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From the editor:

This fall issue represents the completion of our second volume of the *Journal of Montessori Research*, with three fascinating articles. In the first one, Banks and Maixner explore Social Justice Education principles within an urban, socioeconomically and racially integrated Montessori charter school. The second article provides a much-needed examination of the racial and economic diversity of 300 whole-school, public Montessori programs open in 2012–2013, based on a new empirical data set developed by Debs. Finally, Christensen provides insights into the experience of a Montessori teacher as she balances multiple social identities contributing to her feelings as an authentic Montessori educator.

Four new manuscripts are being reviewed for the next issue, and we will accept submissions until January 15, 2017. Thank you once again to the individuals who contributed to this issue, as well as to the American Montessori Society (AMS) and the University of Kansas Libraries for making this publication possible. In May, keep an eye out for the next issue of the *Journal of Montessori Research*.

Sincerely,



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Editor

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Social Justice Education in an Urban Charter Montessori School

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Abstract. As the Montessori Method continues its expansion in public education, a social justice lens is needed to analyze its contributions and limitations, given the increase in racial and socioeconomic diversity in the United States. Furthermore, much of the work in Social Justice Education (SJE) focuses on classroom techniques and curriculum, overlooking the essential work of school administrators and parents, whose work significantly influences the school community. The current study applied an SJE framework to the efforts of one urban, socioeconomically and racially integrated Montessori charter school. We examined the extent to which SJE principles were incorporated across the school community, using an inductive, qualitative, case-study approach that included meetings, surveys, focus groups, and interviews. Administrators quickly adopted a system-wide approach, but parents—often color-blind or minimizing of the relevance of race—consistently resisted. Study results imply a continued need for an institutional approach, not solely a classroom or curricular focus, when integrating social justice into Montessori schools.

Montessori education is often found in elite private institutions, yet the number of public Montessori schools is growing (National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector [NCMPS], 2014; Whitscarver & Cossentino, 2008). There are approximately 500 public Montessori schools, with a 50-year history in the public sector (NCMPS, 2014). While Montessori schools have traditionally served predominantly White students and children of highly educated parents (Lillard, 2012), the student population within public Montessori schools is becoming increasingly diverse with respect to race and class. Of students at 300 schoolwide public Montessori schools, 56% are students of color and 47% are free and reduced lunch (FRL) eligible (Debs, 2015). Yet, research has found that diversity does not ensure equity of education. In fact, high-performing schools have been found to provide inferior education to students of color, which reinforces the need for schools to intentionally take race and class into account while building an environment where all children can learn (Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Lewis-McCoy, 2014).

As Montessori schools become more common in urban education, it is important to examine the extent to which these urban Montessori schools effectively engage Social Justice Education (SJE). In fact, failing to see the context within which Montessori expansion is occurring would be counter to the emphasis that Montessori places on cultural studies. Typically, research on social justice efforts focuses on teacher preparation, classroom techniques, and curriculum. While these factors are important, less attention has been paid to the role of administrators and parents as prominent stakeholders who shape the tone and tenor of the educational experience. For example, a study of Montessori and racial diversity highlighted systemic barriers, institutional biases against students' home culture, and explicit antibias policy as important external factors outside of the classroom that can shape student experience and achievement (Stansbury, 2012). A recent Harvard Graduate School of Education initiative, "By All Means," explicitly goes beyond the traditional student–teacher–classroom scope to highlight ways schools and communities can choose to

support student learning and address common barriers experienced by children and families from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Shafer, 2016). The current study examines the roles of administrators and parents in creating an equitable educational environment and, specifically, how SJE can be used as a framework in public Montessori schools.

SJE is defined as a process intended to promote equity across social identity groups (e.g., race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability, religion, nation of origin, etc.) via critical analysis and social action (Carlisle, Jackson, & George, 2006). The five principles of SJE in schools include (a) inclusion and equity: promoting these concepts within the school and larger community and creating a climate that challenges inequities across broad issues; (b) high expectations: the presence of such across all students, faculty, and staff, along with the services and resources; (c) reciprocal community relationships: acknowledgment that the school both gives and receives from the surrounding neighborhood and community and can be a catalyst for outside entities to share SJE work; (d) system-wide approach: assessing and understanding the impact of policies, procedures, behaviors, and leadership on issues of social justice within the school; and (e) direct SJE and intervention: the school's curriculum and trainings that teach equity and model ways to intervene and interrupt in inequitable situations (Carlisle et al., 2006).

Underlying this framework is Critical Race Theory (CRT), which focuses on race and racism in particular, yet also incorporates the intersectionality of other social identities, calling for the elimination of circumstances that inhibit individuals' experience of full rights and freedoms (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This case study examines ways in which an urban, racially and socioeconomically integrated charter Montessori school has incorporated these principles within the school over the course of 3 years.

Efficacy of Montessori with Students of Color

Public Montessori schools have shown positive outcomes for students from diverse racial and class backgrounds (Ansari & Winsler, 2014; Brown, 2016; Dohrmann, Nishida, Gartner, Lipsky, & Grimm, 2007; Lillard & Else-Quest, 2006; Mallett & Schroeder, 2015). A quasiexperimental design compared the performance on math and reading standardized state tests across third-grade Black students at public Montessori schools, traditional schools, and other choice schools and found that the students at the Montessori school had significantly higher reading scores (Brown, 2016). A longitudinal study of high school graduates found that those students who attended public, magnet Montessori preschools and elementary schools scored higher on math and science indicators compared to a peer control group (Dohrmann et al., 2007). Similarly, Lillard and Else-Quest (2006) found better outcomes on academic and social measures at ages 5 and 12 for students who were randomly assigned to attend Montessori schools. These data illustrate that Montessori education can be successful in urban settings.

Racial Disparities and Montessori Education

However, it is also important to acknowledge the potential for disparities seen in broader education to also manifest within Montessori schools. SJE is a necessary framework for urban Montessori schools to consider because the majority of students within urban schools, as well as the schoolwide Montessori public schools, are students of color (Debs, 2015; Nevarez & Wood, 2007) and are disproportionately affected by race and class inequities within the education system. For example, recent studies highlight racial disproportionality in school discipline in the Montessori classroom (Brown & Steele, 2015; Stansbury, 2012). While the racial disparity was less robust in the public Montessori setting compared to traditional public schools (Brown & Steele, 2015), findings suggest that Montessori education is not immune to how social identities can affect school experiences.

Furthermore, research suggests that an institutional focus on race and class can be met with resistance (Mildred & Zúñiga, 2004). The pushback to discuss these issues within institutions and schools may be partially explained by the fact that color-blind racial ideology (i.e., the tendency to believe that race does not and should not matter) is pervasive (Neville, Awad, Brooks, Flores, & Bluemel, 2013). Adherents

of color-blind racial ideology may use this approach to decrease the appearance of bias; however, in situations in which race is central, the application of colorblindness can actually increase bias (Apfelbaum, Sommers, & Norton, 2008). Given the pervasiveness of the approach, it is important for institutions to be race and class conscious and to not ignore the potential effect on school culture.

SJE and Montessori

Both SJE framework and public Montessori education represent a call for significant reform within our educational system. Seemingly disparate, these two frameworks for educating children can be compatible and, together, represent viable shifts from the concepts of schools as factories or children as blank slates. Instead, these frameworks insist that we think holistically about education, taking into account the whole child, community, and culture. For example, the research on teaching in a multicultural society stresses that social justice and student achievement are inseparable (Banks et al., 2001). However, the pairing of a social justice approach with student success is still emerging in Montessori education (Stansbury, 2012).

In recent years, the Montessori community has attempted to articulate the importance of social justice in a number of ways. Approximately 7 years ago, the American Montessori Society (AMS) published a series of articles linking the focus on peace and social justice to Montessori theory (Ungerer, 2009). AMS also published a white paper calling for inquiry into intersections between Montessori practices and culturally relevant curricula for Black students (Hall & Murray, 2011). In 2013, a community of educators began the grassroots group Montessori for Social Justice, which provides an online community and annual conference that share resources on public Montessori and social justice. However, recent initiatives that focused on expanding public Montessori education have not prominently featured social justice conversations.

For example, the Montessori Public Policy Initiative, a collaboration between Association Montessori Internationale and AMS, released a document addressing the essential elements for successful implementation of Montessori curriculum; however, neither culture nor social justice is mentioned (Brown, 2015). Maria Montessori believed that Montessori environments should serve the “complete human being, able to exercise in freedom a self-discipline, will and judgment, unperverted by prejudice and undistorted by fear” (Montessori, 1989, p. 2). Naming the inequitable systems that affect the lives of children of color, children in urban spaces, and children who are from a low socioeconomic background can enhance schools’ capacity to teach the whole child and to practice inclusion in the classroom and broader building.

Montessori education, given its recognition of the importance of culture and teaching the whole child, is poised to incorporate social justice (Duffy & Duffy, 2002). Furthermore, Dr. Montessori believed in inclusion—that a quality education should be accessible to all children, regardless of status. The concept of a *cosmic education* asserts that it is essential for students to understand how they fit within the larger world—from the classroom community to their broader neighborhood, country, continent, planet, and solar system (Duffy & Duffy, 2002). In fact, recent research found that children attending Montessori programs showed increased ability to practice sharing and fairness to solve social problems when compared to children attending conventional programs (Lillard, 2012).

Despite these and numerous other areas of potential overlap, the intersection of the Montessori Method and SJE is narrow. The current study examined one public Montessori school’s journey over 3 years to intentionally articulate and implement strategies to increase the overlap between SJE and Montessori.

Urban Montessori School

Urban Montessori School (UMS, a pseudonym) began as a Montessori preschool in 1994 in a Midwestern city, in a neighborhood chosen by founding administrators specifically for its racial and socioeconomic diversity. It opened as a charter school in 2008 with 53 children: 53% were students of color,

and 55% were FRL eligible. The school's location was strategically chosen to provide access to quality education for children in the city from a variety of racial and socioeconomic backgrounds. Currently the school enrolls 197 students: 46% are students of color (predominantly Black), and 41% are FRL eligible (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2015).

The mission of UMS is to prioritize a high-quality Montessori education among diverse students. Early in the life of the institution, the executive directors and heads of school determined social justice to be important, as indicated by their intentional choices to be in the city, in a diverse neighborhood, to focus recruitment efforts on attracting racially and socioeconomically diverse students, and to provide SJE training opportunities for teachers and staff. Initially, the efforts were driven mostly by the executive directors, and UMS looked for opportunities to integrate SJE tenets throughout the organization as the school grew.

Method

Data collection and observation for this case study occurred over the course of 3 years: 2012–2015. The overarching research questions directed to respondents were: How is the school integrating SJE? What are your thoughts and reactions related to the school intentionally engaging in SJE and being racially and socioeconomically diverse? Directed content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) using SJE as the conceptual framework was conducted to examine the ways in which UMS incorporated SJE. Therefore, a school that had content across the multiple principles of SJE has successfully implemented the framework. Data collection included analysis of four focus groups, 10 interviews, two surveys, and six meetings.

Participants

School administrators (n = 10). School administrators included the executive director, head of school, director of development, assistant director of development, family support coordinator, community outreach coordinator, office administrator, and head of preschool. Ten individuals served across these eight positions over the course of data collection, and staff remained predominantly White. One or two Black women were on staff at different times, as was one Black male more recently; most staff members were women, along with two or three men at various times. Group meetings and a series of individual interviews were the sources of data.

Parents (n = 119). UMS had about 125 families in the charter school. The data for this study came from within-race focus groups attended by 15 parents (Black = 6, White = 9); two Black families reported receiving free or reduced lunch, a criterion used as a proxy for socioeconomic status. Additional data came from 104 responses to open-ended questions related to SJE within an anonymous survey about parents' experience with the school, administered by the charter sponsor. It was not possible to know if the 119 data points represented the same individuals across the multiple methods of data collection, or if they were unique data points. Of the parents who responded to the survey, 71% were White, 21% Black, and 4% identified as Hispanic, and 4% identified as multiracial. The majority of respondents (81%) reported paying full price for lunch; 7% paid a reduced price and 12% received free lunch. Free childcare and food were offered to maximize attendance at events.

Researchers. The first author is a Black professor of psychology who researches the mental health effects of discrimination and intergroup interactions. Furthermore, she has consulted for individuals and institutions on how to implement diversity, inclusion, and equity efforts for 18 years. Her relationship with UMS began when she enrolled her child in the Primary program. Following a pattern of educational researchers who are embedded in the school (Cossentino, 2005), she currently has two children enrolled in the school. She is also employed by the university that holds the charter of the school, and she has served on a number of parent and board committees. Her involvement in this study included conducting interviews and meetings with administrators, in addition to data analysis and manuscript preparation. To balance her personal experience of the school, the first author drew on her professional work as a clinical psychologist,

using self-reflection and objectivity regardless of personal feelings, as well as collaborating with another researcher who was not affiliated with the school to ensure the data were not cherry-picked.

The second author is a biracial graduate student in psychology with a research interest in White parents' racial socialization practices, cultural competency, and use of colorblindness as a strategy to teach their children about race. Her involvement with the school includes two semesters delivering clinical services as a practicum student and collecting data for her master's thesis via focus groups of White parents. Her participation in this project included conducting focus groups with parents and assisting with data analysis and manuscript preparation. Potential biases include seeing the data through the lens of her research on colorblindness. This bias was managed by having an unaffiliated researcher corroborate the results. Both authors attempted to keep these biases in mind as they analyzed data in the study.

Procedure

School administrators were invited to participate in semistructured, one-on-one interviews. Group meetings focusing on the topic of SJE took place during the time of regularly scheduled staff meetings. Interviews with administrators centered on these general questions: How is the school doing at implementing SJE? What, specifically, have you implemented as a part of your role? What do you need to succeed with implementation?"

Parents were invited by e-mail and a follow-up phone call to take part in the focus groups. Given the SJE framework, which acknowledges systemic inequities, we chose to separate focus groups by race and class to ensure all voices were given the opportunity to respond. Parents who participated in the focus groups were provided dinner and then participated in a semistructured, 90-minute session. The protocol for parent focus groups included questions such as "Are you aware of *why* SJE was deemed important enough to be a main part of the mission?" and "What are your thoughts about this aspect of the mission?" Parents were also recruited via an anonymous, online survey about their experiences with the school. Answers mentioning SJE were analyzed as a part of this study.

Data Analysis

Directed content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) guided data analysis as the five tenets of SJE theory were used as a priori categories. Interviews and focus groups were transcribed and then analyzed by the first and second authors. Agreement was reached by discussion. To increase the trustworthiness of the data, the coding scheme was sent to another researcher unaffiliated with UMS (Yin, 2009). Where there was disagreement, the unaffiliated researcher's coding prevailed. The survey results were similarly examined for open-ended responses related to SJE. Subsequently, the results were shared with the executive director to check for confirmability (Yin, 2009), to aid in understanding the data's implications for the institution, and to provide feedback to the institution.

