

Dealing with Diversity: Administrator, Teacher and Parent Perceptions of the Responsiveness of
Montessori Schools to Racial and Ethnic Diversity

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ABSTRACT

Research in non-Montessori environments suggests that low income students and students of color are more successful in educational environments where they share a common cultural background with their teachers and that students can be equally as successful in cross-cultural classrooms when their teachers actively educate from an anti-bias perspective. This study sought to assess if Montessori teachers, administrators and parents of color are aware of the impact of classroom cultural differences on student performance. It also looked to determine what practices, if any, were in place to differentiate instruction for students of color to address cultural differences. Data was gathered through individual interviews. In addition, this project used classroom observations to determine if teacher-student interactions were egalitarian and if observed language instruction included practices that were culturally relevant for students of color. The data from the interviews and observations was analyzed for themes using a Critical Race Theory perspective.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Guiding Research Question

The focus of this study is to understand the experience of teachers and administrators in implementing the Montessori method with students of color and their families. The essential research question explored in this study is how administrator, teacher and parent perceptions of students' ethnicity and/or race impact the Montessori education experience of students of color?

Socio-economics, Race/Ethnicity and Public Education in America

The what, why, and how of school reform is taking up a considerable amount of the dialog about public education in America today. Simply stated it is a battle between an older view of American education having its primary purpose be socialization to national values and the national class system based in industrial capitalism. This vision is in opposition to a newer view of public education that sees the goal of education ought to be the academic preparation of students to compete in a global marketplace (Smith, 2008). The old view attempted to prepare citizens to participate in a local, industrial capitalist marketplace. Socializing students as future workers to the routine of the factory was the primary goal. The new view seeks to shift educational goals to meet the needs of the economy, as the American ruling class has done for the last two and a half centuries.

If one takes on the view of futurist Thomas Friedman (2005) in his book *The World Is Flat*, the American economic ruling class would be wise to position itself to be the world's manager, outsourcing the lower-income work to other countries with more cost-effective labor costs. He predicts that Americans will position themselves as the middlemen for labor from other parts of the world to service the American and potentially the global market. He suggests

that this will require a relational skill set that transcends national borders. Offices will be a thing of the past making the ability to work independently and unsupervised at home vital to employability. Furthermore, workers will need the ability to collaborate that is radically different from what a worker needed to be able to do to be successful on an assembly line. According to Joel Spring (2008) in his exploration of the dynamics of the National Education Summit on High Schools called "The Goals of Public Schooling", business leaders would like low-income employees to have soft skills like punctuality, social graces, and friendliness. They are not interested in the majority of their employees having more than a ninth-grade education because most of what they need to know to do their jobs they will learn at work. This is a higher level of education than was required to work on an assembly line. There are two educational reform pushes coming from the business world: to prepare a self-motivated managerial class to have an international, relational skill set and to prepare a working class that has a ninth-grade education.

National lawmakers, who also tend to be very influential members of the boards of many of America's larger corporations and have a vision that is similar to Friedman, got together and proposed a national system of assessment to help bring about that change, especially in the lowest-performing schools (Spring, 2008). That system is established in the federal act called *The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (2008) that, interestingly enough, uses the quality control notions of an industrial economy, specifically the factory (Giroux, 2009), to assess school performance. It also gives the government the ability to restructure, reconstitute, or remake into multiple schools within a school persistently underachieving schools. These schools tend to service socially disadvantaged communities of low income and/or minority families. The goal of the act is that all schools have students (inclusive of English language learners and students with significant cognitive challenges) scoring at their state-determined level of proficiency by 2013.

This reform supports the job preparedness for the working class but does not address the business community's changing requirements for the managerial class. As a matter of fact, the achievement gap between high-achieving white students and high-achieving students of color has increased (Plucker, Burroughs & Song, 2010). In a study of ten years of test scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, Plucker, Burroughs & Song (2010) concluded that gifted students of color are getting their needs met less and less as the standardized testing focus drives attention to the minimum competency end of the achievement spectrum.

The law clearly touts itself as "an act to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice, so that no child is left behind" (*No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, 2008). In this context "the achievement gap" is the difference of scores between the minimum competency scores of low-income students of color and their white, often more financially advantaged peers. Recent outcomes show that the gains made in decreasing the gap were much more significant in the seventies and eighties through the initial inroads created by desegregating schools. The Northwest Evaluation Association in Portland states that gains now mimic those that were occurring before the law was passed (Dillon, 2009). A representative of that organization goes on to say that there has not really been any "watershed change;" change that is actually meaningful or able to be sustained over time. This initiative failed for several reasons. The law did not come with financing for professional development for school leaders and teachers to explain the value of its major strategies (increased parent involvement, choice to leave failing schools and free tutoring) for addressing the achievement gap. As a result, many of the programs *No Child Left Behind* requires have not been implemented with integrity, if at all.

Additionally, there is a structural problem in American schools that standardized testing does not address. As a matter of fact, testing is a symptom of that structure. As mentioned earlier, American schools are designed to sort students for participation in an industrial economy. Everything about their structure from tracking, to teacher-centered instructional methods, to the use of huge chalkboards, to changing classes according to a system of ringing bells, to grading, including using standardized tests to control for quality, is an expression of that goal (Apple, 1977). Until the structures change, the outcomes will not change. There will be no “watershed” moment (Dillon, 2009) and students will not be much more prepared for the global economy or to be psychologically healthier than they are now. In all fairness, nine to thirteen year old students’ of color test scores have improved, but not as much as their white counterparts, though students tend not to sustain those gains over time (Dillon, 2009). This reform addresses the needs of the business sector for employees with a ninth grade education. Since the structures of traditional education keep doing what they were designed to do (create groups of citizens socialized to their position in the economic structure) perhaps public Montessori education could represent the promise of “watershed change” that *No Child Left Behind* and its mandates promised and achieve the much higher educational levels required of both the managerial and working classes in an information economy.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

The Growth of Montessori in the Public Sector

The radical and swift timeline of the reform movement that inspired the *No Child Left Behind Act* has created opportunities for educational entrepreneurs and progressive educators. If one has an educational model that is effective at teaching academics (Miller, Dyer, Stevenson & White, 1975; Miller & Bizzell, 1983; Miller & Bizzell, 1984; Borman, Hewes, Overman, & Brown, 2003; Lillard, 2008), executive functioning (Diamond & Lee, 2011), social skills (Rathunde & Csikszentmihalyi, 2005b; Lillard, 2008), self-motivation (Rathunde & Csikszentmihalyi, 2005a) and cooperation (Lillard, 2008); a clear, organized curriculum; and an apprenticeship system for teaching that curriculum and replicating its unique classroom culture, as Montessori schools do, this is a good time to be expanding in the public sector. Montessori is a model based on human development that strives to educate for maximum human potential. This high academic ideal makes it a good match for the skill set projected by Friedman to be required for optimum effectiveness of the managerial class in an information economy. The employee competencies required of the information economy are much more in alignment with optimal human learning and Montessori education than that required by an industrial economy. Assembly line work requires workers to repeat the same tasks in a machine-like fashion for decades. Montessori education has the capacity to meet the needs of business leaders to create a more educated low- and middle-income work force in a global, capitalist economy. Beyond that, it has the capacity to do so in ways that are psychologically healthy, which will benefit all American citizens, not just business and political leaders.

According to Whitescarver & Cossentino (2008) through its use as a model in Head Start programs and as a tool to create voluntary desegregation in districts under Supreme Court mandates to desegregate, Montessori education established a foothold in public programs over the course of the last fifty years. There are now at least 240 public Montessori programs in 32 states. That compares to about 4800 private Montessori schools. The number of public programs does not include schools that do not have Montessori in their name or are schools within schools. Whitescarver and Cossentino (2008) speculate that the number is actually much higher. Angeline Lillard (2008) estimates in her study that the total number of public programs is 300. Montessori has entered the public sector and has expanded radically there in the last fifteen years. That boom is likely to continue as the federal government incentivizes states to remove laws capping the total number of charter schools in funding programs like Race to the Top (*America's Recovery and Reinvestment Act*, 2009). As a result of this expansion, many more low and middle-income students of a variety of ethnicities are getting access to Montessori education.

