect Montessori School to address unjust conditions existing within the community for their students and their families.

For Montessori Educators

In the case of Prospect Montessori School, we find that the success of Montessori schooling for this community lies in the adaptations that it has made to accommodate the unique needs of its student body. In this case as in many others, trauma, poverty, and inequity disrupt classroom environments to a staggering degree. Teachers and administrators have found that by adopting culturally responsive practices and implementing trauma informed practices in their classrooms and with individuals, they are able to soften the impact of the hardships experienced by children in this setting. The key to their success is likely their deep compassion for the children and their families. As they are guided in their work by their love for the relationships that they are building each day, they are building bonds of trust. Schools and educators who are looking to guide students through hardship and to build bonds of trust may want to try layering in culturally responsive practices and trauma-informed practices such as Conscious Discipline.

Because relationships are the starting place for all success that is to follow, schools that are looking to implement the Montessori Method with similar populations should consider their goals as a community and examine where they have been successful in building relationships. While the programs in place at Prospect Montessori School may not be the exact fit for other environments, beginning with what is currently working well for the community is an important start. In building good relationships, we heard that Prospect Montessori School teachers took time to reflect on their own biases, they practiced listening to the community members, and they made themselves available as resources to the children and their families. Administrators built time into the school year for professional development, which not only engaged teachers in academic and social and emotional work but also helped them to connect with one another.

Helping teachers to see how they can support one another is something that worked well for this school and could be of great benefit to other educators in similar settings.

For Montessori Advocates and Policy Makers

In the field of Montessori research and advocacy, we often find that researchers and advocates are looking to prove that Montessori is as functional if not more functional than traditional schooling or other progressive schooling. This is likely because we live in an era of measurement and accountability. Although the tides are beginning to turn, American education culture has sought to measure progress and quantify success (Strauss, 2020). Montessori Education has had to earn its seat at the table. But in the end, it is like comparing apples and oranges. The Montessori Method is philosophically so different from traditional public schooling (especially as public education has been impacted by standardization and accountability). It is arguable that researchers and advocates should be spending time making the case for alternative schooling in the public sector to be measured according to its own standards.

Something that has struck me regarding the outcomes of this case study is the ability of the Montessori educators and advocates in this space to set aside the measuring stick despite their entanglement with dated neoliberal policies that require them to assess their students according to inequitable tests. The teachers and administrators here work within the system, many times doing twice the amount of work, to be able to provide children with classroom environments that place more emphasis on the process of learning and relative growth. This does not mean that teachers are off the hook for instilling the knowledge required for standardized performance measures, however. Many times they do double the work as they translate the Montessori experience into what can be measured on a test. I am not making a recommendation

for more work for teachers. But I do find it admirable that these teachers take on extra work in order to preserve the integrity of the Montessori classroom experience for their students.

It is my feeling that it is time that public school systems acknowledge the philosophical differences in the Montessori Method and let educators in these spaces hold themselves accountable to the standards put forward by a 115 year old method that places the child at the center of their own learning process. I recommend that researchers like myself and other advocates for Montessori in the public sector stand their ground and pressure public school systems to acknowledge the benefit that Montessori school communities are providing for all children—and especially for under-served children—when they assess children according to their own development. Rather than pressuring these schools to adapt Montessori practices to meet district and state wide standards, they should be offering resources to teachers to differentiate instruction as they work to meet the individual needs of their students within the Montessori experience rather than outside of it.

Directions for Further Research

I recommend further studies be conducted at Prospect Montessori School to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the school culture. Based on the delimitations of the study and to correct for researcher bias, I believe it is important to collect data beyond one-on-one interviews and observations, perhaps through focus groups and/or a survey. The focus groups would give participants an opportunity to interact with their colleagues around topics that were initially addressed in the one-on-one interview. A survey would provide an opportunity for a response by the teacher or administrator in a less pressured scenario away from the researcher. Both of these forms of data would add an additional layer of insight to the case study. They

could also both be used to triangulate the existing data, adding to the credibility and validity of the study.

I would also like to point out that because the research sample is small and each one of the participants volunteered to be interviewed, their perceptions could be different from educators in the building who did not wish to be interviewed for the study. It is important to acknowledge that the findings are specific to the experiences and perspectives of this one sample group of eight teachers and administrators. As such, the results could skew towards those who often participate in the life of the school. Those who did participate paint a picture of hardship, advocacy, and possibility for the whole school community. However, if the study were larger and could include additional teachers and administrators, a more inclusive picture containing alternative perspectives could be the result. I would recommend using a larger sample group to gain more insight into the culture of this school.

I also believe that this study could be enhanced by including the perspectives of parents within the school community. We have only half the story when we only hear from the educators in the school community. Hearing from parents would make for a much more complete picture of life at Prospect Montessori. One can imagine that the academic perspective of teachers and administrators assumes a level of knowledge regarding the field of education and Montessori education specifically. Parents, on the other hand, would give rich details regarding community life, outside perspectives on Montessori education, and valuable information surrounding the experience of raising a child in partnership with the teachers and administrators at the school.

In addition, I recommend that further research be done to gain the perspectives of the students at the school. This knowledge would be invaluable. Numerous questions come to mind immediately. How does the Montessori Method feel to them? How do they feel about their

teachers? What makes this experience different, better, or worse than traditional schooling? How does it feel to be a member of their classroom? What does Conscious Discipline mean to them? How is the school responding to their cultural identity? The questions are seemingly endless and would help to gauge whether what teachers believe is happening at the school is a reality for their students.