Results and Discussion

Because SJE principles were used to organize the data, the results are presented by principle. Given the desire to protect confidentiality within the small number of the administration sample and the inability to link demographic data to the parent survey's open-ended responses, race and gender are not reported with direct quotes. Discussion of the relevant content and of how it is situated within the larger literature is also embedded within this section.

Principle 1: Inclusion and Equity

This principle refers to the promotion of inclusion and equity within the school setting and larger community by addressing social oppression. In particular, the school has chosen to focus on race and class, given the challenges facing the neighborhood and city.

School Administrators. To articulate the school's long-standing commitment to inclusion and equity, the executive director frequently told how the charter school began as intentionally racially and socioeconomically diverse. One staff member reflected, "[The founder] made an intentional effort to integrate the school racially and economically, from the beginning and over the years. However, both economic and racial integration [were] consistently a challenge." Additionally, the pursuit of equity and inclusion in admissions required extra efforts from the staff.

Administrators described some strategies that UMS adopted to maintain race and class balance, including neighborhood canvasses, positive relationships with local businesses, and publicity in the local Black newspaper. However, during the same time period, the neighborhood began to change, with an increase in higher-end housing. Subsequently, UMS drew a disproportionate number of middle-class—and predominantly White—applications. These factors affected the pool of lottery applicants, threatening the school's core mission to remain racially and socioeconomically diverse. The school also stayed abreast of state and federal guidelines regarding the weight of student demographics admissions. Unlike city magnet schools, UMS was not allowed to take race into account during admissions.

We [administrators] need to make sure that the applicant pool stays about right demographically, because we aren't allowed to have quotas.... There aren't that many other neighborhoods in the city where we could protect what we are trying keep—our neighborhood model and maintaining a balanced demographic.

Administrators generally appeared to understand that the lack of racial diversity among staff caused some individuals within the school and community to question the staff's ability to champion SJE.

[UMS]'s leadership has been primarily White and, though the number of staff members of color has increased in recent years, the majority of faculty and staff have consistently been White. [UMS] still has to work to establish rapport and trust with Black parents, particularly low-income Black parents. [UMS] faces an uphill battle as the school strives to maintain its commitment to integration.

This awareness is noteworthy because UMS acknowledged how the school being predominantly White has influenced its ability to recruit Black families. Staff composition was one variable—people of color might not trust that a school that appeared so White was serious about equity and inclusion. Intentionality and investment in relationships over time allowed the school to initially enroll families of color, and that approach is still warranted.

The administration also attempted to be more inclusive by diversifying the donor list in hopes of bringing a wider variety of interests and talents to the school. In addition, administrators expanded the ways families and donors could give time or money (e.g., pizza sales, cleaning supplies, a jazz concert, a formal gala). These multiple entry points are in contrast to schools that focus solely on high-end events (e.g., galas), which can exclude supporters who have less formal networks (e.g., pizza sales). The administration also repeatedly communicated to families that donations of time were appreciated when monetary donations were not feasible. Diverse fundraising opportunities fostered a sense of community, regardless of financial means, yet often seemed at odds with the demands of raising the large amounts of money that were essential to the functioning and growth of the school.

At the beginning of our workshops with administrators, one administrator, who also served as a lead guide, expressed disbelief that Primary-aged children see racial differences: "I don't think they see color." Over the course of the next year, she came to understand that, much as she wished that were the case, this belief did not reflect reality.

I asked them what they could know by looking at a White, male Primary student. One student replied, "That he's nice." I asked how we know that, and another student replied, "Because he is White." I ended the lesson by reminding them they cannot tell what a person is like simply from skin color.

This administrator's willingness to question color-blind racial ideology and acknowledge how privilege shapes our assumptions was a turning point in her understanding of the importance of SJE and of supporting the institutional focus.

School leadership continued to engage with issues of SJE. A notable result of this commitment was a statement of social justice goals, acknowledging its link with Montessori philosophy and highlighting inequities that exist within the context of the school and society. The statement, drafted by school leadership in spring 2012, (a) articulated the school's commitment to social justice, working toward interrupting and dismantling inequities, and (b) reiterated the guiding framework of Montessori and its commitment to transformation. The statement was further shaped by teachers in fall 2012 and was presented to the board in spring 2014.

Parents. Some families did not initially know that social justice was an explicit focus for the school but were aware of the administration's recent SJE efforts. Parents often asked how the focus on SJE would be implemented: "Sometimes it seems like when people try to be diverse and celebrate diversity that... the White guilt kicks in. So now, anything that's White is, like, bad." Another parent said, "I'm afraid that if we start getting too far into, like, how is everyone different than everybody else, then you start ignoring [that] we are all the same in so many other ways." Another parent said, "I have concerns that the [SJE] work may be taking a higher priority than quality education and oversight of educators."

These responses represent a misunderstanding of social justice concepts and indicate respondents' hesitancy to explicitly address inequity, preferring colorblindness and minimizing the relevance of race (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Neville et al., 2013). Research suggests that members of a dominant group may not fully understand the ways in which life experiences are shaped by nondominant status (Neville et al., 2013). Therefore, it is common for Whites to express concerns about race and race-related dialogue or policy by minimizing the importance of race or worrying about reverse discrimination (Neville et al., 2013). However, these concerns are not exclusive to Whites.

One Black parent said, "This place is both racially and socioeconomically diverse. But whether or not it's an inclusive place is another matter." Another parent expressed similar sentiments: "Even in this diverse environment that we've tried so hard to create, there's still issues." Several parents expressed the need to find ways to include all parents in the life of the school. One parent said

They have ... meetings, parent action committee meetings at 8:30 in the morning. Well, I go to work so I can't be here at 8:30 in the morning so, you know, I guess there is an economical issue because apparently there's a lot of stay-at-home moms and I want to know who's attending the meetings.

These comments highlight the potential intersection of race and class. Research confirms that class can drive the dynamics of volunteering and resources within a school (Spencer, Reno, Powell, & Grant-Thomas, 2009). Whether families had the option for one parent to be out of the labor market or had jobs with more autonomy in scheduling, there was a disparity in who was visibly involved at the school. Attending meetings during the day, volunteering to be a parent-reader during school hours, or attending the principal's coffee hour all require time out of the traditional workday. In that regard, class was also a potential barrier to involvement. Overall, these comments suggest a need for a discussion that will facilitate parents' understanding of SJE and the opportunity for parents to express how they feel the school aligns with the concepts.

Principle 2: High Expectations

School Administrators. UMS worked to be a supportive and nurturing learning environment that held the community to high academic standards as written into the original charter. Expectations and community standards were also articulated via a family handbook, a family contract, and communications from the school. The school adopted the concept of inclusive excellence (Association of American Colleges

and Universities, n.d.) and developed an infrastructure for reviewing academic achievement disaggregated by race and FRL status.

We aren't just focused on the three R's—reading, writing, and arithmetic. Now it's relationship, relevance, and rigor. In our mission statement, we talk about all students. When an achievement gap exists, then we are not meeting mission. We are creating plans for our classrooms and planes of development so that we become more accountable for student growth and achievement for all.

UMS administration has made clear that it was not acceptable for a subset of students to succeed while others do not perform at their full potential. The school has attempted to institutionally support culturally relevant pedagogy, as evidenced by a committee that explores the intersection of the concept with Montessori methods at the school (Hall & Murray, 2011). From a critical race perspective, this approach is noteworthy because it pushes back against the deficit model of seeing children of color, often labeled *at risk* or *underperforming*, as the central “problem” if they do not conform to White norms (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). UMS, as an institution, attempted to take on the responsibility to see race and culture as assets to be leveraged.

Parents. Each year the school requested that families volunteer 2 hours per month. Parent volunteer activities included helping in the classroom, labeling books for the library, reading to children, assisting with fundraisers, and serving on committees. In focus groups, parents discussed the challenge of active involvement in the school. One parent said

It's one thing to want to get into [a] great school but it's another thing to come to the parent/teacher meetings and to come to the extracurricular stuff.... I think people are very glad to be here but not engaged 100%.

Another parent reflected, “We need to find a way to get all of the parents there ... to try to come up with a language to reach everybody.” Both of these comments came from parents whose children were not FRL eligible. While it is possible they speak to the need for the school to improve communication and engagement strategies, it is also possible that these parents are judging other parents unfairly and simply fail to see the numerous ways that parents of lower socioeconomic status volunteer. For example, a parent whose work hours are inflexible but who cuts laminated materials at home is not visible in the same way as a parent who comes in during the day to be a reading parent or to chaperone a field trip.

It is possible that the institution has set high expectations for parent involvement yet also has created barriers that contradict its mission for racial and socioeconomic integration. Previously discussed factors regarding class and volunteering (Spencer et al., 2009) may have contributed to some parents' inaccurate and unfair perception of the involvement of other parents.

Principle 3: Reciprocal Community Relationships

Early on, UMS recognized the reciprocal nature of its work in the community in that the desired racial and socioeconomic diversity relied on the community trusting and embracing the school. However, as discussed earlier, and paradoxically, the school's success and the gentrification of the surrounding neighborhood jeopardized the school's integration.

School Administrators. In 2013, in partnership with other local districts, the school hosted a community panel on urban education, stimulating discussions with key stakeholders about affordable housing in the neighborhood. School leadership attended a number of neighborhood-development planning meetings to represent not only the interests of the school but also the connection between community development and education. Another panel highlighted the financial and development partnerships that made construction of the school's facility possible. In 2015, the school hosted a community meeting for a major research initiative that focused on racial health disparities. Consistently, UMS has partnered with local institutions to highlight issues that are relevant to families in the school and in the broader community. As one administrator articulated,

The changes in our neighborhoods present real obstacles for many of our children. It has become difficult or impossible for their families to afford to stay in their homes. Montessori asserts that, to truly serve the whole child, we must see him or her in context. What happens with a child inside a classroom cannot be disconnected from what happens in his or her neighborhood, and beyond.

From this perspective, Montessori education calls for an understanding of the systemic challenges that affect children, their school, and the broader neighborhood. Recent research confirms that looking beyond the classroom improves school climate and learning (Shafer, 2016). The success of an urban school serving a diverse population of students has inspired a number of entities to want to collaborate with UMS. These opportunities have drawn attention to the art of maintaining integration within a shifting neighborhood and have forced UMS to be choose partnerships carefully in order to ensure the tenets of SJE remain central.

Parents. Critically, parents collectively engage with the community through a series of monthly dialogues hosted by a parent-led committee that is focused on fostering SJE within the school. The series has become popular throughout the city and is now sponsored by the local neighborhood association. Topics range from definitions and terms (e.g., socialization, racism, privilege, institutional dynamics, gentrification, and affordable housing) to activities that simulate oppression, often including a video or brief presentation. Some parents are clearly aligned with this type of community engagement: “I love the [UMS] mission!!! I am very, very excited about the [SJE] and affordable housing work [UMS] has been doing.” Another parent responded, “Love and respect what they do in the community and anti-bias work.” However, others think the attention is misplaced. One parent said

I feel that the school has prioritized the social aspects of the mission over the academic aspects of the mission. These can coexist and support each other, but unfortunately, I believe that the administration suffers from some confusion about whether we are a community organization or a school.

The disconnect between administrators’ collective engagement and parents’ more varied responses is noteworthy. The resistance of some parents may indicate opposition to SJE; previous research has documented similar opposition to explicit discussion of controversial topics. (Mildred & Zúñiga, 2004). Furthermore, given the lack of clarity regarding the intersection of SJE and Montessori education (Brown, 2015), some parents may think adopting an SJE framework goes beyond the school’s role.

Principle 4: System-Wide Approach

A system-wide approach refers to examination of the institution as a whole, with specific norms and practices, rather than a focus on individuals or positions. A focus on individuals and positions can temporarily improve social justice efforts; however, people and positions change over time. Therefore, it is crucial to keep policy and the broader system in mind.

School Administrators. In 2012, the school leadership recognized that embracing the principles of SJE would not be as simple as buying a curriculum or declaring the beginning of a new era. Examples of system-wide changes include development of a statement outlining the school vision, revamping of hiring procedures, adoption of SJE as a lens for policies and procedures, and meetings:

All of this work has made us want to tighten our policies and procedures. We did a comprehensive policy manual and handbook. When things are left to subjectivity, privilege and racism rear [their] heads, and that’s where the problems arise. Consistency across the organization is really important.

Additionally, school leadership was quite aware that it was predominantly White. School leaders made clear that hiring would not occur simply by word of mouth, which can breed homogeneity. The school not only posted openings widely but also reached out to contacts at the city’s historically Black teachers

college and advertised in the local Black newspaper. Administrators added language to employment advertisements and to interviews that explicitly addressed the issue of social justice (e.g., “A key part of [UMS]’s mission is to be an actively intentional [SJE] school. What experience do you have in this area? How will you help to lead [UMS] to deepen its commitment?”).

One administrator stated, “I think [UMS] is doing a great job of incorporating [SJE] training and activities at all levels of the community: parents, staff, teachers, board, etc.” The presence of committees focused on social justice at parent, teacher, staff, and board levels reflects the system-wide approach. The responsibility for being an institution infused with the principles of SJE is not assumed to be at any one level. UMS is aware that analysis and effort across the institution are necessary for success. However, some of the leaders felt more skeptical of the progress: “While I support the school’s commitment, it seems to be in word only and not in practice.” This comment reflects the tension between day-to-day operation and systems-level change. Conversations with the administration demonstrated that UMS recognizes the lofty nature of its goal: instilling SJE and creating a liberating space for all participants will not occur overnight. As UMS moves toward broader SJE goals, it is imperative that its administration create and implement ways to share feedback. Moreover, the larger community must fine-tune operations and norms.

Parents. Families expressed the need for attention to diversity that extends past students into the institution. One parent said, “Well, for me it always comes down to ... whether or not true diversity exists, and not just numerically, but practice. Who makes decisions? How are these decisions ... carried out? Who’s driving the bus?” Another parent also discussed the need for multiple levels of the institution to embrace SJE tenets.

If you have a mission for diversity in your student body, you have to have that mission for diversity in your administration at your school board—you just have to. You can’t have an all-White school board. I mean, I know it’s not now—they have added some people of color on the school board. You can’t have an all-White administration.

Numerical diversity—the representation of people—is not sufficient (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002). Increasing the opportunity and incentives for creating and upholding SJE policies, practices, and norms is an area of growth for UMS. In particular, UMS should encourage parents to reflect upon their own significance in the system at UMS.

Principle 5: Direct SJE and Intervention

School Administrators. Trainings for school leadership, board members, teachers, and parents have provided the bulk of direct SJE interventions. At the beginning of 2012, administrators began a semester-long study of SJE. Rather than start with a curriculum to teach the children, they engaged in learning themselves. In addition, the executive director, head of school, and community outreach coordinator attended a 3-day advanced workshop for organizers of social justice. They also attended a 2½-day workshop on analyzing racism; the workshop is now annual and is attended by teachers, board members, parents, and community partners. Their consensus is that training is needed across stakeholders in the institution. An administrator said

The [SJE] training is needed on at least a yearly basis, especially to make sure new teachers and staff are included in the training. I think [UMS] is doing a great job of incorporating training and activities at all levels of the community: parents, staff, teachers, board, etc.