Though Dr. Maria Montessori--the founder of the Montessori method and educational philosophy--began her program working with mentally challenged children and later low-income families in Rome, Italy, the American movement is populated by and serves largely middle and upper-income European-American families in the private sector (Whitescarver & Cossentino, 2008). This history causes some traditional educators of a variety of races and ethnicities to question the method's ability to achieve results with low-income students and/or minority students as its philosophy and methods are drastically different than the mainstream American education with which they have experience. The reason the query into the impact of school community members' perceptions of working with students of color is valid is that it will contribute to the thin body of research about the effectiveness of the Montessori method in

meeting the needs of students and communities of color as public-sector programs expand to serve a much more diverse student body than Montessori private schools. The middle-class Whiteness of Montessori education can be attributed to the conflation of race and class in the United States (Sleeter & Grant, 1999). Over time, institutionalized racism has succeeded in keeping many people of African descent in low-income jobs and limiting the opportunities available to subsequent generations to move into higher income brackets. However, American demographics are shifting. Significant numbers of people of color are moving to the suburbs as the urban centers are gentrified (Orfield & Lee, 2005). Concurrently, more and more states are creating universal preschool funding and voucher programs that can be used in private preschool programs, so the socio-economic, racial and ethnic diversification of private and public, suburban Montessori programs is a reality that some schools are better prepared to face than others. The more prepared institutions have begun to look at the impact of socio-economic status and race and/or class on the American Montessori educational experience.

Throughout this thesis, I will use the term “people of color” to refer to Latino and people of African descent in the United States that have a variety of differing ethnic origins that may be visually identifiable from the current dominant ethnic majority in the United States--people of European descent. This visual manifestation of ethnic difference subjects some of these groups in different degrees to a series of systematic, often invisible, structures designed to have them remain members of the lower socio-economic tier. It is used to create a caste system that is racialized (Giroux, 2010). Henry Giroux goes so far as to refer to it as “American apartheid”. The term people of color is considered to have a more positive connotation than minority, which defines less populous ethnic groups in relation to a dominant group by defining them by their commonalities to each other (Saffire, 1988). It is speculated that the term has been in use since

the late 1790's when free people of African descent used it to define themselves in relation to those that were enslaved. It has resurfaced in usage since the late 1970s.

The Essentials of the Montessori Philosophy

The Montessori philosophy has eight basic principles according to Lillard (2005): movement is deeply interconnected to the learning process; a sense of control greatly enhances learning and emotional health; personal interest deepens the learning process; external rewards actually reduce the internal drive to complete a task once they are no longer offered (thus grading is rarely used in the elementary grades); peer learning strongly supports the educational process [thus the use of multi-aged groupings (three to six years old, six to nine years old, nine to twelve years old, twelve to fifteen year olds, and fifteen to nineteen year olds)]; creating meaningful contexts to acquire knowledge deepens the learning experience; adults should use an authoritative classroom management style (one that is kind and firm) to create freedom within limits to get the best student outcomes; and an orderly and organized environment is good for students.

Beyond these eight core components, two additional ones bear mentioning. Teaching methods, materials and multi-sensory curriculum are organized around human development. Thus, sensitive periods related to brain growth in specific areas at specific times of life are the focus of materials and pedagogy to maximize the brains development and learning. Additionally, students get to move through the curriculum at their own pace. The Montessori educational model is considered to be Constructivist (Hayes, 2006). This means it is based in the idea that students create their own knowledge, and the elements listed above create an ideal environment for developing brains to do that mental work. Montessori states it clearly herself when she says:

...education is not something which the teacher does, but it is a natural process which develops spontaneously in the human being. It is not acquired by listening to words, but in virtue of experiments in which the child acts on his environment. The teacher's task is not to talk, but to prepare and arrange a series of motives for cultural activity in a special environment made for the child (Montessori, 2009, p.8).

Human development calls for education and that natural tendency can be used to help students achieve greatly through their own experience.

Benefits

As Lillard (2005) relates in her summary of the research which supports the elements of Montessori education, American education swings back and forth between an overly controlling standardization pole (as currently exemplified by *No Child Left Behind*) and an overly permissive progressive pole (exemplified by teachers who implement project based learning without using any form of assessment to measure student achievement), neither of which have good outcomes for learners. One introduces a superficial learning process due to teaching to the test, and the other, when done poorly, lacks the structure to create a solid educational foundation. What Montessori has that other progressive education models lack is a clearly written curriculum--in Montessori education referred to as albums--that is sequential and scaffolded as well as a system of training and apprenticeship through national and international professional associations to disseminate the curriculum and the philosophy in teacher-training programs. The Montessori educational model has a clear plan which, when implemented with fidelity (Lillard,

2012), may yield strong educational outcomes and achieve the new educational goals for workers in an information economy.

Montessori programs give students direct instruction in geography, science, phonics and math concepts such as place value and operations at a much earlier age--3-6 years old depending upon the child--than traditional programs do. Due to the use of hands-on manipulative materials, the Montessori curriculum is designed to provide developmentally appropriate acceleration as compared to traditional education, so students learn to read and understand math concepts such as place value at a much earlier age than in traditional programs. According to Levin (1994), the Montessori method is often used in early intervention programs because it has the ability to proactively build the neurological structures for early literacy and numeracy at developmentally appropriate times in early childhood. These are experiences that some students' families are not able to offer them because they are socially disadvantaged due to socio-economic status or membership in a non-dominant group that is discriminated against (1994). Montessori understood the value of early childhood education to brain development in a way that no one else did in the early twentieth century. Contemporary empirical research continues to reveal that many of her conclusions about the ideal learning environment for maximum human potential were accurate (Tough, 2008).

Finally, Montessori is a holistic method that does not separate the academic from the ethical and social education of children. The Magnetic Resonance Imaging research of the 1990s bears out how deeply interconnected academic learning is to emotional states (Goleman, 2005). By consciously teaching children manners and social skills as well as considering the classroom a laboratory for developing ethical understanding, deep interrelatedness between the relational

and academic activities is thoughtfully addressed in Montessori classrooms. This holism is also translated to the study of subject matter. Tracing insets used to strengthen the pencil grip are also used to teach the names of geometric shapes. The symbols used to parse sentences are also the geometric shapes. History timelines are used to teach the history of math and language, etc. The curriculum addresses the needs of the whole child and is interdisciplinary. It prepares students to have the self-directed, relational skill set Freidman (2005) calls for in *The World is Flat*.

Montessori Education and People of Color

Since Montessori began as a private school model in the United States and private school attendance is associated with middle- and upper-class families that correlate with being of European descent, the Montessori teacher training programs and formal Montessori curriculum in this country do not address culturally relevant teaching practices for working with low socio-economic status students and families or for working with Latino or Black families, outside of those that are relevant for the dominant culture. This observation is based on my own experience going through teacher training in the mid-1990s, the dozens of teachers I have worked with over the course of my career and the eight teachers I have interviewed for the pilot and final study for this project. One national organization, the American Montessori Society (AMS), has just begun in the last few years to have presentations at its national conferences that focus on the needs of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community members; bilingual students; and students with learning challenges in Montessori schools. Only recently has it begun to provide information that focuses on the needs of low-income or minority English-speaking students. The Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) in association with North American Montessori Teacher's Association (NAMTA) had at its 2011 conference a presentation called "Supporting

the Needs of Families and Children in Urban Settings: A Partnership Approach to Public and Private Schools” which is about replicating Montessori programs in areas serving the needs of families in poverty. Other progressive educational organizations like the National Association for Independent Schools and the National Association for the Education of Young Children have significant resources invested in supporting membership and schools around best practices in social justice and diversity work and have been doing so for decades. The national organizations and training centers have yet to fully integrate diversity education into their programs either, though initial inroads are being made.

Multicultural education¹ is an outgrowth of the identity politics in education movement which began in the eighties and really made its presence known in American universities in the nineties through a shift in the topics and course offerings (Sleeter & Grant, 1999) and suggests that the perspectives of people from groups other than the dominant one should be part of the education of all students, including those from the dominant group. Essentially the experience of people of ethnicities, classes, genders and abilities that differ from the dominant one, should be included and valued. Ladson-Billings (2009a) critiques multicultural education’s application in American elementary education:

Rather than engage students in provocatively thinking about the contradictions of US ideals and lived realities, teachers often find themselves encouraging students to sing ‘ethnic’

¹ Ramsey, Williams and Battle Vold (2003) define multicultural education as “process oriented learning experiences, that foster educational equity, awareness of a respect for the diversity of our society and world, and commitment to create a more just and equitable society for all people (p. vii).”

songs, eat ethnic foods and do ethnic dances. Consistently, manifestations of multicultural education in the classroom are superficial and trivial ‘celebrations of diversity’ (p. 33).

In Montessori education, we do all the things that Ladson-Billings decries, but not from the position of tacking them on to the curriculum to celebrate diversity. As Yezbick (2007) states in her thesis on Montessori teacher perceptions in a public school with a significant amount of cross-cultural teaching, “Although many themes in the traditional Montessori philosophy lend themselves to creating a culturally responsive classroom, they do not inherently guarantee it” (p. 23). The study of human cultures and the geography of the world they inhabit is the history and geography curriculum, and many Montessorians teach about them skillfully, but the fact that Montessorians do not always consider the cultural needs of their students when doing it reinforces Yezbick’s observation that some Montessorians and Montessori school leaders tend to educate students of color without a critical consideration of their own cultural and class position in the American social order or that of their students, a trap that many traditional educators fall into as well (Ladson-Billings, 2009a).