Finally, I would like to recommend that this case study be compared and contrasted with a case study of another similar school using the same interview protocols and methods of data collection. This type of study would provide schools and educators an opportunity to learn whether "like environments" engage in similar practices, and where there is overlap in what is working and not working in both schools. This type of comparison would offer more broad insight into the applicability of Montessori education for under-served public school communities. It may also provide a sampling of blended practices that could prove to be beneficial for other similar school communities looking to implement hybrid Montessori programs to address the many forms of injustice impacting students across the nation.

Appendix A

Teacher Interview Protocol

Background

1. Tell me about how you came to work at Prospect Montessori School.

School Culture

1. What is it like being a teacher here?
2. How would you describe the culture of this school?
    a. How is it the same as other teaching experiences you have had?
    b. How is it different?
3. What are the things you like/don't like about the school?
4. What do you see as some of the unique challenges of the student body and families that your school serves?
5. How is the school addressing these unique challenges?

Classroom Culture

1. Would you describe your classroom as a community? If yes, in what ways?
2. How would you describe your interactions with students?
3. How would you describe the interactions between students?

Curriculum

1. How would you describe the Montessori curriculum at Prospect Montessori School?
2. What are your thoughts on how curriculum is implemented by the teachers?
3. Is there anything you would like to change about the curriculum?
4. What role does high stakes testing play in the curriculum?
5. How do you build on/integrate student backgrounds in curriculum?
6. How is the curriculum relevant to your students' lives outside of school?
7. How do the students play a role in their own education?

Community

1. How would you describe your relationship with parents?
2. How much do you know about the community/the families that your school serves?
    a. If little, how are you addressing this?
    b. How is the school addressing this?
3. How does the school engage with its surrounding community?

Professional Development

1. What kind of professional development is available to the teachers?
2. How do you feel about the professional development that the school provides?

Closing

1. What are your hopes for yourself as a teacher in this school?
2. What are your hopes for the students that attend Prospect Montessori?
3. Is there anything you would like to add to our conversation?

Appendix B

Administrator Interview Protocol

Background

1. Tell me about how Prospect Montessori Charter school came to be.
2. Tell me about how you came to work at Prospect Montessori School.

School Culture

1. What is it like being an administrator here?
2. How would you describe the culture of this school?
3. Could you please describe your admissions procedures?
   a. How are families recruited?
   b. How are admissions decisions made?
4. What do you see as some of the unique challenges of the student body and families that your school serves?
5. How is the school addressing these unique challenges?

Curriculum

1. How would you describe the Montessori curriculum at Prospect Montessori School?
2. Is there anything you would like to change about the curriculum?
3. What role does high stakes testing play in the curriculum?
4. How do you build on/integrate student backgrounds in curriculum?
5. How is the curriculum relevant to the students' lives outside of school?
8. How do the students play a role in their own education?

Community

1. How would you describe the school's overall relationship with the parent community?
2. How much do you know about the community/the families that your school serves?
   a. If little, how is the school addressing this?
3. Does the school engage with the community? If so, how? If not, why not?

Professional Development

1. What kind of professional development is available to the teachers?
2. How do you feel about the professional development that the school provides?

Closing

1. What are your hopes for yourself as an administrator at this school?
2. What are your hopes for the students at this school?
3. What are your hopes for the relationship between the school and the community?
4. Is there anything you would like to add to our conversation?

Appendix C

Traditions in Education Comparison Chart

Nine Montessori Principles (Lillard, 2017**)**	**Culturally Responsive Practices in Teaching** (Gay, 2002)	**Social Justice in Education** (Ciechanowski, 2013**,** Fan, 2013, Nieto and Bode, 2018, Spitzman and Balcon, 2019, Yoon and Kim, 2012)
• Particular porms of adult interaction are associated with more optimal child outcomes. • Movement and Cognition are closely intertwined, and movement can enhance thinking. • The best learning occurs in authentic contexts of interest. • Learning and well-being are improved when people have a sense of control over their lives. • Learning with and from peers. • The ability to direct one's attention in a sustained and concentrated way fosters an array of positive developments and is itself trainable. • Learning situated in meaningful contexts is often deeper and richer than learning in abstract contexts. • Extrinsic rewards are avoided. • Order in the environment is beneficial to children	• Match teaching styles to learning styles. • Be critically conscious of what is portrayed in books and what is visually portrayed in their curricular materials. • Emphasize holistic an integrated learning. • Be partners in action as they use knowledge and strategic thinking to decide how to act in the best interest of others. • Recognize differing cultural communication styles. • Recognize differing patterns of task engagement. • Acknowledge the impressions and distortions of ethnic groups in the media. • Exhibit cultural caring as they use students own cultural experiences to expand their intellectual horizons.	• Respectful communication • Inclusive approaches to teaching and learning where all students are integrated into the classroom learning from the curriculum and each another • Myriad opportunities for critical thinking, self-reflection and questioning power imbalances • Reciprocal teaching where power is shared between teacher and student • Establishing connection to students by seeking knowledge of their experiences and unique backgrounds • The teacher demonstrates and models a respectful attitude to diversity and encourages students' curiosity about multiple ways of doing things • Affirmation of culture and talents of individuals • Provide students with stories where they see themselves and language that includes them • Teach alternate histories • Teach anti-bias curriculum • Engage is activism

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