Despite this shared vision, the desire for training had to be weighed against other pressing school needs, such as competitive salaries to retain teachers and building expansion. Through strategic partnerships with community agencies and the board’s agreement to dedicate training funds, UMS was able to continue to offer trainings.

Parents. In 2013, families were invited to a 3-hour workshop that introduced the ideas of bias, racism, power, and privilege. Parents who attended the workshop (n = 50) watched “Danger of a Single

Story,” a recorded TED Talk by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, and participated in a facilitated discussion about socialization, social identities, and the definition of racism. Parents who serve on school committees have also been invited to the 2½-day workshop described previously.

One area of need and potential learning emerged in the focus groups. A number of parents expressed hesitation at the idea of talking directly to their children about bias. They were concerned that they did not know how or when to talk to their children or what, specifically, to say to them. Some parents thought their children were too young or that these discussions would be too difficult. This sentiment was expressed across race and class. One parent said, “I don’t want to introduce—I just don’t want to introduce bias to him.” Another parent described the discussion as “a fine line to cross and with the kids, and what age do you? You know, how? How do you approach it? When do you approach it? I don’t know if you want them to know. I don’t know.”

Research suggests that children start to see racial differences as young as preschool age (Pahlke, Bigler, & Suizzo, 2012). Therefore schools and parents, as socializing agents, should be intentional and explicit, rather than vague and noncommittal, about having conversations and understanding children’s perceptions (Pahlke et al., 2012). Some parents seemed to believe that talking to their children would introduce bias, not acknowledging that bias already exists in the world. This distinction is important because it is inaccurate to believe that a child does not perceive bias until a parent introduces the topic. Children observe dynamics that inform their understanding of bias before they enter elementary school (Pahlke et al., 2012). Thus, concerns about not wanting them to know about bias or about introducing bias are misaligned with the research corroborating children’s awareness. Furthermore, silence can be as powerful as words and, along with reluctance, can be perceived as support for the status quo (Tatum, 2003; Vega, Crawford, & Van Pelt, 2012). It is important to acknowledge, validate, and engage difference, rather than minimize or be blind to it.

Summary

Our results represent 3 years of UMS’s SJE efforts. The data suggest that school administrators have engaged in multiple activities across all principles and in greater depth than has the parent community. UMS intentionally began its social justice efforts by focusing on institutional concerns and leadership, acknowledging that, regardless of the individuals in power, SJE would be embedded into the norms, policies, and procedures of the institution.

It is noteworthy that parents were generally more tentative about the integration of SJE principles than was administration. Concerns about SJE overshadowing academics or garnering undue attention suggest that parents would rather be blind to issues of race and class or do not see the value in focusing on equity (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Neville et al., 2013). This stance may prove to undermine the system-wide approach of the administration. It is also possible that, with increased direct SJE education and intervention, parents may step into a more consistently supportive role in shaping the school culture. It would be beneficial for UMS to more intentionally communicate its efforts and rationale to parents, encouraging them to be partners in the process, rather than remain confused or become dissenters.

The current study adds to our understanding of how Montessori education can work in concert with SJE, but it has its limitations. Lack of generalizability is a major limitation in the study, as SJE efforts at UMS might not be representative of those at other institutions. Another limitation is the nature of the data. Although UMS is a racially and socioeconomically diverse school, the bulk of the administration was White; the parents who responded, too, were predominantly White and paid full price for lunch. Future research on urban or public Montessori schools should make extensive efforts to oversample for families of color and FRL-eligible families. Longitudinal data will also be important for rich learning and for drawing causal inferences. However, it is also critical to report interim data because embedding SJE principles into Montessori theory and practice is an iterative, long-term process.

Conclusion

From the Montessori perspective, the data suggest that increased overlap between SJE and Montessori is possible. Of course, the question of how Montessori will appropriately educate an increasingly racially and socioeconomically diverse student population is not left to UMS alone (Brown & Steele, 2015; Debs, 2015; Stansbury, 2012). Given the increasing number of public Montessori schools, now is an important time to be engaged in exploring social justice work among administrations and parent communities.

Other Montessori schools deliberating how to integrate SJE principles should consider this system-wide approach that starts with school administration. However, as an administration develops a shared language and vision, it is essential that it engage parents and other stakeholders. The explicit identification of race and class as important topics for thorough discussion was met with some resistance at UMS. However, given the prevalence of color-blind racial ideology (Neville et al., 2013) and the broader principles of SJE (Carlisle et al., 2006) and CRT (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), these dynamics are not surprising and will be present inside and across other educational institutions within the United States. Therefore, resistance should not be seen as a reason to abandon SJE efforts. Reflection, openness, and robust feedback mechanisms are essential.

Montessori's expansion into public schools requires explicit acknowledgment of race and class. The efforts of national bodies (Hall & Murray, 2011) and researchers (Brown & Steele, 2015; Stansbury, 2012) provide an approach that focuses on students and curriculum. The data from this study provide a system-wide approach to SJE that was successfully launched among administrators and was more nascent in the parent population, suggesting that SJE has a place outside of the classroom as well. Taken together, these findings support the potential for successful integration of SJE and Montessori philosophy. The pressure to deliver on the promise of Montessori within the public sector may lead some to see SJE efforts as tangential to a Montessori education. However, embracing a framework that tightly connects Montessori and social justice may be central to the continued success of urban, public Montessori education.

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Racial and Economic Diversity in U.S. Public Montessori Schools

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Abstract. As public Montessori schools rapidly expand through the United States, the question then arises: What population of students do the schools serve? This study presents a new empirical data set examining the racial and economic diversity of 300 whole-school, public Montessori programs open in 2012–2013, where the entire school uses the Montessori Method. While school-choice scholars are concerned that choice programs like Montessori lead to greater student segregation by race and social class, this study finds a variety of outcomes for public Montessori. Public Montessori as a sector has strengths in student racial and socioeconomic diversity, but it also has diversity challenges, particularly among Montessori charters. The study concludes with recommended strategies for public Montessori schools to enroll a racially and economically diverse student body.

Public Montessori schools¹, with 503 programs in 2015–2016, currently comprise approximately one eighth of an estimated 4,000 Montessori programs in the United States (American Montessori Society, 2016). As private Montessori schools expanded rapidly throughout the US in the 1960s (Meyer, 1975), public Montessori schools emerged a decade later as part of desegregation initiatives in cities around the country. The earliest whole-school public Montessori programs, in which the entire school follows the Montessori Method, were developed in the 1970s as part of desegregation initiatives in Cincinnati, OH; Kansas City, MO; and Milwaukee, WI. More recently, cities such as Cambridge, MA; Hartford, CT; Grand Rapids, MI; and Fort Wayne, IN, have implemented public Montessori education to create racial diversity in urban school districts (National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector [NCMPS], 2014a).

While a primary concern in the Montessori community has been the extent to which public Montessori programs maintain Montessori pedagogical fidelity (Daoust & Suzuki, 2013, 2014; Kahn, 1990; Kostin, 1995; Lillard, 2012; McKenzie, 1994; Furman University, 2015a, 2015b; Van Acker, 2013), in the

broader literature around public school choice¹, scholars are concerned that choice options like public Montessori lead to racial segregation (Renzulli & Evans, 2005; Orfield & Frankenberg, 2012; Smrekar & Goldring, 1999), where White and more-advantaged students are able to use school choice to exit traditional public schools. Recent news media reports² have made similar charges, linking public Montessori to elite and White student enrollments in San Francisco, CA (Cobb & Glass, 2009); Dallas, TX (Nicholson, 2016); and Charlotte, NC (Helms, 2015). A disproportionately White enrollment was grounds for blending a Montessori program at Leschi Elementary School in Seattle, WA (Nyland, 2015; Stocking, 2015). Montessori charters were denied in Santa Cruz, CA, and Salem, OR, on charges of elite enrollment (Brown, 2012; McCord, 2012; Schapiro, 2012; Wong, 2014), and several Montessori charter renewals, including the California Montessori Project in Elk Grove, CA (“EGUSD staff wants diversity,” 2016), and in Chippewa Valley, WI (Swedien, 2014), are in jeopardy because of concerns their enrollments do not represent the diversity of the broader school districts.

Some initial research (Brown, 2016; Murray & Peyton, 2008; Furman University, 2015c; Roberts & Fleming 2016) has attempted to document the racial diversity in selected samples of public Montessori schools, but no research has measured the extent of this racial diversity across the entire public Montessori sector. At a time when public schools across the US are resegregating (Orfield, Kucsera, & Siegel-Hawley, 2012), policymakers are more interested than ever in implementing school programs that act as engines of diversity. How successful are public Montessori programs in creating racial and socioeconomic diversity?

School-choice researchers also distinguish between the impact on diversity of different kinds of school choices (Frankenberg & Siegel-Hawley, 2008; Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, & Wang, 2010; Renzulli & Evans, 2005). Magnet schools—choice schools that are part of existing school districts—are generally established as part of racial desegregation efforts in urban areas. They are typically required to meet a target enrollment of students from particular racial and ethnic backgrounds in order to respond to a desegregation court order. Charter schools—tuition-free schools chartered by the state but run by private organizations—can be created by any group looking for an education alternative. Charter schools have historically been held more accountable for their academic results than for the enrollment demographics. Whole-school, public Montessori schools are nearly evenly split between magnet and charter schools (NCMPS, 2014a; Debs, 2016c). Thus, this study’s second research question is: How does the racial and economic diversity of charter Montessori differ from that of district and magnet Montessori schools? This study answers the research questions by analyzing a unique national data set of public Montessori schools, using information from multiple Montessori sources and the 2012–2013 Common Core of Data from the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics, (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

Literature Review

Benefits of Racially and Socioeconomically Diverse Public Schools

Researchers have found academic and social gains for all students attending racially and economically diverse schools, including higher overall academic achievement (Bohrstedt, Kitmitto, Ogut, Sherman, & Chan, 2015), as well as specific gains in mathematics (Berends & Penaloza, 2010; Newton, 2010) and literacy (Benson & Borman, 2010). Students in racially diverse schools also build more expansive social networks (Braddock & Gonzalez, 2010; Goldsmith, 2010; Wells, Holme, Revilla, &

¹ I include district, magnet and charter schools as part of public school choice, excluding private schools and school vouchers. Although some researchers and policy makers debate whether charter schools are public schools, as they are run by private organizations receiving public funding, I follow Kahlenberg and Potter (2014) and Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, and Wang (2010) in considering them public schools.

² In the absence of academic research on this topic, I relied on news sources to identify public awareness of patterns in public Montessori student enrollment.

Atanda, 2009; Wells, Fox, & Cordova-Cobo, 2016). Others have argued that maintaining school diversity is a critical component of the American democratic system (Hochschild & Scovronick, 2003).

But despite this evidence, American public schools have been resegregating over the last 25 years (Orfield et al., 2012). Factors in this resegregation include the rolling back of desegregation court orders (Clotfelter, 2004; Orfield & Frankenberg, 2013), White families continuing to move away from school districts that have concentrated populations of students of color (Goyette, Farrie, & Freely, 2012; Goyette, Iceland, & Weininger, 2014), and the education policy arena focusing on student achievement instead of racial diversity.

The policy conversation is now shifting. In the last several years, an increasing number of policymakers at both the grassroots and national levels are examining how to make American schools more racially and economically diverse (Kahlenberg, 2001; Kahlenberg & Potter, 2014; Potter, Quick, & Davies, 2016), and the federal government has recently allocated new grants for districts and schools promoting school diversity (U.S. Department of Education, 2016b).

School Choice and School Diversity

School choice—providing parents a series of educational options—has become the consensus tool for creating such diversity. The pupil assignment strategies and busing of the 1970s were politically unpopular. The residential segregation underlying most school assignments remains a persistent problem, particularly among White families with children (Goyette et al., 2014). Giving parents additional choices, and sometimes choices outside of their assigned school district, has emerged as the most palatable and expedient policy alternative (Frankenberg & Siegel-Hawley, 2008; Kahlenberg & Potter 2014; Orfield & Frankenberg, 2013).

Yet there are limitations to how much schools of choice can effectively create racial and socioeconomic diversity. School choice requires that parents have the time and knowledge to research school options, navigate complicated choice systems, and, in some cases, provide their own transportation to school. Not surprisingly, research shows that low-income families and families of color are less likely to participate in school-choice programs (Pattillo, 2015; Pattillo, Delale-O'Connor, & Butts, 2014; Pérez, 2011; Rhodes & DeLuca, 2014). As a result, even programs designed to create racial diversity can end up unintentionally excluding low-income families and families of color. Nearly all public Montessori schools face the challenge of being *choice* schools, in that families must deliberately enroll rather than automatically be assigned to attend.

Public Montessori and School Diversity

While Montessori has long been popular in the private sector, it has also been a sought-after public school choice (Murray & Peyton, 2008). Since the late 1960s, public Montessori has expanded exponentially through first magnet and then charter schools (NCMPS, 2014a). The literature on public Montessori has focused primarily on two issues: (a) examining how effectively public Montessori educators maintain high-fidelity Montessori implementation (Daoust & Suzuki, 2013, 2014; Kahn, 1990; Kostin, 1995; Lillard, 2012; McKenzie, 1994; Furman University, 2015a, 2015b; Van Acker, 2013), and (b) evaluating public Montessori student outcomes (Ansari & Winsler, 2014; Dohrmann, Nishida, Gartner, Lipsky, & Grimm, 2007; Lillard & Else-Quest, 2006). Few of these studies provide information about the racial or socioeconomic diversity of study participants, making it challenging to draw conclusions regarding the efficacy of public Montessori for specific subgroups of students.

As education researchers demonstrate the continued salience of race on student educational outcomes (Ferguson, 2000; Johnson, 2014; Lewis, 2003; Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Lewis-McCoy, 2014), more recently, scholars are examining the academic, disciplinary, and social justice context of public Montessori's Black and Latino students (Ansari & Winsler, 2014; Banks & Maixner, 2016; Brown & Steele,

2015; Debs & Brown, 2016; Stansbury, 2014; Yezbick, 2007). Such research suggests both opportunities and limitations with public Montessori in racially diverse contexts.

Much is still unknown about the student enrollment of the public Montessori sector as a whole and the demographic makeup of particular schools. The 1993 Montessori Public School Consortium [MPSC], the *Public Montessorian* 2005 directory (Schapiro, 2005), and the 2014 public Montessori census undertaken by the NCMPS (2014b) were important sources in documenting the number of public Montessori schools around the US over the last three decades. A few studies have examined the racial composition of groups of public Montessori schools. Murray and Peyton (2008) surveyed 85 public Montessori programs in 2008 and found that they were 59% White. A study of South Carolina's 46 public Montessori programs found that their enrollment was slightly Whiter and more economically advantaged than the enrollment of both their surrounding districts and the average South Carolina public school (Roberts & Fleming, 2016; Furman University, 2015c). No study has measured or evaluated the diversity of student enrollment in public Montessori schools across the United States.