Democratic pedagogy takes the notion of multi-cultural education that critics view as a limited application of the identity politics movement a step further and suggests that the only way to make education meaningful to students from non-dominant groups is to use it as a site to resist domination and to alter the social structure that requires the oppression of non-dominant groups (Friere, 1998). Sleeter and Grant (1999) also posit that a blend between multicultural education and democratic pedagogy that they call “social reconstructionist” where schools and students work together to create a school culture and educational experience that is the ideal learning environment for all students and a stepping stone to creating a healthier society. This is

compatible with Montessori education because Dr. Montessori's vision was to create a more peaceful society by transforming children and families, fueled by her experiences in living through World War II (Education and Peace, 1992).

I am curious if the European cultural context in which Montessori education was formed has any negative impact on minority students, since the peace curriculum component of Montessori education can be considered its own form of resistance to the hierarchical, competitive and violent tendencies of European culture (Education and Peace, 1992; Schonleber, 2006). Have Montessori schools consciously or unconsciously placed themselves in the best position to create a more just civil society for the students of color they serve? If Montessori schools are participating in the same unconscious, institutional racism perpetuated by traditional education, what are the mechanisms in Montessori schools that contribute to recreating an unjust social order?

Individual schools and individual teachers in schools have taken on the work of organizing structures to support diversity and create social justice education curriculum. A quick Google search on Montessori schools and diversity brings up a million web pages. However, as in traditional education, national systems, scholarships and structures are not consistent and are in their infancy at the national and school level. Many Montessori schools and professional organizations are led by people who were educated before multiculturalism was incorporated across areas of study, including education, in colleges. Prior to the last five years, few traditional teacher programs offered significant multicultural training to educators, and I am not aware of any Montessori teacher training programs that do. I want to know if this failure to prepare

teachers impacts the experiences of administrators, teachers, parents and students in Montessori schools.

Research in Montessori Outcomes

There has been considerable work by the AMS in the last ten years to support formal academic research in Montessori outcomes. AMS has a research committee and provides professional development at national conferences on topics like how to do action research. Practitioners share research they have done in their classrooms, while university researchers share their insider and outsider studies on Montessori educational practices. Prior to this recent development, AMS was largely uninterested in formal academic research. Whitescarver and Constantino (2008) attribute this to an institutional bias created during the first wave of Montessori interest in the United States around the turn of the last century when William Heard Kilpatrick, an important teacher trainer and text book writer at Teacher's College, scoffed at the Montessori method as unscientific. Today, AMS supports a monthly publication that affords submission and acceptance of blind, peer-reviewed research articles. NAMTA initially went a different direction than AMS. It supports a peer-reviewed research journal and holds conferences, sometimes in partnership with the AMI to disseminate that research. The national movement toward research-based curriculum generated by *No Child Left Behind* can be given a lot of credit for this change in AMS's focus. Fostering research about methods and curriculum is being financially incentivized in education right now. When Montessori was an exclusively private school endeavor, there was not much motivation to participate in research at this level. Public schools have asked the AMS to help in this endeavor to ensure that their funding streams are not jeopardized, and it has responded by devoting a significant amount of the training that it offers at its annual conferences to fostering and developing research and researchers.

Of the research that has been done, a significant amount of it is flawed due to the choice variable that Montessori programs in magnet or charter schools bring into the equation (Lillard, 2005). Most public and private Montessori programs in the United States are magnet, charters or schools within schools that parents have to seek out and choose. This makes setting up a valid control group difficult [American Montessori Society (2010), Lopata, Wallace & Finn (2005) & Vance (2003)]. Additionally, the sizes of many studies that include Montessori are small, which limits their generalizability [American Montessori Society (2010), Vance, (2003) & Yezbick (2007)]. Overall, the research on Montessori effectiveness is limited due to challenges with setting up control groups, the relative lack of it due to the failure of the Montessori community to value it, and the lack of studies and their size means that there is not enough information to start making generalizations. However, several studies with a variety of designs do begin to look at the impact of Montessori education on eliminating the achievement gap [Vance, (2003); Lopata, Wallace & Finn (2005)].

Vance's (2003) study entitled "An Exploration of the Relationship between Preschool Experience and the Acquisition of Phonological Awareness in Kindergarten" in a comparison between a Head Start preschool program, a High Scope preschool program, no preschool at all and a Montessori program, found that Montessori students outperformed others on the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening. The challenge with this study is that there is no random sampling and multi-year programs are compared to one-year programs, making the superior performance of Montessori students attributable to either their Montessori experience or the larger quantity of time spent in school. This is a pretty significant design flaw. It was also a very small study with an over-representation of Latino students, most of whom were not in the Montessori program. By the end of kindergarten, there were no gaps between the white students

in the study and the African-American students or students from different socio-economic groups in any of the programs. There was a gap between Latino and White students that can be attributed to the later acquisition of phonological awareness of bilingual students. The methods of this study make its results inconclusive.

“Comparison of Academic Achievement Between Montessori and Traditional Education Programs” (Lopata, Wallace & Finn, 2005) compares Terra Nova scores in math and English/language arts at four schools that are over half low income and minority in demographics. One was a Montessori magnet school, one an open magnet (large community spaces, team teaching, incorporation of small group work, multi-aged groupings and a discovery learning orientation), another a structured magnet (back-to-basics curriculum, teacher directed and drill-and-practice), and the last a traditional non-magnet school (basic curriculum with the goal of improving test scores, direct instruction, drill-and-practice and strict discipline). The magnet schools required families to go through a lottery, but the traditional school did not. Choice was a variable that was consistent across the three magnet schools but not the neighborhood school.

The findings were that of the 241 total fourth-grade scores analyzed, Montessori students did not differ significantly from any of the other types of schools in language arts achievement. In math, the traditional neighborhood school outperformed the Montessori school. It scored at the same level as the structured magnet school, and it was higher in math outcomes than the open magnet. Of the 252 eighth-grade student tests assessed, all schools had higher language arts achievement than the Montessori school although the open magnet school's higher scores were not statistically significant. In math, there were no statistically significant differences.

Lopata et. al (2005) conclude that Montessori students do not consistently achieve higher standardized test scores than students in other programs. They list limitations to their study as the school difference may be related to building level differences rather than program difference. They also note that they were not able to control for program fidelity. In their opinion, other studies stating that Montessori has higher degree of academic outcomes should be viewed with skepticism. The researchers also fail to account for the fact that sometimes cohorts are weak. A look at the current eighth-grade students' fourth-grade test scores might have given a better picture of that cohort of students. Aptitude testing would have made this a stronger study as well. Then it would be possible to know if students were achieving their potential in that regard. The fact that there is no baseline for students that shows growth as opposed to where they fit either into the bell curve of the Terra Nova or how they achieve according to state proficiency standards is also problematic. Additionally, this study makes no attempts to measure the social/emotional side of learning, as that is related to academic outcomes. Though Lopata et. al's (2005) methods are sound, there are many limitations to the scope of their research and there is no triangulation of data to verify their findings.

In an attempt to design and carry out a more sophisticated study on Montessori outcomes, Angeline Lillard (2008) did a study called "Evaluating Montessori Outcomes." In this research she evaluated 55 five year olds and 57 twelve year olds, half from an established Montessori public school in Milwaukee and the other half from a mix of public and private schools. She improved on the design of Lopata et. al's (2005) research by choosing students from a well-established school noted for its fidelity to the Montessori method. Lillard also created a control group of students that accounted for the parent-choice variable. She studied students whose parents applied to go to the school but did not make it through the randomized lottery.

Five-year-old participants were academically assessed in language and mathematics using the Woodcock Johnson². Executive skills were evaluated through a verbal functioning skills were assessed, the ability to delay gratification was measured, and social problem solving task and by observing students on the playground. The reliability of these measures was not mentioned in the study. On the Woodcock-Johnson, five year olds measured the same as the control group in picture vocabulary, spatial reasoning and concept formation. Montessori students outperformed the control group on letter word identification, word attack skills and applied problems (a mathematics measure). They also outperformed the control group on the executive function task. There was no difference between the Montessori group and the control group in the ability to delay gratification. In the social behaviors realm, Montessori students were “more likely to use a higher level of reasoning by referring to justice or fairness to relinquish the object” (Lillard, 2008, p. 1894). When observed on the playground, Montessori students were more likely to be involved in “positive shared peer play and significantly less likely to be involved in rough play that was ambiguous in intent” (Lillard, 2008, p. 1894). The Montessori students matched or exceeded the control group on a variety of academic and social measures.

This study represents a design improvement over the last two mentioned. However there are several limitations that are not addressed in the article. There is no indication that Lillard gathered information about preschool participation, but that might be a variable that could skew the results if it was not accounted for. Not all Montessori public programs have preschools. If this one did and all the Montessori students participated, while control group students did not

² The Woodcock Johnson is a battery of tests that measure a variety of cognitive skills including: reading-writing ability, comprehension-knowledge, quantitative knowledge, long-term retrieval, short-term memory, visual-spatial thinking, processing speed, auditory processing and fluid reasoning [Woodcock, R.; Mather, N.; and McGrew, K. (2001)].

participate, what Lillard may have measured is an effect for preschool education and not Montessori education. I am also curious about what the Woodcock-Johnson may have revealed about the difference between aptitude and achievement. Not to note this deprives the study of an opportunity to see if those studied are working up to their academic potential, a weakness of Lopato et. al's (2005) study as well. By chance, the Montessori students may have had a higher aptitude than the control group.

The research on the twelve-year-old group brings up some additional questions. They were assessed on the Woodcock-Johnson using several language and math subtests. In addition, they were evaluated on a writing test, and the last two measures looked at their social/behavioral skills and school attitudes. There were no differences on the Woodcock Johnson for math and language between the Montessori and the control group. Lillard (2008) offers two explanations for this. One is that this group may have been behind at age five or were impacted by the early implementation at the school when there were not always multi-aged groupings. She also posits that the acceleration effects of Montessori may equalize by the age of twelve. Another possibility is that the control group also attended preschool programs and that unaccounted-for variable is skewing the results. On the writing measure, there was no difference between the two groups for spelling, punctuation and grammar. However, the Montessori group outperformed the control group on creativity and complexity of sentence structure. In the social/behavioral scenario, the Montessori students were more likely to use a positive assertive response to solve a problem than the control group. Lastly, on the school survey, the test group was more likely to respond positively to statements about peers authentically caring for each other and treating each other with respect. Twelve year olds in Montessori programs outperformed their control group peers in some writing skills and some behavioral measures.

Information about race was not gathered in this study at all because the researcher felt like it was such a divisive topic in the district where the research was being conducted that asking for that demographic information might serve as a deterrent from participation. It is very telling that one of the most high-powered Montessori studies in years utterly avoids the uncomfortable subject of race. The fact that talking about race would be a deterrent to families of color is a view that reflects the middle class white perspective of the researcher. Race is a very uncomfortable topic for white people in positions of privilege, and it is an unwritten social norm that it be discussed little if at all (Barbarin, 1981a; Dornbusch & Steinberg, 1996). In communities of color, not discussing is not an option. Developing coping skills and garnering support in a society composed of institutions that contain structural racism are valuable survival skills.

Family income data was collected. All families participating fell within the \$20,000 to \$50,000 range, the low socio-economic status range, eliminating income as a variable to consider (Lillard, 2008). Supplemental quality research conducted to get at the effects of race/ethnicity and income on student performance at Montessori schools is really lacking in the literature. This is an ignored topic in the research, which may be attributed to the middle/upper class, European American origins of Montessori in the private sector and the deep racial divide that is still present in American society. The research on Montessori outcomes across cultural and economic segments of society is small in sample size, mixed in outcomes and inconclusive.

This research suggests that just as research in other areas of education is limited by the White privilege lens of researchers and assessment tools, Montessori education may fall prey to the same blind spot. In order to understand what the blind spot is in American Montessori

schools, it is necessary to understand the history of labeling race, what racism and discrimination look like, and how they continue to be used to reproduce a racialized caste system over time through their presence in American institutions, with a focus on education despite changes in American law.

Teacher and Parent Perceptions in Monocultural, Nondominant-Group Montessori Environments

There is some research about teacher and parent perceptions of the use of Montessori education with a variety of nondominant group populations in monocultural settings. Schonleber (2006) researched why Hawaiian teachers, both native and nonnative, considered the Montessori model to be consistent with Hawaiian cultural values and how they pursued its implementation in Hawaiian language and culture based schools. Teachers interviewed perceived the Montessori method to be culturally relevant because it had a similar view of teaching as a calling; engaged in like teaching strategies to those used in Hawaiian society; shared similar values and beliefs with local culture; and had similar views about the underlying characteristics of existence. The method was applied in unique ways to make it relevant to Hawaiian culture. For example, artifacts from the natural world of Hawaii, rocks and shells, were used in practical life. Timeline and cosmological studies used the creation stories of Hawaiian culture. The community, care of the natural world, and the study of patience and humility were given more focus and time than in conventional Montessori environments. There was also a belief that education could be an act of activism to empower communities in both Montessori and Hawaiian culture. Maria Montessori was serious about transforming the world community to be a more peaceful and egalitarian place through education, and there is a significant movement in Hawaiian society to empower its youth

through education. Montessori educational practice and philosophy shares a holistic, spiritual and transformative world-view of education with Hawaiian culture. These are also the features that distinguish Montessori education from traditional education.

Cultural dissonance between native Hawaiian culture and Montessori education was primarily centered in Montessori education's European roots. It does not have the same focus on connection to nature. The equality between adults and children and the amount of physical contact between adults and children does not match with Hawaiian society. The emphasis on free choice was another area of cultural conflict. Many of the programs were only partially implementing Montessori and were therefore not fully stocked with Montessori materials. In general, there were not as many materials on the shelf, and their scope and sequence was different than in traditional Montessori environments. Additionally, teachers were more likely to be teaching out of their area of training than in more traditional Montessori programs. There was more of focus on family and place, and the native Hawaiian programs strove to teach both Hawaiian and Western values. Cultural conflict and cultural alignment were both present in the perceptions of school community members in relation to the use of Montessori in programs primarily implemented by native Hawaiians for native Hawaiian children.

Teacher Perceptions in Cross-Cultural Montessori Environments

As earlier mentioned Yezbick (2007) did a participatory research study in which five Montessori teachers, four from the dominant group and two of Asian descent (the researcher herself) read some of Lisa Delpit's (1995) work on quality practices for disciplining and teaching students of color and engaged in six group discussions over a period of several weeks about their practice with that population. She noticed several themes. The Montessori emphasis on

independence is clearly a cultural norm that has roots in European values. It created so much dissonance with some families that they left the school. She goes on to state that the Montessori method is inherently Eurocentric. As in the Hawaiian study, another place where there appeared to be cultural conflict with students of color was around the concept of choice. Low achieving students, the majority of whom were students of color, really struggled to work independently and engage themselves without nearly one on one instruction in several teachers' classrooms. Choosing work seems to be a component of the clash created by the intense valuing of independence in Montessori environments. She also noted that teachers were not able to define what they meant by independence or if they made any modifications if families had significantly different ideas about independence than they had:

Cultural differences around gender socialization also emerged as a theme:

Several members had noticed that some cultural groups seemed to be more lenient in disciplining their male children, even as they held their female children to rigid standards for behavior. This manifested in the classroom as more behavior from boys that needed redirection from teachers to maintain the learning environment and the need to encourage girls to assert themselves and feel comfortable participating. It was noted that the dominant culture of the United States does also play into this gender dynamic (Yezbick, p. 46).

Additionally, teachers noted that Asian students of both genders and Latina students had to be taught to advocate for themselves in opposition to parent instructions to obey educators. Broader cultural beliefs about the interplay of gender dynamics in the politics of public education also

emerged. "Patriarchy in the dominant society of the U.S. was seen as one of the social reasons that our jobs involved such high pressure. Group members felt that if the profession was male-dominated, more resources would be used to support teachers" (Yezbick, p. 50). Sexism and authoritarian parent perspectives were complicating factors requiring additional direct instruction for students to be successful in a cross-cultural learning environment.

Cultural differences around teacher authority were also noted as a place of challenge. One of the activities that the study group participated in was reading selections from Lisa Delpit's (1995) work *Educating Other People's Children*. This chapter emphasizes that White teachers often discipline Black students indirectly which has the students thinking that they are being given a choice. When they choose no as an answer, not realizing they are being defiant to indirect discipline, they often get into conflicts with White teachers. They also discussed how a typical communication style in the African American community labeled call and response gets black boys in trouble and over-referred to special education.

As in the Hawaiian study, cultural conflict around the Eurocentric Montessori curriculum was also notable. Yezbick states, "taking the Montessori curriculum as it comes from Europe without augmentation cannot be considered culturally responsive pedagogy" (p. 23). One teacher stated she was most successful with students who were first generation American citizens when they did not assume that they shared the same cultural knowledge as those that were second generation and beyond. They began to teach them nursery rhymes from the European tradition, but did not seek to use stories from students' family cultures as well. She found that the Montessori teachers she talked with were not engaging in culturally responsive pedagogy when it came to curriculum, though they did modify language and literacy instruction by expanding

phonics instruction for English language learners while still balancing that out with reading and discussing high quality children's literature.