Methodology

Sample

In order to measure student racial/ethnic and socioeconomic diversity in public Montessori schools nationwide, I created the American Public Montessori Historical (APMH) data set, an original data set of 724 public Montessori schools that were opened between 1912 and 2015. The APMH data set was derived from four primary data sources: (a) the 1987–2013 National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) data on public schools, (b) the 2014 NCMPS All Montessori Census, (c) the 2005 *Public Montessorian* directory, and (d) the 1993 MPSC directory. The last three sources all relied on voluntary data submission from individual schools. In contrast, the NCES collects required data from all public schools and was a method of finding public Montessori schools omitted from other listings. The APMH data set does not include Head Start or publicly funded early childhood centers. To determine opening dates for schools, I relied on NCES data and numerous secondary archival and web resources for information about individual schools.

I did not attempt to evaluate the fidelity of the public Montessori programs, an important concern among Montessori educators, particularly in the public sector. If programs were reported as Montessori programs to NCMPS, the *Public Montessorian*, or MPSC, or if program titles in the NCES school database included the word “Montessori,” I included them in the data set. Background research of each school via its website indicated that nearly all schools had one or more Montessori essential elements in their schools, including mixed-age classrooms, preschool programs, Montessori materials, and Montessori-trained teachers and classroom assistants (NCMPS, 2016), though the presence of these elements by no means indicated high-fidelity Montessori programming. Three schools, part of the Einstein Montessori Charter schools in Florida, had no explicit link to Montessori pedagogy. These schools were not included in the database and have now dropped Montessori from their names.

From the APMH data set, I created a subgroup of 470 public Montessori schools open in 2012–2013, the most recent year with comprehensive statistics on race, ethnicity, and student socioeconomic status.³ These 470 public Montessori programs were either whole-school programs or partial programs (a set of classrooms within a larger school). The NCES provides enrollment details only by entire school. Since media reports suggested patterns where some partial Montessori program enrollments were very different from the enrollment of the entire school (Nyland, 2015; Stocking, 2015), I dropped the 170 partial-school programs from my analysis, leaving a subset of 300 whole-school programs for which 2012–2013

³ As of 2014, certain districts with high levels of student poverty switched from complete reporting of free and reduced lunch (FRL) data to using a Community Eligibility Provision. As Tegeler, Hilton, and McArdle (2014) explain, student FRL data going forward will no longer be a consistent measure for researchers to analyze schools nationwide.

demographic data were available.⁴ These 300 whole-school public Montessori schools make up approximately two thirds of the 470 public Montessori programs open in 2013. Due to the size of the school-wide programs, they make up a disproportionate student enrollment of 94,613 students, or 76%, of approximately 125,000 public Montessori students around the United States (NCMPS, 2014a).⁵

Almost every public Montessori school is a school of choice, meaning that families must deliberately choose to enroll their children in public Montessori schools. Only a handful of public Montessori schools enroll nearly all students in a region, such as the Longview, TX, public school system, where the default pre-kindergarten and kindergarten programs are Montessori (Whitworth, 2016). School-choice research suggested it was important to distinguish between Montessori charters and noncharters. Thus I coded these 300 whole-school public Montessori programs by type of school-choice program: charter, district, or magnet. Through research on school websites, I identified charter schools using the following indicators: (a) school name, (b) details of the school history, (c) autonomy from the local school district, or (d) presence of an independent board of directors. It was sometimes difficult to determine whether schools were magnet schools or part of another choice program in the district. Magnet schools are funded by federal and state governments through grants for desegregation initiatives, while other district-choice programs have a variety of funding sources. In either case, these magnet or district-choice public Montessori schools function quite similarly: they are part of a larger public district and follow a district-wide enrollment strategy, like a lottery. For this reason, I combined the district and magnet schools into a single category.

Using the NCES Common Core of Data collected annually from schools, I compiled information on students' racial/ethnic background and eligibility for free and reduced lunch (FRL), a proxy measure for the concentration of low-income students in a school. (In 2012–2013, when these national data were collected, a family of four earning under \$42,643 was eligible for reduced-price lunch.) I also created a similar table for 2002–2003 public Montessori enrollment to evaluate the 10-year enrollment difference by race and socioeconomic background. In order to compare each public Montessori school's enrollment to that of the surrounding district, Katie Brown and I used NCES data to match each school with the district in which the school is located. Even though most charter schools are not officially part of a school district, we wanted to compare these charters to the district in which they were located.

Analysis

To answer the first research question about the total diversity of public Montessori schools as a sector, I calculated the number and percentage of two key categories for each school and district: (a) students of color and (b) FRL-eligible students. Students of color include non-White students who are Black, Latino, Asian, Native American, Pacific Islander, or multiracial.⁶ Researchers use a broad range of definitions to talk about school segregation and school diversity (Cotto & Feder, 2014; Kahlenberg & Potter, 2014; Orfield et al., 2012). This study follows NCES quartile breakdowns. I define schools with between 25% and 75% students of color as racially diverse, and schools with between 25% and 75% FRL-eligible students as socioeconomically diverse.

To answer the second research question, about FRL and student-of-color enrollment differences between charter Montessori and district/magnet Montessori schools, I made several calculations. I calculated the mean, standard deviation, and standard error for each group, charter, or district/magnet, using

⁴ Roughly one quarter of the partial-school programs are located in South Carolina. Their demographics are analyzed in Roberts and Fleming (2016).

⁵ This estimate of 125,000 students was derived by creating an estimate of the total number of students in partial Montessori programs. For each school, I used website research to determine the number of Montessori classrooms at each partial school and multiplied each classroom by an average estimate of 25 students.

⁶ The term *students of color* is used instead of *minority*, with the recognition that Black, Latino, Asian, Native American, Pacific Islander, and multiracial students will soon form the majority of enrollment in U.S. public schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2016a).

its concentration of students of color and FRL-eligible students. To evaluate whether there was a statistically significant difference between public Montessori schools and their surrounding districts, I used chi-squared tests, a statistical test to evaluate whether there is a substantial difference between two populations. Using the district percentages of students of color and of White students, I calculated an expected number of students of color and White students at each school, which I then compared to the actual value of students of color and White students at the school. For one degree of difference, chi-squared values of 3.841 and higher were statistically significant. Schools with a chi-squared value of less than 3.841 did not have a statistically significant difference in student enrollment compared to the surrounding district. I took the percentage of students of color at the school and then subtracted the total percentage of students of color in the district to derive a percentage difference. I identified the number of charter and district/magnet schools where students of color were underrepresented, not statistically different, or overrepresented. I followed the same procedure to calculate chi-squared values for the difference in number of FRL-eligible students between each public Montessori school and its surrounding district.

Findings

Whole-School Montessori Sample in Context

As a sample, these 300 whole-school public Montessori schools were located in 36 states and the District of Columbia. The states with the largest number of whole-school Montessori programs were Arizona (30 schools), California (24 schools), and Wisconsin (21 schools).⁷ Urban public Montessori schools made up 47% of the sample. There were 135 magnet/district schools (45%) and 165 charter schools (55%). In 2012–2013, the average school size was 315 students.⁸

Racial and Economic Diversity of the Public Montessori Sector

In 2012–2013, whole-school public Montessori schools as a group enrolled a proportion of students of color similar to that of all U.S. public schools. Students of color—including Black, Latino, Asian and Pacific Islander, Native American, and multiracial students—made up 55% of all public Montessori students, in comparison to 54% of all public school students. Figure 1 shows that much of the concentration of students of color came from the higher percentage of Black students (27%) compared to the national average (15%). Latino and Asian and Pacific Islander students were underrepresented in public Montessori compared to the national average.

Considering students by socioeconomic background, in 2012–2013 whole-school public Montessori schools enrolled a lower proportion of FRL-eligible students (40%), in comparison to the national average (51%). This difference meant that students at public Montessori schools were more economically advantaged than the total U.S. public student enrollment.

⁷ NCMPS publications *Growth of Public Montessori in the United States: 1975–2014* (2014a) and *Census Report 2014* (2014b) include more detailed, descriptive statistics about the public Montessori sector as a whole, including the estimate that 31% of public Montessori schools serve adolescents.

⁸ Readers may view the APMH data set here: <https://goo.gl/mF7RHs> and the 2012–2013 whole-school Montessori database here: <https://goo.gl/uTQLdX>.

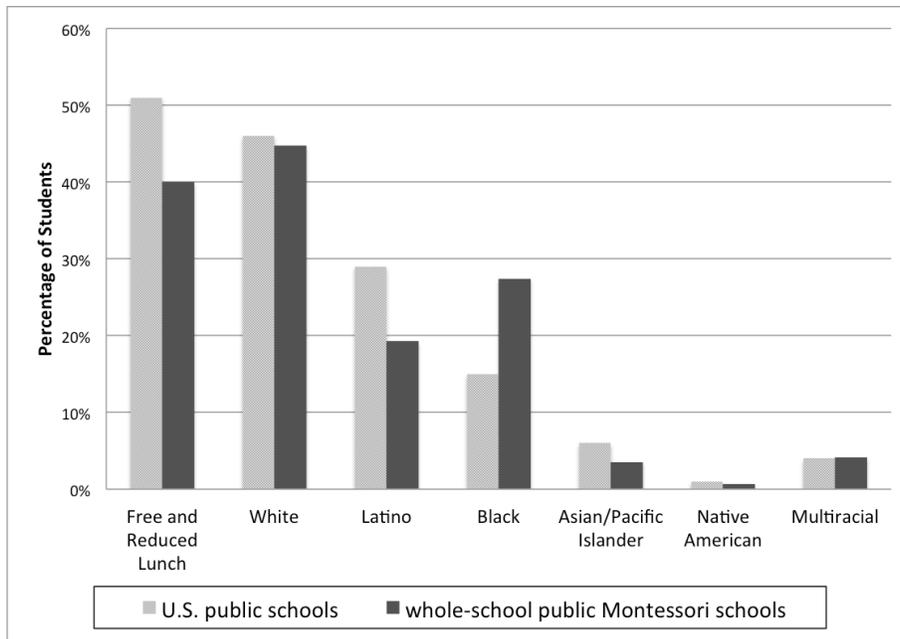


Figure 1. Percentage of students by racial/ethnic background and FRL status at 300 whole-school public Montessori schools compared to total U.S. public schools 2012–2013. Data from U.S. Department of Education (2013, 2015a, 2015b, 2016a).

To better illustrate the racial/ethnic diversity among the public Montessori student enrollment, Figure 2 shows that, while White students formed the largest share of whole-school public Montessori students (45%), Black students made up 27% of the enrollment, Latino students 19%, Asian and Pacific Islander 4%, and Native American and Hawaiian students 1%. In 2012–2013, the majority of public Montessori students in whole-school programs—52,313 students, or 55%—were students of color, an important statistic given the perception that public Montessori disproportionately enrolls White students, and a considerable difference from earlier findings by Murray and Peyton (2008) and from the South Carolina state results (Furman, 2015c), both of which showed 59% White student enrollments.

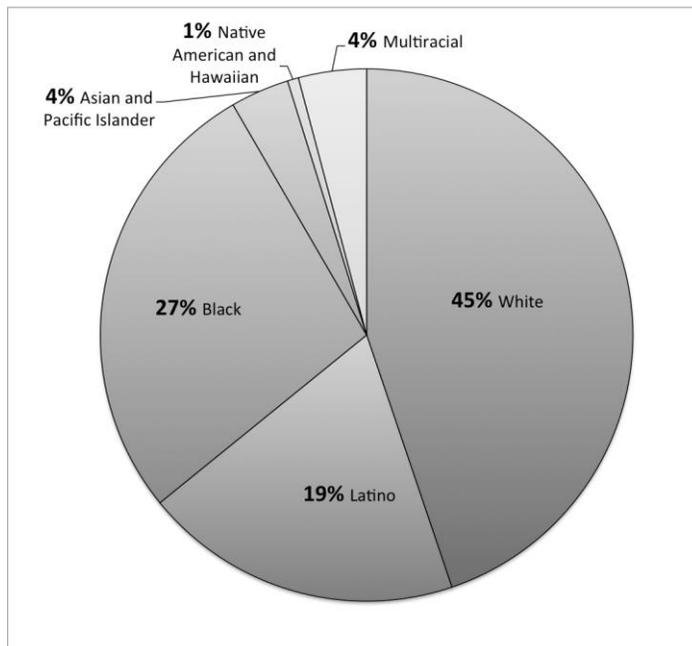


Figure 2. Enrollment percentage by race/ethnicity at whole-school public Montessori schools, 2012–2013. Data from U.S. Department of Education (2013).

Moreover, public Montessori schools had higher levels of racial/ethnic diversity in comparison to the total student enrollment in U.S. public schools. Figure 3 shows that in 2012–2013, 54% of public Montessori

students attended racially diverse schools, defined as schools where 25%–75% students of color were enrolled. This percentage is in comparison to only 40% of all U.S. students attending racially diverse public schools.

Public Montessori students also were less likely to attend schools with limited racial diversity. Nineteen percent of public Montessori students attended schools with 0%–25% students of color, compared to 32% of all U.S. public school students.

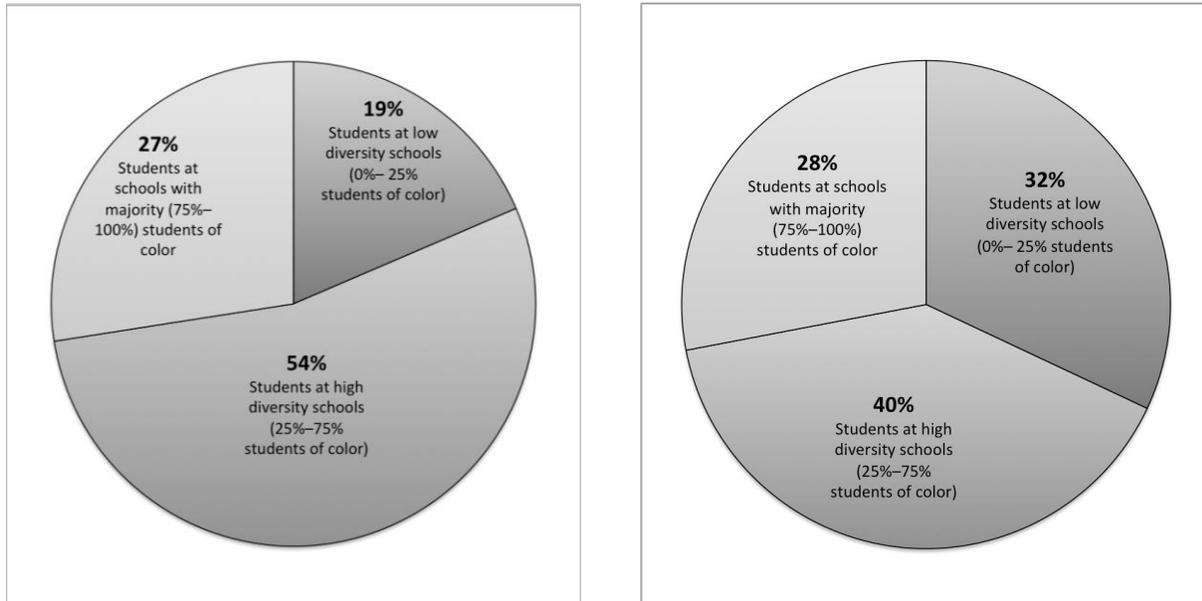


Figure 3. Distribution of public Montessori students and all U.S. public school students by percentage of students of color in the school. Data from U.S. Department of Education (2013, 2015b).