She and the other teachers really found following the child and getting to know them over a period of time helped with relationship building across cultural differences. The three-year cycle in a Montessori classroom has benefits in cross-cultural settings as it gives time for trust to develop in cross-cultural relationships. The flexibility of the Montessori work period was also noted to be particularly helpful in scheduling individualized groups for English language learners within and across classrooms.

Yezbick notes several limitations to her study. The first of these is the fact that most of the participants were members of the majority group. Two were of Arab descent but were considered White by their peers. This is a very common situation in Montessori public programs, as it is in most American public schools. Often teachers are largely of European descent and about half of their students are non-dominant group members. Their dominant group membership makes it difficult for them to see and analyze their own cultural biases. She found the teachers that she interviewed to take "...the very common position that White teachers take on race: race is not an issue in their professional lives because they see all children as the same and treat them all equally. However, classroom practices and student outcomes reveal this to be untrue (p. 57)." As a result, deep analysis of authority in the classroom, respectful treatment of children, intra-cultural communication style differences, learning disabilities created by socialization and the way instructional time was used did not occur. In retrospect, she also realized that she was unwilling to push the group to be really uncomfortable around a topic they are socialized not to discuss directly because of her own fear of doing damage to relationships she would have to

sustain with peers after the study was completed. Additionally, her own experience as a non-dominant group member that is from a more privileged group due to her ability to pass as White impacted her perspective to a different degree than her dominant group peers, but was an issue. The size of this study makes it difficult to generalize from. Also, the researcher provides no quantitative data to make the case that cross-cultural relationships in the school she is studying impact students of color disproportionately.

In summation, the existence of the concept of race is situated in the dynamics of domination and oppression. The use of the term to describe humans is historically loaded as it was used by dominator cultures to define their place on top in global power relationships. This dynamic is so woven into American culture that social structures privilege the experience and outlook of dominant group members at the expense of non-dominant group members. Additionally, dominant group members who desire to be egalitarian in their outlook often are dismissive of the ongoing prejudice faced by non-dominant group members because it has little impact on them. Furthermore, they may unconsciously discriminate against their peers of color using a variety of subtle social cues. This unconscious discrimination has been repeatedly observed in classroom settings, though there have been studies that found no discrimination. The impact of discrimination when it is present may compound over time and contribute to the achievement gap between dominant and non-dominant group members. Beyond race, teacher perceptions have exhaustively been seen to impact student outcomes, especially in letter grades. Often Black students' parents have less of an expectation that they will be successful in an educational system that has is designed to recreate a racialized caste/class system. This magnifies the importance of teacher expectations for students of color up to three times.

There is a body of research that suggests that Montessori is as effective as other models in educating students. There is little work that pays attention to issues of race/ethnicity and achievement in Montessori education and the work that addresses these issues is significantly flawed in design. A longitudinal early childhood study including schools that work with low income dominant and non-dominant populations as well as those that middle income populations of color found that cross-cultural student/teacher relationships can negatively impact student achievement unless the teacher has an anti-bias perspective. There are a few small studies on teacher and parent perspectives on the use of Montessori education in non-dominant monocultural learning environments as well as in environments with sizable populations of students from different cultural groups than their teachers. Issues of cultural dissonance in the areas of Euro-centrism in the curriculum, as well as beliefs about independence and adult exercise of authority and control show up across studies.

CHAPTER III: Theoretical Framework and Methodology

Critical Race Theory as a Framework to Study Education

The qualitative methods used in this study were applied in a Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework. CRT is a theoretical perspective that uses ideas from multiple academic domains to offer a cultural critique of the hidden racism in American institutions, including social science research. It was born out of the realization by academic legal scholars that the progress toward an egalitarian society promised by the legal actions of the Civil Rights Movement had not been delivered upon [Bell, 2009; Freeman, 1988]. As a matter of fact, there is a CRT critique that argues a significant reason *Brown vs. Board of Education* (1954/5), the landmark Supreme Court case desegregating American schools, passed was not because of its validity as a social justice concern but because of its ability to remove America from an international public relations problem it was having. The issue was due to the televising of the protest movement causing “shame in the global marketplace” at a politically challenging point in the Cold War (Taylor (2009), p. 6). The conclusion of CRT scholars that the legal solution to create lasting social change was ineffective was brought home in the 1980s by the resegregation of schools, the end of affirmative action and the expanding gap in school achievement as it related to race (Taylor, 2009).

This critical framework puts race and racism at the front of research methodology (Solórzano & Yosso, 2009). In its analysis of race, it does not simplify the complexity of the experience of non-dominant group members when story telling or sharing “narratives” that can value or devalue their experience of difference when shared in social situations with people of similar or different cultural backgrounds. The framework deals with the overlap of race, gender

and class in the experiences of people of color in a variety of social contexts, including educational ones. A critique of traditional interpretations of the experiences of students of color is a part of the application of the theory. It is an active practice that looks to transform subordination of these groups. Furthermore, Critical Race Theory (CRT) looks at non-dominant aspects of identity as place of strength. It is interdisciplinary and brings in ideas from women's studies, law, ethnic studies, sociology, history and humanities to understand the experiences of students of color.

In education, CRT tends to highlight particular inequities in the American educational system so that it can be transformed, with a vision of liberating American society from its oppressive tendencies. Gloria Ladson-Billings (2009a) is known for being at the forefront in applying the theories of CRT to the American educational arena. She sums up the essential racial issues in education in need of transformation as curriculum, instruction, assessment, school funding and desegregation.

From a CRT perspective, the purpose of curriculum is to "maintain a White supremacist master script" (p. 29). It is a component of institutional³ racism that mutes and erases the stories of people of color and downplays their ability to measure up in the mythical American meritocracy. Diversity curriculum in many schools educates about cultures other than the dominant American one in a race-blind way. This is done by mentioning that all Americans are immigrants while subtly suggesting that many African-Americans and Latinos failed to achieve

³ Institutional racism is that which is built into the justice, economic, political, educational and health care systems of a society that grant or deny benefits based on race (Barbarin, 1981). It is distinct from individual prejudice or discrimination that occurs person to person and lacks the power to dominate an entire group in the way that institutional racism does (Augoustinos, 2010).

the American dream of middle income success because they are inherently inferior. As a result of structural racism in other parts of society, students of color come to school poorly prepared and are given limited access to gifted and advanced placement courses where critical thinking is taught and encouraged in order to train an American managerial class (Noguera, Route-Chatmon, Scott-George, Fuentes, & Wing-Yonemura, 2008; Kozol, 1991). What is or isn't included in the curriculum and who has access to more challenging courses that may result in better paying jobs are the structural issues that surround race and contribute to a racialized caste system in America (Harris, 1993).

Some traditional instructional methods may contribute to institutionalized racism in American education because they are based on flawed educator perceptions that serve as self-fulfilling prophecies. Low-income students and students of color are much more likely to get drill-based instruction that is boring, rote and requires them to remain seated, a series of strategies that are not culturally relevant (Levin, 1994; Apple & King, 1974). The overuse of this type of instruction in communities of color is due to the stereotyped belief that people of color are not as intellectually capable as dominant group members and that their flawed cultural values cause them to be deficient. These perspectives are referred to genetic and cultural determinism and together the educational view of students they create is referred to as the deficit model (Solorzano & Yasso, 2001). Based on this misconception, instruction is dumbed down and remedialized (Hilliard, 1978; Ladson-Billings 2009a). This most likely contributes to African American students being significantly over referred to special education classes and receiving significantly more discipline than their peers because pupils tend to act out when they are bored (Barbarin, 1981; Kunjufu, 2005). In some circumstances, this model contributes to dis-identification with school. According to the deficiency model, if the strategies educators are

using do not work, there must be something wrong with the student, their family and their culture. Delivery of curriculum using low-quality instructional methods from a deficiency perspective is a component of institutional racism in American schools.

Standardized assessment is the third component of schooling upon that CRT highlights as racially problematic. CRT puts forth that such testing is used in American education to prove that students of color are inferior (Ladson-Billings, 2009a). Standardized testing serves as a tool of scientific measurement to empirically prove this fact. It does not necessarily measure what students can do in the real world; it just measures what they can do on a test on a given day under a particular type of pressure. Some of this pressure occurs for both high achieving White female students in math and high achieving students of color in language testing in such a way as to negatively impact their achievement. This is referred to as “stereotype threat” (Steele, 2009). The fear of performing poorly as one’s subgroup is expected to do can create so much anxiety for these groups of students that their test performance does not reflect their actual abilities in the classroom. Standardized testing interacts with societal bias in such a way as to make achievement scores of these subgroups of students inaccurate which reinforces the “empirical” based beliefs that females are bad at math and people of color are bad at language and that the problem is inherent in them, not in the discriminatory system.

School funding is another pillar of inequity in American education that CRT examines closely. In the United States, the task of educating the population, including funding schools, is largely the purview of each state to administrate. However, CRT scholars point out that all 50 states fund schools exactly the same way, based on property taxes. Therefore, this is an institutionally racist practice that results in students of different races and ethnicities in the same

states receiving drastically different educations due to the relationship between income and race in the United States. As a result, all across the country, students in wealthier, usually White, areas have schools that receive as much as twice the funding of those attended by students of color (Kozol, 1991).

Desegregation is the final component of American educational inequity that CRT addresses. As earlier mentioned, the legal critique of this topic is that legislative intervention in school segregation was implemented to benefit the dominant cultural group in an international Cold War public relations move. America did it to look good, not because it was the right thing to do. Once the need for that sort of international public image work receded, so did the efforts to force desegregation to become common place and exist over time (Bell, 2009). American schools have re-segregated with multiple impacts on equity in American civil society.

CRT as a Critique of Qualitative Research Methods

One of the educational structures that CRT considers to support institutional racism throughout American culture is academic research methods. The earlier mentioned use of standardized assessment in education is a quantitative example of how quantitative data gathering can be used to sustain educational inequity and reinforce stereotyped beliefs. Qualitative research is also implicated and looked at with a close eye in CRT (Parker & Lynn, 2009). Historically, qualitative research in education has overlooked the questions and concerns of non-dominant groups. Largely, those concerns have been explained away in educational research through genetic or essentialist lenses. The argument goes like this; women, people of color or those having low socio-economic status are just not as smart as the dominant group because their brains are different or their genes are different. When it comes to the subject of

race, qualitative research "...de-emphasized race by arguing that the problems minority students experience in schools can be understood via class or gender analyses that do not fully take race, culture, language, and immigrant status into account" (Parker & Lynn, p. 153). Solórzano and Yosso (2009) also point out that social science researchers have historically failed to do anything other than point out how non-dominant groups do not measure up to the normative behavior standards of the dominant group. Furthermore, they state that qualitative research from a CRT perspective should include stories from the margins to build community, challenge White supremacy, empower those on the margins, and develop a richer understanding of the complexity of reality and human experience for the benefit of all.

Parker and Lynn (2009) note that other issues in qualitative research that CRT critiques center on the relationship of the researcher to the community being researched. This includes using inappropriate methods of analysis to explore educational issues in the African-American community and the lack of minority representation in the university research community. The Montessori research community is a subset of this community that has the same issues with lack of minority representation. Furthermore, issues of participant exploitation by researchers are part of the CRT challenge to qualitative research is also brought forth in this research. The perception of the community researched that the researcher has an appropriate level of cultural knowledge to accurately perceive and interpret their community is considered important information. As a result, CRT methodology requires that researchers tell some of their own personal stories and participate in self critique if they are researching as members of a cultural group of which they are not members.

Parker and Lynn (2009) go on to say that CRT's use is now widespread enough that a body of criticism that articulates its limitations has emerged. Some researchers have gone into minority communities expecting that participants would have an ability to articulate a clear social critique and found themselves sorely disappointed. In the Native American community, CRT has come under fire as just another way to box in native-indigenous people and their hopes for education (2009). There are also significant concerns about CRT remaining an ivory tower conversation that does not trickle down into the practical, lived experience of Americans or becomes distorted in education by a desire for a quick solution. Ladson-Billings (2009a) puts words to this dilemma in education:

As excited as I might be about the potential of CRT for illuminating our thinking about school inequity, I believe educational researchers need much more time to study and understand the legal literature in which it is situated. It is very tempting to appropriate CRT as a more powerful explanatory narrative for the persistent problems of race, racism, and social injustice. If we are serious about solving these problems in schools and classrooms, we have to be serious about the intense study and careful rethinking of race and education and law. Adopting and adapting CRT as a framework for educational equity means that we will have to expose racism in education *and* propose radical solutions for addressing it. We will have to take bold and sometimes unpopular positions.

We may be pilloried figuratively or, at least, vilified for these stands ... We may have to defend a radical approach to democracy that seriously undermines the privilege of those who have so skillfully carved that privilege into the foundation of the nation. We have to adopt a position of consistently swimming against the current. We run the risk of being permanent outsiders, but, as Wynter (1992) suggests, we must operate from a position of *alterity* or *liminality* where we may 'call into question the rules of functioning on whose basis the United States conceptualizes itself as a generically 'White' nation, and elaborate its present system of societal self-knowledge' (p. 19). But, I fear we (educational researchers) may never assume the liminal position because of the dangers, its discomfort, and because we insist on thinking of ourselves as permanent residents in a *nice* field like education (p.33).

The warning that there is no quick fix to the institutional racism that runs throughout American society is an important critique for scholars and educational practitioners to heed as they begin the complex and challenging work of applying the ideas of CRT to research in education.

Methodology

Qualitative methods aligned with CRT were used in the design of this research. In order to determine parent, administrator and teacher understandings of and practices in implementing the Montessori method with students of color, I developed an interview protocol to use with teachers and administrators. I piloted the administrator protocol at a Midwestern, urban

neighborhood school with a Montessori program inside it. The student population in the school was 99% African American and low income. The administrator was also African American. Next, I piloted the teacher interview protocol and the classroom observation at a magnet school with a neighborhood boundary and piloted a refined version of the administrator protocol as well. The protocols at this stage of development had questions about homework, discipline and there were more questions about students living in low income situations.

After reading the Schonleber and Howes' studies in which parents were included, I decided to add a parent interview as their perceptions seemed especially important in determining if people of color felt like their cultural experiences are integrated into Montessori education. I initially piloted the parent interview protocol using a focus group of ten participants at the Midwestern Montessori Early Childhood (MMEC) site described in detail in the next chapter. The responses I got helped to identify some initial themes. Minority parents were appreciative of the fact that their children were receiving an interesting education with a global perspective. They were also acutely aware that they received educations that were much more about socializing them than teaching them anything. Boredom with their schooling came up repeatedly. It also became clear that the focus group format allowed me to get a broad view on parents understanding, it did not allow me to go deep into their experiences with education. As a result, I decided to pursue individual interviews in the next round.

I also ran a focus group with ten teachers at MMEC on the same trip. Important themes that emerged there were that most teachers had no training in working with diverse populations other than what was offered on site and that training seemed to be largely based on the work of Ruby Payne about working with low income communities, little of which is based in scientific

research. Also, a lack complete of minority lead teachers and a recent loss of African American assistant due to budget cuts came to the forefront. After the pilot focus groups, I refined the protocols and decided to interview individuals in order to dive deeper into the topic of the perceived and actual experiences of students and families of color in Montessori public schools.

Pilot Study

I used the teacher and administrator protocols developed and refined to interview a lead teacher and a principal at a Montessori magnet school which I will refer to as Maria Montessori Magnet, though that is not its actual name. They were not able to provide me with a parent to interview. I interviewed an early elementary teacher of a first through third grade multi-aged classroom six to nine year old that was in her third year of teaching and a principal that had twenty years of experience in education. Both were White. Analysis of these interviews also revealed the use of the Ruby Payne training about strategies for working with low income communities at this school. The presence of stereotypical perceptions of populations of color and their collapse of their educational needs with low-income populations by the teacher was noted. Finally, the value of working with students and their families for three years in bridging cross-cultural and cross-economic status gaps became apparent.

A Framework for Color Blindness

The ideas that the middle income White teacher and the administrator hold about the needs of low income students and students of color are informed by district sponsored professional development. This particular school district uses a professional development program that has been widely accepted by school districts that is widely scorned by the academic

community. The program is called "A Framework for Understanding Poverty". It is based on a book by the same name self-published by a woman named Ruby Payne (2003). In the administrators words,

We give all our teachers and everybody that works for our district the Ruby Payne

training. It doesn't so much focus on just minorities but in a culture of poverty. Because

when you work in a school of poverty, our Anglo students of poverty exhibit

"universality traits"⁴ just like the African-American students of poverty so sometimes it's

more of an economic piece that it is just a racial piece.