How does this student diversity impact public Montessori Latino and Black students, who have been shown to disproportionately attend racially isolated schools (Orfield et al., 2012)?

Figure 4 shows that both Black and Latino students attending public Montessori schools were more likely to attend racially diverse schools (25%–75% students of color) than their public school peers. Almost half of Latino public Montessori students attended racially diverse schools, compared to 34% nationally, which is particularly important to highlight given the trend that Latino student segregation is on the rise nationally (Orfield et al., 2012). Yet a substantial number—over half of Black Montessori students and 44% of Latino Montessori students—still attended schools that were majority (75%–100%) students of color, though in both cases, this concentration was lower than the overall figures for Black and Latino students in U.S. public schools.

Thus, while public Montessori schools are more racially diverse overall than the national public school profile and serve a greater proportion of students of color, there is also evidence that some students of color are concentrated in racially isolated public Montessori schools. Although these students are receiving a Montessori education, they are not receiving the benefits of a racially diverse school. The next section examines how racial and socioeconomic differences vary between Montessori district/magnet schools and Montessori charter schools.

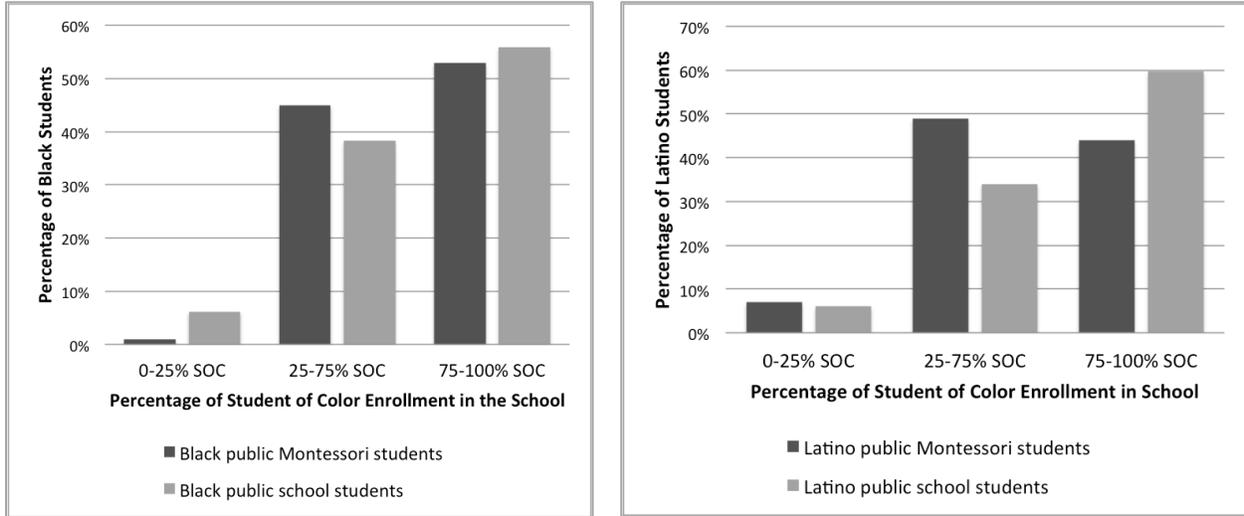


Figure 4. Distribution of Black and Latino students in public Montessori and all U.S. public schools by percentage of students of color in the school. Data from U.S. Department of Education (2013, 2015b).

Racial and Economic Diversity in District/Magnet and Charter Montessori Schools

Charter schools made up only 6% of the nation’s public schools in 2013 (U.S. Department of Education, 2015c). By 2015, in comparison, 41% of public Montessori programs were charter schools (Debs, 2016b). As Figure 5 shows, in the 25 years since charter schools were first created in Minnesota, 238 charter Montessori schools have opened, only slightly fewer than the 314 new, district magnet schools. In the last 5 years, Montessori charter school growth has overtaken that of district/magnet schools as the public Montessori sector grows at a rapid pace.

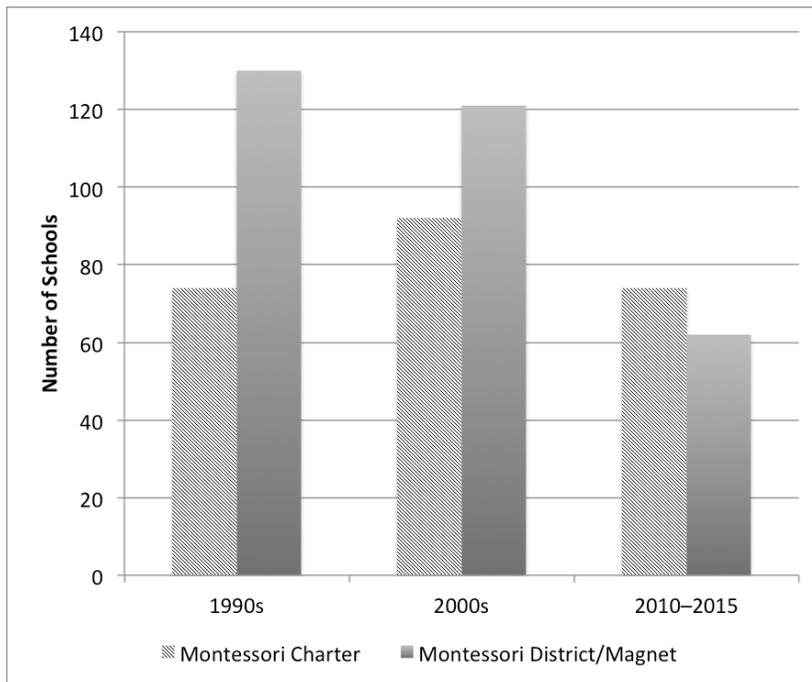


Figure 5. New district/magnet and charter Montessori schools, 1990–2015. Data from Debs, 2016b.

Although both magnet and charter schools are schools of choice that parents must voluntarily select, a critical difference between the two is that magnets were established as part of racial desegregation efforts. In contrast, charter schools have no accountability or incentives for racial diversity. While there certainly are racially diverse charters, Figure 6 shows the sizable difference between the mean (or average) percentage of students of color in Montessori charter schools and that of Montessori district/magnet schools. District/magnet Montessori schools enrolled a much higher percentage of students of color, with an average student-of-color enrollment of 61%, compared with 39% for charter Montessori schools.

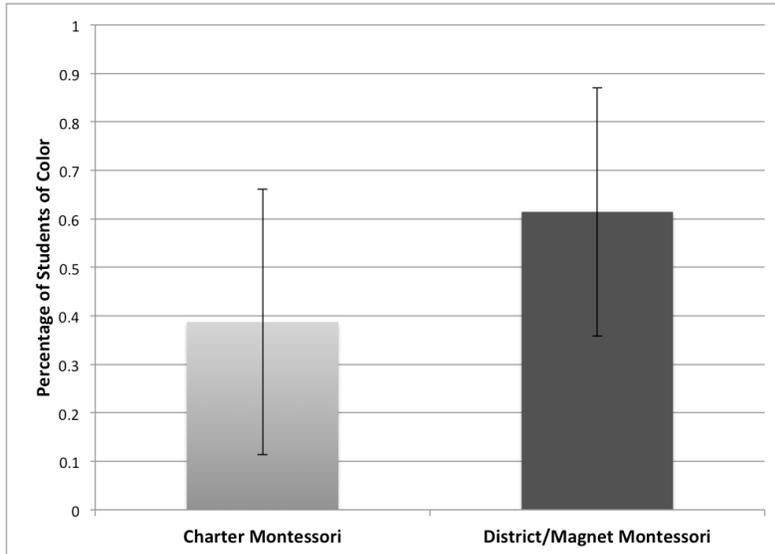


Figure 6. 2012–2013 mean percentage of students of color at whole-school charter schools compared to district/magnet Montessori schools, ± 1 *SD*. Data from Debs, 2016c. *SE* (charter) = .021. *SE* (district/magnet) = .022.

This lower level of charter diversity follows the pattern identified by Renzulli and Evans (2005), who demonstrated that many nonurban charters were driving White flight from traditional public schools.

Considering the level of socioeconomic diversity, Figure 7 shows a similar difference between charter Montessori schools and district/magnet Montessori schools. District/magnet schools averaged 50% FRL-eligible students, and 1 standard deviation, or roughly two thirds, of district/magnet schools have between 25% and 75% FRL-student enrollment. Some have argued that this socioeconomic diversity is a critical component of successful learning for all students (Kahlenberg, 2001). In contrast, charter schools have an average of 31% FRL-eligible enrollment. Twenty-three charter Montessori schools reported no FRL-eligible students.

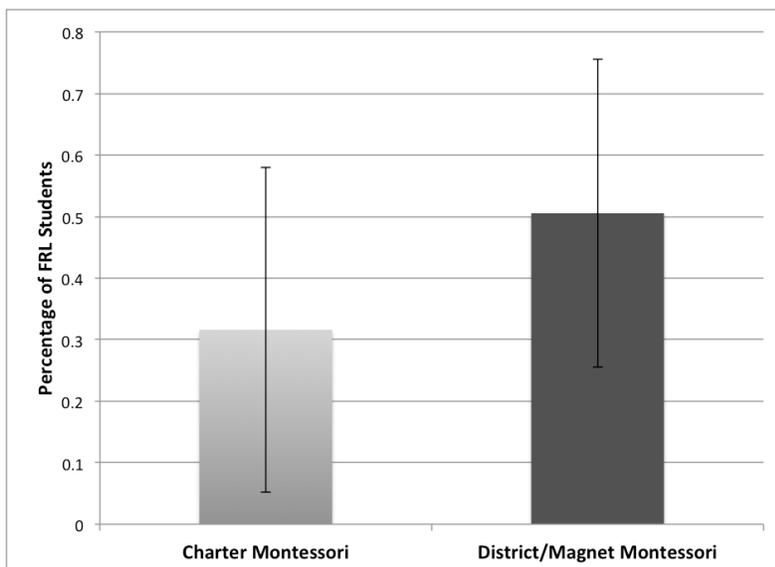


Figure 7. 2012–2013 mean percentage of free and reduced lunch-eligible (FRL) students at whole-school charter Montessori schools compared to district/magnet Montessori schools, ± 1 *SD*. Data from Debs, 2016c. *SE* (charter) = .020. *SE* (district/magnet) = .022.

Representativeness to District

The desegregation mission of magnet schools offers one explanation for the difference in racial and economic diversity between district/magnet and charter Montessori schools. Another possibility is that, while magnet Montessori schools opened primarily in urban areas, many charter Montessori schools were created in small towns or rural areas whose small school districts would not have otherwise been able to support a magnet Montessori program. In these rural cases, low levels of student diversity might actually be representative of the broader district. Is this in fact the case? A chi-squared analysis (Table 1) showed no statistical difference in the percentage of students of color in surrounding districts in almost a quarter of both charter and district/magnet schools. However, two thirds of charters and half of all magnets enrolled a smaller proportion of students of color than did their surrounding districts.

Table 1

Montessori Charter and District/Magnet School Enrollments of Students of Color and Free and Reduced Lunch-Eligible Students Compared to Surrounding School Districts

| | Charters | | District / Magnet | | All public Montessori schools | |
|--|----------|--------|-------------------|--------|-------------------------------|--------|
| | | | | | | |
| Difference in SOC enrollment from district | | | | | | |
| Lower % SOC enrollment than district | 106 | (64%)* | 67 | (50%)* | 173 | (58%)* |
| No significant difference from district | 37 | (23%) | 31 | (23%) | 68 | (22%) |
| Greater % SOC enrollment than district | 22 | (13%)* | 37 | (27%)* | 59 | (20%)* |
| Total | 165 | | 135 | | 300 | |
| Difference in FRL enrollment from district | | | | | | |
| Lower % FRL enrollment than district | 116 | (71%)* | 83 | (63%) | 199 | (67%)* |
| No significant difference from district | 26 | (16%) | 20 | (15%) | 45 | (16%) |
| Greater % FRL enrollment than district | 22 | (13%)* | 29 | (22%) | 51 | (17%)* |
| Total | 164 | | 132 | | 296 ^a | |

Note. SOC = students of color. FRL = free and reduced lunch-eligible students.

^a Four districts did not report FRL data in 2012–2013. * $p < .05$.

The difference was even greater when examining students' socioeconomic backgrounds. At only 16% of charter schools and 15% of magnet schools were FRL-eligible enrollments comparable to those of their surrounding districts. In contrast, 71% of charters and 63% of magnets enrolled a smaller proportion of FRL-eligible students than did their surrounding districts. These results demonstrate that the majority of both charter and district/magnet Montessori schools, even those located in rural and suburban areas, enroll fewer students of color and FRL-eligible students than do their surrounding districts.⁹

A racially or socioeconomically diverse enrollment that is different from that of the surrounding district can be valuable when it helps reduce the racial and economic isolation of district students. It can be

⁹ For a detailed analysis of Montessori charter enrollment by race compared to the surrounding district, see Brown (2016).

problematic, however, when the public Montessori school enrolls a substantially more-advantaged population than does the surrounding district, and in certain instances leads to direct consequences for these schools. As mentioned in the introduction, news media have reported disproportionately White enrollments at public Montessori schools around the country, leading to program closures, denial of charter applications, and threatened charter renewals.

Longitudinal data over 10 years of public Montessori student enrollment show how the aggregate impact of charter growth may cause public Montessori schools to be less racially diverse in the future. Figure 8 shows that in the last 10 years, total White student enrollment has increased consistently, while Black student enrollment has remained the same.