Public school systems have really taken up this training, and academics have really decried it (Gorski, 2008). Gorski speculates that it is comforting to majority educators because it does not challenge them to question their stereotypes or their basic understandings of the world. His meta-analysis of the criticism of the work is that the limited portion of it that is based in research is old dated and from a deficit model perspective. Her work is self-published and has never been through a peer review. Payne has done no current research to support her premise that those

⁴ Universality traits are 70 characteristics of communities living in poverty described in a theory about their being a culture of poverty established by anthropologist Oscar Lewis. He did ethnographic research in low income urban areas of Mexico, New York, Puerto Rico and Cuba in the 1950s and 1960s. Some examples of these traits are: lives in the moment, lack of order/organization, experiences time in the present moment, values a sense of humor, negative orientation, uses discipline to punish, believes in fate, uses the body to attract a partner, considers people to be possessions, places importance on non-verbal communication, identity tied to a martyr/rescuer role for women, significance of relationships, matriarchal structures for families, strong oral-language tradition, the importance of personalities, significance of entertainment, and conducts communication and daily living in environments with a high noise volume (Payne, 1994).

living in the “culture of poverty” can be re-educated to understand the culture of the middle class and thus be culturally literate in middle class situations and successful according to those standards. This does nothing to include the strengths that students living in low income situations bring to school or to make the educational experience more relevant for them. Finally, she does not address the systematic nature of classism or address racism at all. Having middle class values is not going to guarantee one a job in an economy that has a 7 % unemployment rate all the time. The district has chosen a professional development model around class issues in education that does not analyze race and class from a scholarly position. It’s a model that may actually contribute to maintaining the school’s position in culturally reproducing race and income level inequity. Students of color have needs around developing school esteem, support for healthy identity development through inclusive curriculum content, as well as direct instruction language instruction that includes dialects of English or native languages spoken at home (Delpit, 1995; Kunjufu, 2005; Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2012) that professional development like the Ruby Payne training does not address because it does not acknowledge the institutional racism in America, inclusive of its schools.

The limitations of the Payne’s framework can be seen in the elementary teacher’s articulation of the needs of students and families of color. She states,

A lot of students with, uhm, I would say with, uhm, how do I want to say this?

Students from various backgrounds they have different needs. I know when I give conferences, uhm, most of my African-American population; they are wanting to know,

“Is my child doing well. What are the things I can do at home?” That’s about where it

stops. They just want to know the basics. Uhm, more of the upper middle class

Caucasian students their parents want to see data. They ask the same questions but it's elevated more."

The teacher's racing of class when she discusses what parents are looking for in communication in conferences and the fact that a desire to want to know about data is considered to be "elevated" and associated with White, upper middle classness is noteworthy. Speaking to low income families in ways they can understand that do not leave them feeling separated from service providers due to the use of jargon is one of Ruby Payne's strategies for the practical application of understandings garnered from the "universality traits". However, it avoids the troubling issue of the fact that low income parents of color are uncomfortable in schools due to the fact that they have been used to socialize them to their position at the bottom of the social order below low income White folks and that empirical data and jargon have been used to perpetuate this injustice.

The belief in the inherent superiority of empirical science and the data associated with it is a view ascribed to members of the dominant group of educators in the United States by Lisa Delpit in her analysis of the challenges in cross cultural relationships in American education (1995). It is often a way that educators from the dominant group dismiss or devalue the feedback and input of parents and educators of color. The classroom teacher in this school was clear that none of the families of color in her classroom were middle-income. When asked about the needs of low-income families she mentioned African-American low-income families and upper-middle class Caucasian families as seeking different kinds of information. However, the low-income White families did not come up. Based on the schools demographics, the odds are that at least a quarter of the students in the class were both White and living in poverty. Perhaps the conflation

of race and class is so prevalent in thinking patterns that we do not even see White poverty since it is not as common there as it is in communities of color. This is an idea to consider in further research. No generalizable conclusions can be drawn from this limited study.

The ability of strong relationships built over the course of a three-year cycle in bridging socio-economic differences emerged as a theme.

You have students with the three-year cycle, they are very comfortable with us so if they have a need at home maybe food or, uhm, some kind of material like indoor shoes or they're needing something for school they will definitely let us know that they have that need, and we meet that need for them.

This idea of the importance of relationships in dealing with the needs of students from diverse economic and cultural backgrounds shows up here for the first time and is repeated in several other contexts. In a Montessori school, this makes a lot of sense because one of the cornerstone's of the Montessori philosophy is that relationships are the air that learning breathes; they are central to the process of constructing knowledge (Montessori, 2009). Also, the three-year cycle saves a lot of instructional time for teachers, students and families. Instead of having to create new relationships during a three-year cycle, they get to deepen the ones they already have.

The teacher and the administrator have different views of the impact of poverty and race on students, appropriate to their positionality in the school. The administrator was highly aware of the needs of her low-income students and that low-income students of color had different issues to grapple with than their dominant group peers. However, she did not label or articulate

the reason for this, a variety of different types of institutional racism. Her own words reveal her understanding of the needs of low-income students and how the school addresses them:

Usually there are social needs. There can be health needs. Oftentimes there can be lack of dental care, lack of proper immunizations, lack of regular checkups, uhm, lack of mental health, uhm, or lack of medication for illnesses, be they physical illnesses or emotional illnesses. Uh, the inability to pay for medication, lack of transportation, uhm, so they can't come to school for as many things. Uh, they just can't come on a whim to have lunch with their child, come to a parent teacher conference with no transportation, anything you can think of that would be a societal issue that could be linked to lack of funds is present. So, uhm, care is linked to academics. The lack of time that they have available because they work several minimum wage jobs, because they're trying to make ends meet. They will work several rather than one more lucrative job. Less time with their students, less reading, less communication that isn't command driven like, "Pick up your shoes. Clean your room. Watch your baby brother." Uh rather than, "Where do you suppose the lost city of Atlantis is? Why do you think that?" A whole different kind of conversation, and so all of that impacts the way that kids come to us, and it's poverty issues . . . connecting with other service agencies, uhm, I am trying to think of some of the wrap around services we offer but usually they are health related. They tend to be

education related like getting parents access to community colleges, child care, that's a big one, transportation, health insurance, all those kinds of things that a more affluent family would be able to provide for themselves.

The administrator articulates the big picture needs of low income families in relation to other organizations and services in the community. In a discussion about the reasons for the racial achievement gap, she clearly links academic achievement to these needs and discusses how the school takes on the task of dealing with the underlying basic needs as an intervention for dealing with academic challenges.

In reading a lot of it is vocabulary and inferential comprehension. The ability or the luxury to be able to think beyond basic needs and essential things and make connections and to use higher level vocabulary. There are many things they come, often times, not always, at a disadvantage, and so it takes longer and an enriched, it's sort of like a gifted child, for a gifted child, every day. So the longer they are in a very enriched vocabulary setting that's using Greek and Latin roots and high level vocabulary, their vocabulary grows as well. As long as we are taking care of their essential needs, we are feeding them three times a day. We are giving them coats. We are buying them shoes. We are providing them transportation. We are giving them dental care at school. We are

providing them shots, we're doing those basic Maslow needs, then they are free to start thinking deeper thoughts like, "What do you think the characters motivation was in that story? Why do you think the author wrote that story?" The kinds of questions that standardized tests are asking that when they are worried about being hungry or they've got a really bad abscessed tooth, they can't think about sometimes.

Finding ways to address the basic human and social needs of students and their families is considered by the principal to be part of the job of the school in educating the schools' students living in low-income situations.

In the interview with the principal, the needs of low-income students of color as distinct from low-income students from the dominant American racial group were discussed. She clearly stated that low income, African American students were much more likely not to know people who were educated that got employment and financial rewards as a result of that education:

Interviewee:

I would say one of the things I would point to most because achievement, the longer they are here the less disparity there is between them and their peers; but, when they come, the disparity is larger and some of that is because they don't have a lot of role models in their families that have received higher education or have made a living as a result of applying themselves in the school setting. So they don't equate doing well in school or performing in school to doing well in life or having money. So I think there is a disconnect there. It is

almost like having, a uhm, an inculcation or an indoctrinating or changing a cultural mindset that education has value. And that is only done after that relationship piece is built.

Researcher:

And would you say that that is the same or different for your low-income Anglo families?

Interviewee:

Different because, uhm, those families even though they haven't had higher education, they've seen it in other people in their community, in their neighborhood, or other people in their family. Maybe they're not the successful one in their family; maybe they know of others. Whereas sometimes in the African-American community, though not all, that's an overgeneralization, but some don't have those models to look to.

I failed to follow up this line of questioning with a probe that might have revealed why she thought this difference existed. So, we did not make it to a place where we had a conscious conversation about racism. In general, White people (including the researcher) are uncomfortable discussing race, because usually they have the luxury of not having to. Many stay in dominant group places and spaces their whole lives. However, even in integrated settings, there is a tendency to avoid the feelings of discomfort around noticing race by dominant group members. Inaccurately collapsing race and class on the part of the teacher, the importance of relationships

to transcending socio-economic differences, and a failure to name racism emerged as themes in the pilot of the individual teacher and administrator interviews.

Emergent Themes in the Classroom Observation

In order to begin to look into the ways race/ethnicity and class impact Montessorians' educational practices, I observed in a multi-aged first through third grade classroom for thirty minutes. There were 23 students total in the classroom. Seven of them were boys and fourteen were girls. All of the boys were of European descent except for one who was of African descent. Five of the girls were of African descent and two were multi-racial. The other half the girls were of European descent. There were three adults in the room, and they were all of European descent. There was a lead teacher in her late twenties or early thirties, an assistant teacher in her mid-forties and a student teacher from a nearby university in her early twenties. In my observation, I watched a small group math lesson, a small group language lesson, and students working independently while the small groups happened. When I looked at the interactions between the students and the students and the teachers some interesting patterns suggested themselves.