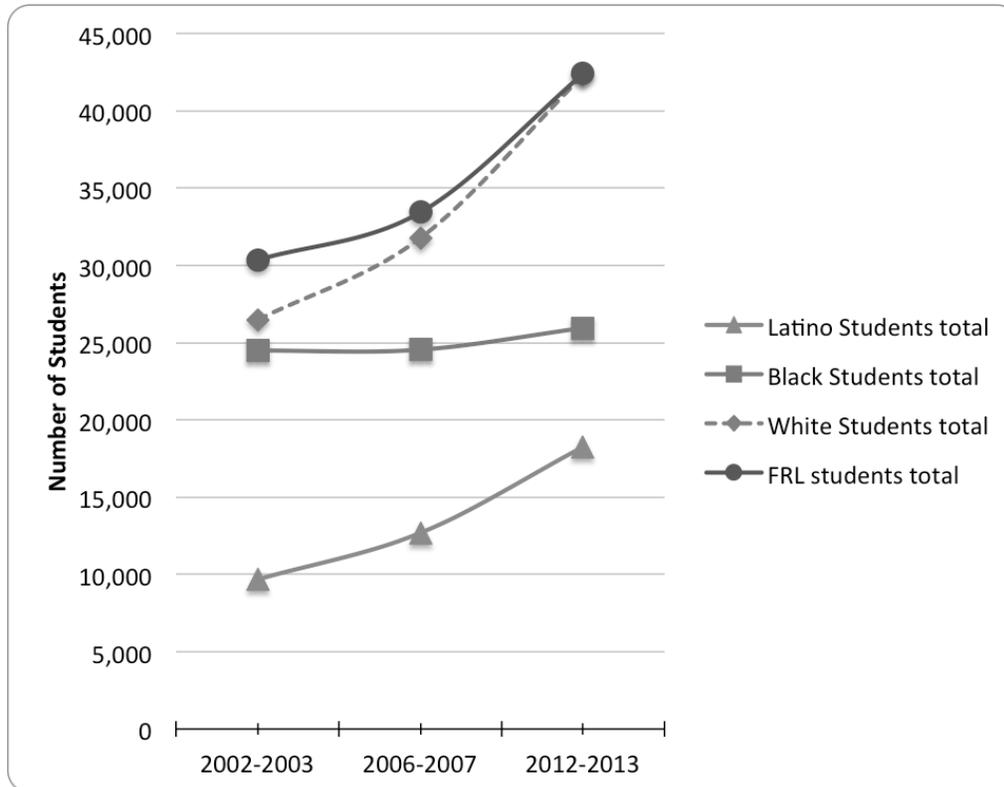


Figure 8. Ten-year change in whole-school public Montessori student demographics, 2002–2012. FRL = free and reduced lunch eligible. Data from U.S. Department of Education (2003, 2007, 2013).

Public Montessori is whiter than it used to be. The historical data show this change may be due to the rise of Montessori charters and the closure of some urban magnets in majority-Black communities. At the same time, the number of FRL-eligible students and Latino students is growing at public Montessori schools nationwide. This increase may be due to the growth of charter Montessori programs in the West and Southwest, particularly in the charter-friendly states of Arizona, California, Colorado, and Texas.

Maintaining diversity is a challenge even for Montessori charters that began with explicit missions of racial diversity. Baltimore Montessori Public Charter School in Maryland and City Garden Montessori School in St. Louis, MO, have found their student populations to be increasingly White (Bowie, 2016; Prothero, 2016). Both schools now advocate measures to implement weighted charter lotteries in order to maintain a racially and economically diverse student body (Potter et al., 2016). In 2016, the Baltimore school board approved Baltimore Montessori’s request to set aside 10% of its seats for neighborhood residents, though this was a lower percentage than the school’s initial request (Bowie, 2016). Thus for many public Montessori schools, enrolling a diverse population students is not only a social good, it is also a matter of remaining faithful to their original mission.

Discussion

Like the broader school-choice sector, public Montessori schools have had both successes and limitations in creating racially and economically diverse schools. Data analysis of the racial and socioeconomic demographics of 300 whole-school public Montessori programs open in 2012–2013 indicates that these programs serve a majority of students of color, enroll a greater percentage of Black students in comparison to the national average, and continue to attract families from all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Students in a public Montessori school are more likely to attend a racially diverse school than are their national public school peers. Black and Latino public Montessori students are more likely to attend a racially diverse school than the U.S. cohort of Black and Latino public school students, who disproportionately attend racially isolated schools.

At the same time, not all public Montessori schools are racially and socioeconomically diverse. Half of Black and Latino students attend public Montessori schools with majority students of color. The percentage of FRL-eligible students at public Montessori schools is 11% lower than the national average. Charter Montessori schools are whiter on average and enroll fewer low-income students than do district/magnet Montessori schools. In comparing charter Montessori schools to public schools in their surrounding districts, one third of them represented the demographics of their districts, while two thirds had a racially disproportionate enrollment, most commonly more White students (Brown, 2016). While in some cases, such disproportionality can help reduce racial and socioeconomic isolation, when the differences are stark, they can be grounds for terminating a Montessori program.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. In constructing a national data set of public Montessori schools, this study does not examine the fidelity of public Montessori programs beyond verifying that they have some link to the Montessori Method, though I recognize that Montessori fidelity remains an important concern to Montessori educators. Second, while this study demonstrates high levels of racial and socioeconomic diversity in public Montessori schools and areas where such diversity is limited, like Brown (2016), I cannot explain why certain schools are more or less representative of their districts. In some cases, this disparity may be due to limited recruitment efforts (Jabbar, 2016; Welner, 2013) and complicated enrollment processes, alongside an overwhelming number of White, middle-class applicants (Brown & Makris, 2016). Montessori educators may also unintentionally deter some parents of color by downplaying academic outcomes in favor of focusing on the holistic and socioemotional benefits of the Montessori Method (Debs, 2016a).

In addition, now that a national data set of public Montessori schools has been established, additional research is needed to effectively evaluate the experience of students of color and low-income students in public Montessori programs. Policymakers, politicians, and district-level administrators frequently ask public Montessori educators whether the Method is effective for specific populations of students such as Blacks, Latinos, and English language learners. Though initial research has demonstrated both promising and mixed results for these student populations, research on Montessori is far from having an adequate answer to these questions. Examining test score data from a large sample of public Montessori schools disaggregated by student racial and socioeconomic cohort (similar to the school district-level research of Reardon and colleagues at the Stanford Center for Policy Analysis [Reardon, 2013, 2016]) would help us better understand to what extent racial and economic achievement gaps exist at public Montessori schools, as well as how these gaps compare to those in surrounding districts. Large-scale studies of lottery winners and losers who apply to enroll in public Montessori programs could help in examining the efficacy of Montessori over a number of years, particularly for low-income students and students of color.

Implications and Conclusion

As a public school choice, public Montessori has the potential to lead the school-choice sector toward fulfilling its promise in creating racially and economically diverse schools. Public Montessori schools have been widely successful in bringing students from all racial and socioeconomic backgrounds together, but they must continue working to maintain this progress. In addition, public Montessori schools, and Montessori charter schools in particular, must be proactive in recruiting and sustaining their communities' most vulnerable families.

AUTHOR INFORMATION

Mira Debs is a post doctoral fellow in the Yale University Education Studies program and the Political Science department. She is a junior fellow of the Yale Center for Cultural Sociology and the Trinity College Cities, Suburbs and Schools Project. Her research focuses on public Montessori, school choice and diversity, and the formation of collective identity through schooling, art, and historical narratives.

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Appendix

Creating and sustaining racially diverse schools involves strategies for access, outreach, cultural diversity and student support, and advocacy. Below are a number of strategies that have emerged from Montessori research (Ansari & Winsler, 2014; Debs, 2016a), school diversity best practices (Kahlenberg & Potter, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Potter et al., 2016; Welner, 2013), and initiatives created by public Montessori schools (Bologna, Kantor, Liu, & Taylor 2015; Bowie, 2016; Huck, 2015; Laub & Kim, 2011) to enroll and support a racially and economically diverse student body.

Access

- Provide full-day programming and before- and after-school care to support working families.
- Provide transportation to all families.
- Participate in the district lottery process to simplify enrollment for parents.
- Use a weighted lottery to increase enrollment of disadvantaged students.
- Offer sliding-scale tuition if the preschool program is not free.
- Follow federal law mandating that charter elementary schools that have private preschools conduct open lotteries at age 5 to ensure that all students have access to the charter elementary program.
- Offer summer programming.

Outreach

- Develop a thorough outreach plan and share it publicly with the school community.
- Print brochures in multiple languages, and include translations or a translation service on website.
- Hold information sessions at community libraries, public housing, Head Start facilities, and places of worship.
- Publicize Montessori's efficacy with English language learners and students with special needs.
- Publicize Montessori's rich curriculum related to cultural diversity.
- Share academic results so that parents will know they are choosing a college preparatory curriculum.

Cultural Diversity and Student Support

- Hire diverse staff, and create school-based pathways for training and hiring from within the local community.
- Use curriculum materials that accurately represent economically and racially diverse students and families.
- Include a parent-outreach coordinator on staff who recruits a diverse population of students and supports a diverse population of families.

Advocacy

- Advocate for increased public funding for all early childhood students, starting as young as possible.
- Advocate for urban renewal plans that provide for intentional racial and socioeconomic housing diversity, including mixed-income housing and affordable units.
- Advocate for greater support/mandates in federal, state, and local policy to promote racially and socioeconomically diverse schools.



Proving Montessori: Identity and Dilemmas in a Montessori Teacher's Lived Experience

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Keywords: *Montessori, teacher preparation, early childhood, critical discourse analysis, phenomenology*

Abstract. This phenomenological case study was conducted to better understand the experience of a Montessori teacher in a leadership role. A veteran Montessori teacher, newly hired by an established Montessori preschool, was interviewed over the course of her first year in the position. A critical discourse analysis revealed multiple social identities that contributed to her desire, and ability, to be what she felt was an authentic Montessori educator. While some of these discourses and social identities aligned, some did not, creating ideational dilemmas that affected her work, relationships, and personal identity. The findings suggest that current Montessori discourse excludes important characteristics of the teacher-lived experience. Acknowledging and discussing the social challenges Montessori teachers face is a necessary addition to teacher preparation, teacher support systems, and Montessori leadership decisions.

Maria Montessori prescribed a form of mental, emotional, and even spiritual teacher preparation used in teacher education to this day. This preparation develops skills that are essential to creating a quality Montessori classroom environment. However, teachers' duties and responsibilities have evolved over the years, expanding beyond the classroom walls. Teachers, including Montessori Early Childhood teachers, are frequently expected to develop and maintain harmonious parent–teacher relationships, conduct parent-wide and even community-wide education events, and promote school philosophy. While they work to embody what it means to be a Montessori teacher in the classroom, they may be confronted with differing and even contradictory social beliefs, rules, and identities from the greater social community. These experiences can be challenging and discouraging for both novice and veteran Montessori educators.

Because of these added responsibilities, a better understanding of the difficulties Montessori teachers face in this role is invaluable for both Montessori teachers and Montessori teacher education programs. Acknowledging and addressing these challenges with preservice teachers will help prepare them for their future work, fostering well-informed and confident teacher-leaders. Additionally, insight into potential challenges and successes between a school community and Montessori pedagogy is necessary not only to help classroom teachers but also to inform Montessori leaders about how to improve and strengthen the Montessori Method of education as its use in schools continues to grow.

As a former Montessori preschool teacher, I experienced the difficulty of effectively sharing Montessori theory with others and the pressure to consistently represent the “true Montessorian.” Because I had incorporated Montessori so deeply into my personal identity, these challenges were not only frustrating but also often emotional, affecting my attitude toward my day-to-day work. As a doctoral student of teacher education, I used these personal experiences to guide my research process as I sought to better understand the experience of being a lead Montessori teacher.

To this end, I conducted several phenomenological interviews with a veteran Montessori teacher. The following analysis is focused on a section of one interview session. My research question was: How does a teacher characterize her experience of proving Montessori philosophy to a small preschool community? The following analysis sheds light on the push and pull between multiple identities and discourses that were a part of this experience.

Literature Review

An important part of educational research and teacher education is understanding the development of a teacher's identity, including the challenges and obstacles that may affect a teacher's practice. The literature reviewed provides further understanding of Montessori theory of the prepared adult, its current challenges, and recent research and discussion regarding teacher experience and identity.

To become a true Montessori educator, the adult must embark on not only a unique form of educational training, but also what Dr. Montessori (1967b) called *spiritual preparation*. She wrote, "The educator must not imagine that he can prepare himself for his office merely by study, by becoming a man of culture. He must before all else cultivate in himself certain aptitude of a moral order" (Montessori, 1967b, p. 107). She continued her instructions, describing steps for inward preparation that include critical self-reflection, objective observations, and a new understanding of child psychology. The emphasis on personal preparation in teacher education and teacher practice is unique to the Montessori Method (Lillard, 2005) and is often referred to as an experience of personal transformation (Cossentino, 2009; Lillard, 2005). This process has evolved into a belief in the essential Montessori teacher, a commitment to a certain way of being—a feeling of responsibility, and ability, to fulfill revered philosophical principles (Malm, 2004). This lived experience creates an identity of not simply a teacher, but more specifically, a Montessori teacher (Malm, 2004). While the transformation focuses on inward reflection and change, generating a new or additional self-identity (i.e., self-concept and emotional identification with self-descriptions), a Montessori teacher also takes up a new social identity equipped with specific characteristics and expectations to be fulfilled and maintained (Barker, 2012).

The vast majority, if not all, of Dr. Montessori's suggestions and directions for teacher spiritual preparation focus on the teacher's presence and identity within the classroom, working with the children. Today, the duties of any teacher, including an Early Childhood Montessori teacher, extend beyond the classroom walls. Creating and sustaining parent-teacher relationships, practicing culturally relevant pedagogy, navigating early childhood education rules and regulations, and representing Montessori education for school promotion and marketing purposes are just some of the additional demands placed on Montessori educators. Research has suggested that, although these duties are crucial for effective early education (Bartik, 2014; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Graue, Kroeger, & Prager, 2001), their corresponding values and belief systems harbor the potential to create instances of ideational conflicts (Cuban, 1992; Hall-Kenyon, Bullough, MacKay, & Marshall, 2014; Helsing, 2007; Sumsion, 2002), pitting one social identity against another. These conflicts can be referred to as dilemmas, meaning "conflict-filled situations that require choices because competing, highly prized values cannot be satisfied" (Cuban, 1992, p. 6). Dilemmas occur frequently in teaching because of the varied developmental expectations, educational policies, teacher beliefs, and social values, among others, existent in the early childhood educational system (Helsing, 2007). Dilemmas are particularly challenging because they often require teachers to make moral choices, frequently leading to "good-enough compromises" (Cuban, 1992, p. 7) that are achieved by sacrificing part of one belief to satisfy the needs of another belief. Not only can this sacrifice be unsettling, but it can also be only a momentary fix, leaving the dilemma to be "renegotiated again and again because [it is] so deeply embedded in *who we are* and the practice of teaching" (Cuban, 1992, p. 7, emphasis added).

The personal nature of dilemmas can cause uncertainty in a teacher's practice (Helsing, 2007; Lampert, 1985). Uncertainty in teaching can arise from a variety of educational beliefs and expectations, as well as from the complex social and emotional requirements of teaching. This uncertainty can affect one's teaching practice and even self-identity. While a Montessori teacher may have been trained to create

and sustain a specific identity, dilemmas create moments for critical examination of, and possible uncertainty about, the ability to fulfill such an identity and be a true Montessori teacher. Certainly, Montessori teacher preparation acknowledges the need for self-examination and the willingness to meet the needs of children and their environment in creative ways. However, with the added job responsibilities previously described come more opportunities for dilemmas and uncertainty on a greater social and philosophical level.

The current, and constant, change existent in the early childhood educational system has the potential to pose many dilemmas and instances of uncertainty in a Montessori teacher's practice. Teachers must learn to cope with and successfully navigate the evolving system (Kilgallon, Maloney, & Lock, 2008). Although uncertainty can create opportunities to identify, address, and improve teaching practice, it is also a frequent cause of stress, frustration, and burnout (Floden & Buchmann, 1993; Helsing, 2007). Teaching is naturally an emotional profession, perhaps particularly for Montessori teachers, for whom much internal self-preparation is an inherent part of the work. Research (Hall-Kenyon et al., 2014; Sumsion, 2002) has suggested a need for a closer look at the ways in which all early childhood teachers need support to move through dilemmas and overcome uncertainty. Therefore, identifying the types of dilemmas that may develop in a Montessori Early Childhood teacher's experience, along with their potential effects on her identity, is valuable research.

Theoretical Orientation

This paper adheres to the belief that identity is a social experience and construct (Barker, 2012; Gee, 2014). To better understand such an experience, this study followed a phenomenological approach, with the broad intention of seeking to better understand ways in which social actors "find [themselves] being in relation to the world through [their] day-to-day living" (Vagle, 2014, p. 20). Research began by pursuing not just the activities of a teacher, but rather the lived experience of being a teacher-leader. Because phenomenology is the study of how things are and how they are becoming, the phenomenon, or unit of analysis, reveals itself throughout the research process (Vagle, 2014). In this analysis, the revealed phenomenon was the experience of having to prove the value of one's identity and Montessori education to a school community.

Hermeneutic phenomenologist Max van Manen (2014) noted that the moment a phenomenon is named, it is removed from the multilayered and expansive lived experience of which it had been a part. Therefore, using an analytical approach that created opportunities to consider the multiple layers surrounding the phenomenon was helpful in focusing on "the regions where meanings and understandings originate" (van Manen, 2014, p. 26) within a lived experience. Proving the value of one's identity and system of knowledge and beliefs is a social action with broad personal and social implications. Thus, it was necessary to take up a theory of critical discourse analysis (CDA) that uses both a micro and macro lens to better understand the personal and social qualities of the phenomenon.

To answer the research question of how a teacher characterized the experience of proving Montessori philosophy to a small preschool community, I used Fairclough's (1992) theory of discourse analysis, specifically the three dimensions of analysis: (a) discursive practice (the resources used to produce the actor's discourse[s]), (b) text (the microanalysis of how this is done), and (c) social practice (why the discursive practice is the way it is and its relation to broader social practice[s]). Gee's (2014) theory of socially significant identities helped clarify how actors navigate and represent themselves in a social context. Finally, van Leeuwen's (2007) legitimation offered further insight into positionality within a community. The combination of these three approaches to CDA proved effective in better understanding the phenomenon of proving the value of one's identity and Montessori education to a school community.

Fairclough (1992) suggested that "discourse is a practice not just of representing the world, but of signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning" (p. 64). A CDA following this theory helped illuminate not merely how the phenomenon was represented, but also the identities that comprise the construction of that representation, as well as the effects of social worlds on its creation. Gee (2014) defined identity as a performance and that, "like all performances, it will not work unless at least

some people recognize what you are and what you are doing in your performance” (p. 24). In this way, understanding a social actor’s identity is important to better understanding how an actor views, reacts, and relates to an experience in the world, as well as how others in the world view, react, and relate to the actor. These interactions are what Gee described as “recognizing socially significant identities,” and they create his theory of “big ‘D’ Discourse” (p. 25). In this research analysis, the capitalized term *Discourse* is used to highlight the socially meaningful identities interacting within and through the phenomenon.

Following Fairclough’s instructions on CDA by exploring the messages created through discursive practice, texts, and social practices revealed not only when and how Montessori identity and its system of knowledge and beliefs were reproduced, but also when they were challenged and even contradicted, creating a dilemma and the potential for uncertainty. Analyzing these moments, or times of uncertainty—what Fairclough refers to as “cruces” or “moments of crisis” (p. 230)—aided in discerning “the actual ways in which people deal with the problematization of practices” (p. 230), and more specifically how an actor problematizes and works through the experienced phenomenon.

Finally, van Leeuwen’s (2007) categories of legitimation helped to explore the participant’s positionality within a community and the ways identity was used in the experience. Van Leeuwen’s (2007) theory of legitimation in discourse and communication states that legitimation is an element of discourse used to answer the question “Why?” (p. 93) Legitimation is an explanation—explicit or implicit—of why things are done or should be done a certain way. In this analysis, three of van Leeuwen’s (2007) categories of legitimation were used to better explain why the subject acted in particular ways: authorization, moral evaluation, and rationalization. Analyzing how and why these three forms of legitimation occurred helped to identify not only the reasons for certain choices, but also the Discourses, identities, and knowledge systems that most influenced decisions and the experience.

Because all of these elements of discursive practice relate to the social world, they contribute to the reproduction of societal structures. However, they also can create opportunities for transformation (Fairclough, 1992). These moments of crisis require decisions that are perhaps not as expected and normed as they are during moments of calm and regularity. Exploring the factors that contributed to the development and outcome of such moments and decisions helps readers to better understand the experience of a Montessori teacher-leader and the phenomenon of proving the value of one’s identity and Montessori education to a school community.

Method

Participant

Over the course of a school year, I interviewed Claire¹, a Montessori teacher who had been recently hired by a small, well-established Montessori preschool. She came to the job with significant teaching experience and a firm grasp of Montessori theory and curriculum. The board was hoping to revitalize the school’s use of Montessori practices, so it specifically sought these traits in candidates. Therefore, Claire was hired not only to work with the children, but also to guide the school community—including many children, parents, and longtime staff—toward a more authentic use of the Montessori Method.

Data Collection

Claire and I met for four interviews, participated in several parent-education events together, and communicated via e-mail. Additionally, I observed her working in her classroom one morning, and I shared my notes and opinions on the classroom environment with her, the head of school, and the board president.

¹ Pseudonyms are used throughout, and identifying details have been changed to preserve confidentiality and anonymity.

The first interview with Claire took place at a coffee shop on a weekday evening, but subsequent meetings often turned into dinner. Most sessions generated roughly an hour of recorded interviews but often included additional social time together. Typically, our conversations began with questions like, “What has your experience been like at school recently?” Hoping to prompt experiential descriptions, I also asked her more probing questions such as, “What was it like when...?” and “What was X like for you?” Interviews were unstructured, but it was easy to stay close to the topic of Claire’s experience in the school community. Though greater contextual information contributes to the overall findings and interpretations, the specific CDA of this report addresses one section of the second interview conducted in mid-December.

Post-Reflexion Statement²

Phenomenologists such as Husserl have in the past prescribed a need to bracket (meaning acknowledge and then set aside) the researcher’s pre-understandings, assumptions, and beliefs during the analysis process (i.e., phenomenological reduction) (as cited in van Manen, 2014). However, others (Dahlberg, Dahlberg, & Nyström, 2008; Vagle, 2014; van Manen, 2014) have suggested that these elements play an important role in the research process and should be included in the analysis. Dahlberg, Dahlberg, and Nyström (2008) pointed out that “researchers are also part of the same world as the one they are investigating. It is not possible for researchers to investigate a reality ‘outside the window’” (p. 131).

Instead of bracketing, Vagle (2014) described a process of post-reflexing, in which researchers continuously reflect on their personal experiences while researching and analyzing the phenomenon. It is a process of constantly interrogating pre-understandings existent before, during, and even after data collection. For this reason, my own positionality within the school community, as well as my interpretations of the context, are important elements of the research process and analysis and are included in this report.

Researcher positionality. I became aware of and interested in the experience a newly hired Montessori teacher would have revitalizing Montessori practices through my position as a new board member. In addition to hiring a skilled Montessori teacher, the school board also sent out a call for a trained and experienced Montessorian to join the board of directors. I was excited to take this position on, and, about a month before Claire was hired, I was appointed the board’s Montessori advisory chair. This provided me with firsthand insight into the board’s intent to hire Claire based on her experience and knowledge. I was asked multiple times for my opinion during the hiring process, which included a casual phone interview between Claire and me. During that interview, I found Claire to be a passionate, highly knowledgeable, and dedicated Montessori teacher. I relayed this impression to the board members, and I wholeheartedly recommended they hire her—I may even have used the phrase “You’d be fools to pass her up!” As the school year began, I was asked to support Claire personally and professionally, as well as be available to field parent questions regarding authentic Montessori practices and changes made to the school’s routine. I happily agreed to this role; I was excited to be a part of the transition and to support such a qualified teacher. Our interviews not only offered insight into the experience of a Montessori teacher in a leadership role, but also became an outlet for Claire to share her frustrations and seek advice, and for me to reconnect with my Montessori roots.

Contextual background. Claire described challenges with the staff and parents of the school far more often than any challenges she faced with her teaching or with the children. Her many years as an educator may have given her the knowledge and confidence she needed to understand, accept, and manage the busyness of a preschool classroom. However, multiple times during our conversations, Claire referred to a need to prove herself to the school community. It was a theme that came up repeatedly over the course of our year working together but was given extra attention during our second interview, conducted in the middle of December. At this meeting, Claire expressed frustration regarding the timing and demands of the school’s holiday performance. At the same time, she was using this end-of-the-year event to promote and

² The term *post-reflexion* is specific to Vagle’s (2014) post-intentional phenomenology.

prove the importance of keeping children in the kindergarten program. Montessori developmental theory places significant importance on kindergarten, or what is referred to as *the third year*. During this time, children are not only supported in academic growth but also are given invaluable opportunities to develop socially as the older children and leaders in the community. Additionally, the mixed-age community creates many opportunities for peer teaching and modeling, a quality that fosters valued child independence (Lillard, 2005; Montessori 1967a). These features, along with other elements of a prepared Montessori classroom, are necessary for the development of a normalized environment, one in which children naturally display concentration on and cooperation in meaningful and purposeful activities (Montessori, 1967a). This idea was very new to most of the parents at the school; many had not even realized there was an option to keep their children in the program for kindergarten. In an effort to relay this message to parents, Claire and I both participated in a parent-education event focused on kindergarten, and she expanded her communication to parents on this subject. Claire was passionate about this issue, not only in terms of fostering optimal child development but also of seeing the older children as a critically important asset to her classroom. Promoting, marketing, and representing a Montessori education had become a substantial part of her job.

Analysis and Findings

Van Manen (2014) wrote that “phenomenology does not only describe what something is, it also explores what this phenomenon can mean by offering possible interpretations” (p. 390). Further, Vagle (2014) posited that analysis and findings regarding the researched phenomenon can be more fully explored when worked through together. For this reason, my analysis and findings are discussed jointly. Because I used Fairclough’s three dimensions of analysis (discursive practice, text, and social practice) as my guiding analytical theory, I have divided the results into three corresponding sections.

Discursive Practices

The Discourses at play. Claire represented her work through the use of four different Discourses: Montessori, Day-to-Day Teaching, Personal Worth, and Social Reform. Montessori Discourse was identified by either direct reference to the Method or the use of language specific to Montessori teaching. The Day-to-Day Teaching Discourse consisted of descriptions of more traditional teaching activities and daily teacher duties. Social Reform Discourse focused primarily on social change made possible through a Montessori education. Finally, Personal Worth Discourse comprised the ways that Claire identified and described the need to prove herself. Table 1 shows specific examples of how these Discourses were portrayed.

Claire embodied these four Discourses in order to counteract a greater social and political Discourse that she and the school faced: School Marketization. Claire worked tirelessly to convince parents to keep their children in her classroom for their kindergarten year. It was assumed by Claire, as well as the parent board members that finances were not the greatest issue in this particular community; instead, the competition created by the public school lottery system generated significant stress and anxiety for many families. The preschool, located in a relatively affluent area of a large city, existed alongside many popular public, magnet, and charter elementary schools. The general belief of the parent community was that if children did not enroll in their neighborhood school or participate in the kindergarten lottery for other schools, they would lose their first-grade places in these high-quality public programs. While the facts about this system varied, rumors created enough concern that families were resistant to the idea of keeping their children in Claire’s classroom for kindergarten. Therefore, Claire had to promote and market her program as a superior, and even transformative, school choice.

Table 1

The Discourses at play

| Montessori Discourse | Day-to-Day Teaching Discourse | Social Reform Discourse | Personal Worth Discourse |
|--|--|--|---|
| I believe in the Method. | I had to really get on those kids who weren't finishing things. | It's a huge investment of your time. | I have to prove myself. |
| Seeing how happy and engaged and motivated and independent and confident and eloquent and sophisticated that their children can become in the environment, um, that is serving their needs.... | You have to be in their face about every one of those little fires. And there, it's, right now there's a lot of them because of the holidays, I know that, and I know that when we get to January, it's gonna be a breath of fresh air 'cause things were better before. I always know, like, from Halloween until now, it's downhill. | It brings people together when it's done well, and it helps people see their child as somebody who's really capable of doing things, and it helps people to look at their communication and how they're communicating. | I feel like I have to blow them away with my knowledge of child development. |
| You know a lot of them are very normalized, it's going well, but the true fact is, because of the way this school does the holiday show, I haven't given, almost, I've almost given no lessons in the last, like, three weeks because it required so much. | | I want to create that space in the classroom, um, that will ripple outward into the parents' lives and the lives of their children at home and then in the community. | I have to be head and shoulders above the standard daycare model. And so that's why I set a high standard of myself and, um, I hope that, you know, that comes across, I hope that the children feel that, and that the parents do. |

As the Montessori leader in the school, Claire was responsible for creating a quality Montessori program for the children and educating parents on Montessori philosophy. The high-pressure existence of School Marketization Discourse, however, hindered her in accomplishing these goals. This challenge was further charged by Dr. Montessori's own discursive practice.

To segregate by age is one of the cruelest and most inhuman things one can do, and this is equally true for children. It breaks the bonds of social life, deprives it of nourishment. In most schools the sexes are first of all separated, then the ages each, more or less, in a different room. This is a fundamental mistake, which breeds a host of evils. It is an artificial isolation and impedes the development of the social sense. (Montessori, 1967a, p. 226)

Here, Dr. Montessori's commentary, the foremost influence on Montessori Discourse, is not lacking in opinion and represents a very clear belief system. Thus, Claire faced a dilemma created by the intersection of the School Marketization Discourse and her own internalized Montessori Discourse, comprising an impassioned knowledge (that mixed ages benefits development) and belief system (that mixed ages is socially correct). While Claire wanted to create and provide a truly authentic Montessori experience, she

felt she could not do so without older children in the environment. Therefore, she felt unable to demonstrate the developmental and social possibilities fostered through a quality Montessori education to the parent community. This moment of crisis between multiple Discourses highlights her stress and uncertainty.

I want—I've, I believe in the Method because I've seen it, what it can do for a little community of children and parents. It brings people together when it's done well, and it helps people see their child as somebody who's really capable of doing things, and it helps people to look at their communication and how they're communicating. Um, and I believe at the heart of that, that, that is like a huge, a huge solution to all kinds of things going on in our world to make it a better place to be. So, I want to, um, I wanna, I wanna create that, I want to create that space in the classroom, um, that will ripple outward into the parents' lives and the lives of their children at home and then in the community. So to, to make that happen, they have to be there for three years!

Here, Claire's words create an interdiscursive chain (Fairclough, 1992) by using Montessori and Social Reform Discourses to support her beliefs. She believed the Montessori Method positively affected not just her students, but "all kinds of things going on in our world." However, she stated that this effect is achieved only when children participated in the program for all three years, including kindergarten. This statement depicts the dilemma caused by the School Marketization Discourse that permeated the school community and influenced many parents to move their children out of her program before kindergarten. More subtly, referring to her experiences and hopes reflected Personal Worth Discourse. While she did not take direct credit for creating such an awe-inspiring environment, she stated her beliefs based on what she had seen and experienced when "it's done well." She wanted to create this kind of environment and community in her new position, yet her ability to do so depended on parents continuing to enroll their children in her classroom.

Text

Who is responsible? Fairclough (1992) suggested that the ways producers produce texts signify their social identities, social relationships, and knowledge and belief (p. 76). Therefore, a textual microanalysis of the interview transcription shows how Claire characterized her experience, and herself, in her job.

The Montessori Discourse is the Discourse most interwoven throughout the excerpt, either by referring to Montessori education directly ("I have to prove Montessori to the people.") or using language specific to the Method ("It's like the end of the cycle."). However, there are some particular instances, specifically with word choice, where other Discourses override the Montessori Discourse. Word choices made by the producer of a text frequently have connections to wider social and cultural processes (Fairclough, 1992). Looking closely at how, when, and why Claire used certain keywords reveals competing Discourses within Claire herself.

In the first half of the interview, Claire used the noun *kids* three times, which is significant because many Montessori trainings avoid or even discourage the use of the word *kid* (kids are baby goats!) and promote the use of *child* and *children* instead. In the second half of this interview, when Claire was asked to expand on the idea of having to prove herself, she shifted her Discourse to primarily an authentic Montessori one and used only *child* and *children* when referring to her young students. Furthermore, when she did use *kids*, her words before and after expressed the demands of her job more candidly: "I had to really get on those kids who weren't finishing things, and encourage and entice them." In contrast, in the second half of the excerpt, Claire described how she wanted parents to see the children as "happy and engaged and motivated and independent and confident and sophisticated [as] their children can become in the environment." These excerpts reflect two different views, not only on how to refer to preschool-aged children, but also on their behavior and on the demands they place on their teacher. The dilemma between the Discourses of authentic Montessori and Day-to-Day Teaching exemplified how Claire struggled with maintaining her ideal Montessori identity. Her use of Montessori Discourse portrayed her identity as a highly passionate, dedicated, and knowledgeable Montessori teacher, one who legitimized the worth of

paying for kindergarten. However, the Day-to-Day Teaching Discourse described challenges she faced in her job—challenges that tested her adherence to the image of the perfect Montessorian.

Claire's style, or way of identifying herself (Fairclough, 1992), was most frequently as a member of the group of preschoolers through the use of the pronoun *we* ("We need practice"; "We are moving up"). She distanced herself from the parents through the use of *I* and *they* statements such as, "I have to blow them away with my knowledge of child development" and "get them to wanna pay for kindergarten." Claire described how she positioned herself within the school community: "I know that when we [the community of preschoolers] come back, [the parents will] have had this time to simmer in [the level of work the children have produced]."

Claire saw herself with the children, favoring their place and role within the school community. By doing so, she also gave the children the responsibility of helping to prove Montessori to their parents, effectively sharing the weight of this job with her preschool class.

I have to prove Montessori to the people. I have to prove it to the kids that, um, the reason we're not taking home work every day is because it's gonna feel awesome when you put all this stuff together that you've collected. And then today we just were wrapping up all of their books and things that they've made to give a present to their family.

After commenting about parents having time to "simmer" in their children's work, she elaborated that "the parents will have had the time to process: 'Wow, look what those kids can do when they're motivated!'" Thus, the ability to prove Montessori to the parent community depended not only on kindergarten enrollment, but also on the children's willingness and ability to share their school endeavors with their parents. This dilemma prompts the question: Which of these elements—kindergarten enrollment or children relaying their school experiences to parents—is more important? Without older children in the classroom, Claire felt that she could not create the optimal Montessori learning environment for all students. However, if children did not share their work and development with their parents, the families would not see what makes Montessori education worth considering in the first place. Though Claire repeatedly referred directly to her task of proving Montessori, significant responsibility, perhaps equal to her own, was placed on the children's ability to do this as well.

Claire defended her pedagogical decisions with reflective statements such as "I feel," "In my experience," and "I've seen." These phrases used multiple forms of authority to legitimize her beliefs and practices. For example, in the following quote, Claire used the phrase "in my experience" to invoke personal, expert, and role model authority (van Leeuwen, 2007).

Now it's like the end of the cycle where they can see how it, it takes a while for them to see the richness that then now my, in my experience when we do it this way, uh, they're just like, it creates a boost to their work.

The parents—"they"—were unaware of the rich and advanced work children in a Montessori environment are capable of. Claire used her experiences to emphasize her expertise and expert authority, one form of authorization (authority vested in an individual regarding the legitimation of a specific subject) a part of the categories of legitimation (van Leeuwen, 2007). Using experience and knowledge to guide her decisions, she also positioned herself as a role model—a wise and skillful teacher whom others could confidently follow (i.e., role model authority). Finally, Claire knew that she was hired to lead the community in the development and refinement of Montessori best practices. Thus she took up her personal authority as a teacher-leader—an authority granted by status or role within an institution (van Leeuwen, 2007)—to guide the decisions of the greater community: "When we do it this way."

However, these authoritative, legitimizing statements contrast with other "I" statements, such as "I have to" and "I wanna create that." Despite her authority, Claire felt a need to justify the decisions she was tasked with making and carrying out by herself, placing her in a position that can be lonely, emotional, and uncertain. Just as Claire felt conflicted between representing the ideal and the reality of her work, she

juggled seeing herself as a member of a group working together to impress parents with being in charge of creating a highly authentic Montessori learning environment all by herself.

Social Practice

Resisting and embodying ideology. Claire was hired to teach the children in an authentic Montessori way—she was given a job to do in the classroom with children: “I have to prove myself, I have to prove Montessori to the people, I have to prove it to the kids.” Yet this excerpt shows that her work expanded beyond the classroom walls and into another belief- and relationship-based social system. Notably, in this statement Claire first declared the need to prove herself. As a newcomer to the school, Claire had to promote not only Montessori philosophy but also herself as an important member of the school community, building relationships to garner support. Claire faced this challenge directly; however, without those connections, it was difficult for her to prove the value of a Montessori education.

When asked to elaborate on needing to prove herself, she revealed—this time through a highly personal lens—another dilemma between the ideal (Montessori and Social Reform Discourses) and the reality (Day-to-Day Teaching and Personal Worth Discourses). Claire’s demands on herself were divided between her desire to “blow [parents] away with [her] knowledge of child development” and her resistance to a feeling that she must ultimately change herself.

[Montessori is] a lifelong investment for your child. So, to do that, I just feel like I have to be head and shoulders above the standard daycare model. And so that’s why I set a high standard of myself and, um, I hope that, you know, that comes across—I hope that the children feel that, and that the parents do. However, there are certain things I’m not willing to do—you know, like, I’ve, um, you know, there’s certain cultural things that, you know, like, I’m not gonna be nice, I mean I’ll be, I’ll be kind and professional, but I’m not gonna be fake and that, that’s just like a personal choice, and so, um, I have to sometimes make up for [laughs]. I feel like I have to sometimes make up for certain parts of my personality of just who I am, that maybe to some people might seem abrasive or, you know, whatever. So, um, I wanna be able to be myself completely and sometimes I have to make up for that [laughs] a little bit too!

Here, the tension created between Claire’s desire to impress parents and her resistance to changing herself, or to succumbing to the ideal image of a preschool teacher, is obvious. Ideology is a social construct possessing great power (Swartz, 1997). Bourdieu (as cited in Swartz, 1997) referred to ideology as a form of “symbolic violence” (p. 89) that creates expected adaptations to the social world influenced by economic and political power yet disguised as everyday ways and actions. Similarly, Fairclough (1992) wrote that “the discursive constitution of society does not emanate from a free play of ideas in people’s heads but from a social practice which is firmly rooted in and oriented to real, material social structures” (p. 66). Social constitution and reproduction are based in ideology that has become rooted in tangible social structures. In this case, the ideal preschool teacher is one who embodies an age-old image of a soft, passive, and compliant individual (arguably a woman). Claire viewed herself as quite different from, if not the opposite of, this ideal image. She would be neither fake nor shallow and simple. She felt her personality could be seen as abrasive instead of gentle and serene. Even kindness and professionalism were incompatible with the preferred “nice,” more casual, and laid-back preschool teacher identity.

Taking up an analysis on the broader Discourse of how a preschool teacher should look and act could be highly enlightening. However, for the purpose of containing this paper, I will continue to focus on Claire’s specific experience and social relations. Claire resisted this preschool teacher ideology but also felt she had to compensate for what she lacked in other ways (a “good-enough compromise”). She hoped to do this by positively affecting the children and, once again, depending on them to demonstrate her worth to their families.

Claire: So I feel like I have to prove in other ways that, like, my reasons for doing these other, doing it this way is....

Author: And prove by the children really showing, exhibiting....

Claire: Yeah.

Author: The greatness of....

Claire: Yeah! Loving school. Just loving to be there. Yeah.

Two important conclusions can be drawn from this final excerpt, which was in fact the end of the interview. Though Claire's words suggested she opposed fulfilling an image of the ideal preschool teacher, she was working to embody that of the ideal Montessori teacher (Malm, 2004). To do this, she had to "talk the right talk, walk the right walk, [and] behave as if [she] believe[d] the right things" (Gee, 2014, p. 24). Claire had "reasons," the knowledge and beliefs, necessary for "doing it this way," or teaching according to Montessori pedagogy. She wanted to "blow [the parents] away with [her] knowledge of child development," or talk the right talk. She intended to walk the right walk by "[creating] that space in the classroom that will ripple outward into the parents' lives and the lives of their children at home and then in the community." Having to prove herself was coupled with having to prove the value of Montessori education because its system of knowledge and beliefs was a deep part of her personal identity.

Finally, by using the evaluative word "love," Claire referenced the value system of love versus hate that placed a moral value on her decisions. Moral evaluation legitimized the choices she made as a Montessori teacher-leader, including her reasons to not change her personality (van Leeuwen, 2007). Additionally, her desire or belief that children experiencing the Montessori Method will love school is supported by significant Montessori authority. Dr. Montessori herself wrote extensively about her observations of children loving school as she developed her Method of education.

Our children are notably different from those in ordinary schools. They have the calm look of happy individuals and the ease of those who are masters of their own actions.... They give the impression of being remarkable little men and women.... This is what makes us call our little ones happy and wonderful children. (Montessori, 1967b, p. 321)

Furthermore, Dr. Montessori used these child characteristics to promote her Method to the world, describing experiences such as "The Children's House seems to have a spiritual influence on everyone," and "[The children] represent a childhood that is more advanced than was our own" (Montessori, 1967b, p. 321). While Claire wanted the children to love school, she further hoped they would actively display that love to their parents, just as was done in the past. Love of school would have legitimized her own value and the value of Montessori education.

Fairclough (1992) defined hegemony in discourse analysis as the "constructing of alliances, and integrating rather than simply dominating subordinate classes, through concessions or through ideological means, to win their consent" (p. 92). In this study, hegemony is addressed with Montessori Discourse-legitimized ideology. Claire's strategy is hegemonic in that she sought to rally support by creating and displaying the effects of an ideal Montessori education. She wanted to transform parents' educational knowledge and belief systems—win their consent and construct an alliance—by replacing one ideology with another. Children showing that they loved school, or more specifically showing that they simply loved to be at school, was the way to do this.

Discussion and Implications

Claire is a passionate Montessori teacher with years of experience that guide and support her teaching strategies and decisions. She is highly knowledgeable of Montessori theory and curriculum and believes the work she does can change the world. However, this analysis illuminated moments in which she experienced dilemmas frequently caused by conflicts between her identity as a Montessorian and other social identities and Discourses. Claire's own words showed that multiple Discourses worked together

(Montessori and Social Reform Discourses) or caused uncertainty about her teaching practice, her ability to represent the true Montessori teacher social identity, and her own personality (Day-to-Day Teaching and Personal Worth Discourses).

Prominent Montessori organizations' depictions of a Montessori teacher primarily focus on duties related to child development, classroom atmosphere, and bettering the world (Association Montessori Internationale/USA [AMI/USA], n.d.; American Montessori Society [AMS], n.d.; North American Montessori Teachers' Association [NAMTA], n.d.). A Montessori educator respects children, assists their development through engaging activities, and creates a calm environment (AMI/USA, n.d.). A Montessori teacher fosters collaboration and is a creative resource for children to learn from (AMS, n.d.). Finally, a Montessori teacher is one who not only wants to work with children, but also makes a difference in the world, is emotionally independent, and possesses a "zest for life" (NAMTA, n.d.). While these descriptions exist to market the career and entice prospective teachers, their words may have a greater effect. Ngo (2012) has suggested that, "through repeated use and circulation, some D/discourses become so established that they become 'natural' and conceal the existence of competing, alternative discourses" (p. 47). Perhaps established Discourses such as the ones listed above have concealed the alternative Discourses that are part of a Montessori teacher's lived experience, Discourses that affect a Montessori teacher's identity.

This analysis showed that Claire characterized her experience of proving Montessori philosophy through multiple discursive relationships, identities and self-representations, and social practices. Yet such Discourses are not acknowledged in such Montessori spaces as websites and literature. Was Claire emotionally independent? She described her job as one given to her and her alone. However, this analysis discovered that she was, in many ways, dependent on the children and parents believing that she truly embodied the social identity of the Montessori teacher. Was it Claire's responsibility to create an environment that met all of the children's developmental needs? In fact, Claire was hired to do exactly that; however, she faced situations beyond her control that challenged her creation of the ideal, normalized Montessori environment. Was the collaboration she was tasked with developing focused only within the preschool environment? This analysis revealed that Claire depended on the collaboration, acceptance by the school community, and alliances formed among herself, the children, and parents. Without them, she could not prove her value, nor could she prove the value of a Montessori education.

Montessori Discourse prescribes a social identity that can be challenged by many elements of today's educational social world. Because being an authentic Montessori teacher requires commitment to a system of knowledge and beliefs that contributes to the development of one's social and personal identity, the dilemmas arising from these conflicts can have deeply personal effects. Claire's words depicted an uncertainty composed of passion and frustration about her ability to fulfill the expectations of a Montessori teacher's social and personal identity. Further research is needed on how evolving social demands, parent and school expectations, and educational policies affect Montessori teachers and curriculum. This analysis and future research can be helpful in finding ways to meet these demands while preserving the curriculum. However, it is equally important to generate awareness—and acceptance—of the inner conflicts these requirements may produce for teachers and to offer the support they need to work with and through the uncertainty of this position.

Dr. Montessori (1991) wrote, "The task of the new teacher is a hard one, and I try to remember every principle that can help her" (p. 108). By better understanding today's Montessori teacher experience, we can develop the principles needed to train, guide, and help educators as they face both personal and social challenges in their role. Supporting teachers in this holistic way may enhance the greater social world's understanding, recognition, and value of an authentic Montessori education.

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