The blindness of cultural purveyors such as teachers to their participation in and perpetuation of the structures like racism and classism is one way those structures are perpetuated over time. One way that white male privilege is established in American society is by allowing male students to interrupt other students and dominate classroom discussion (Sleeter & Grant, 1998). In the reading lesson, white male students were the majority of students in the lesson, so it is hard to say if they dominated it. They were observed to interrupt other students and the teacher. In response to the need to determine the percentage of interruption to group

percentage, I created a format to track the gender, race and ethnicity of interrupting students in the observations done at MMEC and Midwestern Montessori Elementary (MMEL).

Some student behaviors also suggested a pattern of avoidant behaviors on the part of female students of color in the classroom. When it was time to do written follow up in a reading lesson, one multi racial student left the lesson to get her notebook and simply did not return to the lesson. The other multi racial student in the lesson went to get pencils for the group. When she got back, her pencil lead broke, and she had to go get another pencil. When she returned, she asked if she could leave without doing the lesson. Additionally, a pair of African-American girls cleaned white boards for a half hour. In a Montessori classroom, student involvement in an activity maintaining the classroom environment during the work cycle is not uncommon. I would have to do more observation to determine if this was an avoidant behavior. Interrupting patterns for White male students were observed and a potential pattern of work avoidance on the part of female students of color were noted.

Qualitative Research Methods in This Study

One core research method in this paper is “responsive interviewing” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 37). The goal of the “responsive interviewing” in this study is to find out how parents, teachers and administrators understand race and ethnicity in the context of Montessori teaching “to provide nuance and precision, context, and evidence all at the same time” (Rubin, p. 37). Responsive interviewing was used to gather first person data about knowledge, attitudes and practices. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Participants were then given copies of the transcripts to verify their accuracy.

At MMEC and MMEL, I preceded the interviews with a two-hour observation to gather data about actual classroom practices. At Maria Montessori Magnet School, I did the interview before the observation. Doing the observation first allowed me to pull from teachers' actual practice and made the interaction richer. Initially, I kept a running record in the field and typed it up when I returned looking for patterns that reflected or conflicted with practices and theories that presented themselves in the interviews. I piloted a system for tracking race, ethnicity and gender parallel to keeping a running record at two different locations. In later observations, I tabulated the numbers of interactions by race/ethnicity and gender. Then, I compared them to actual interactions in the classroom to see if students were getting equal access to their instructors.

The coding practices of grounded theory were used to process the data gathered in both the interviews and observations (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). This represents a modified use of grounded theory, as I believe it is impossible to come to a project with an empty or objective brain. I have been studying the use of Montessori education in educational reform for the last two years, and I have been a teacher and administrator in Montessori private, neighborhood and charter schools for the past eighteen years. I acknowledge that I came to this project with some preconceived notions. My life experiences have influenced this research and my view of the data. I am an insider in Montessori education, but I am an outsider in the programs I am studying and am not employed by them.

I began with line-by-line open coding. After that, I determined patterns in the open codes and established more focused codes. Throughout the coding process I wrote integrative and

theoretical memos to develop the themes that emerged in the data. I also read theory throughout the process and that influenced how I gathered and interpreted the data.

Participant Recruitment

I announced at an Association of Illinois Montessori Schools meeting in the fall of 2011 that I was looking for schools to research the topic of diversity and Montessori education. The meeting included school administrators from several Mid-western states as they were working on aligning the Montessori curriculum with the new nationwide curriculum standards in language and math put forth by a committee of the American Board of Governors. Six schools responded, and I used three of them to refine the protocols and observation methods for the case study in this thesis. A fourth was used to develop initial themes in the observation and teacher and administrator interviews. Pilot groups were used with teachers and parents at MMEC to develop initial themes in the parent interview and to further research emergent teacher interview themes. I returned to MMEC and MMEL in one research trip in which I interviewed lead teachers, assistant teachers, administrators and a pair of parents. I also observed in a three to six year old classroom and a six to nine year old classroom using the protocols and observation methods refined at the other sites. These eight interviews and two observations are the case study that comprises this thesis.

The principals at both schools agreed to the interviews and a flyer was distributed to the teachers at each school stating the expectations of an interview and a class observation. One teacher and her assistant at each school agreed to participate. The teachers then distributed flyers developed by the researcher to the parents of color in their classrooms. Two families responded and one pair of parents was interviewed for the case study.

Researcher Profile

I am currently in my third year as the head of a private Montessori school in an urban neighborhood in a large city. It has a 50% dominant, 50% non-dominant student demographic. I have administrated in a Montessori charter and neighborhood school programs at the early childhood and elementary levels. In addition, I have had an educational leadership position in a progressive independent middle/high school. I have taught in Montessori early childhood, charter and private early elementary and independent middle school programs. I have taught in an independent progressive middle and high school as well. These schools were located in the South and the Midwest, and I am AMS certified to teach Montessori early elementary and trained to teach Montessori early childhood. I have worked in urban and suburban settings; in majority lower, middle and upper income schools, and in schools with majority White populations and majority Black populations.

I am a middle-class White woman who attended elementary and middle school public schools in the New Orleans area in the 1970's when urban public school programs were much more desegregated than they are now. When I was introduced to progressive education, I realized that some of the education I received fell under that umbrella. However, teachers that I had who taught in this fashion were in tracked classes where there were substantially more White students than nondominant students and students of color were the majority population in all the schools I attended. The schools were 60% students of color and the highest tracked classes were 25% students of color. When I realized the kind of education I received in those programs was disproportionately available, I became interested in public school applications of Montessori education and educational equity.

In addition, I identify as a member of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) community and have experienced simultaneously what it is like to be both a minority and a majority teacher and administrator working in Montessori public and private schools. Granted, White members of the LGBTQ community have the ability to pass as majority in many situations that people of color do not have, and I am not implying that my experience in education is the same as people of color because the educational system is not set up to funnel me into the lower level of the American socio-economic order. Being left out of curriculum and issues of stereotype in dealing with math assessment are the only issues that CRT addresses in education that a female LGBTQ White person such as myself would have to face. However, I have an outsider's perspective on some aspects of the educational experience and a personal interest in knowing if other non-dominant populations experience their non-majority status in Montessori school cultures in ways that are similar or different from my own.

The Interview Questions

In the pilot interviews, I asked a variety of questions designed to get background information about the informants and their ideas about Montessori education, including components that some parents and teachers who have not had experience outside of traditional education struggle with such as homework and discipline. In the interviews at MMEC and MMEL, I eliminated the questions about homework and discipline and focused more on topics directly related to working with diverse student populations, focusing on questions about perceptions of the needs of low-income families, families of color and their children. See the appendices section to see the interview protocols that were used with teachers (Appendix A), administrators (Appendix B) and parents (Appendix C).

CHAPTER IV: Midwestern Montessori Magnet Program

School Settings

The Montessori magnet program that I am studying is located in a mid-sized Midwestern city of 250,000 residents. In this particular school district, the early childhood portion for three to six year old children is housed in its own building and has its own principal. The elementary and middle school groupings are housed on another campus with a separate administrator. When the program began, it was all housed in the same building. As it grew, the older grades were given their own site. The early childhood program I will continue to refer to as MMEC, a pseudonym. I will refer to the other location as MMEL.

When one drives up to MMEC, the 1960's architecture and the large playing field outside are striking. It is built like a Pizza Hut. Upon entry, the first thing one notices is the murals on the walls. They are landscapes with animals, such as bunnies in a field of flowers. They are carefully executed in a style similar to 19th century European children's book illustrations. The walls are cinder blocks as is typical of much school construction because many schools are also used as emergency shelters in times of natural disasters. The front office is spacious, well-lit and has several plants. The classrooms are large and have sinks at child height, which is typical of Montessori schools as they are designed for the convenience of the students and not the adults.

MMEC has a total enrollment of 240 three to six year old students. Three and four year olds attend half day and five year olds attend full day. Of those students, 53% are of European descent. Some of those students are first generation immigrants from Eastern Europe for whom

English is a second language. 25% are of African descent. 10% are of Latino origin. 3% are Asian, and 9% are multiracial. This reflects the overall population of the city as well

MMEL does not have the same architectural impact as MMEC does. It is also housed in a cinder block building. It has a central courtyard that is surrounded on all sides by four long hallways. In the center of the courtyard are benches. It is referred to as the peace garden, a place where students can go to reflect or work out challenges they are having with each other. This school also has murals in the hallways, but the murals depict children of varying ages and races/ethnicities engaged in learning activities such as reading. Each of the hallways is named after a value such as “diversity,” “honesty,” or “respect”. In the lobby there is a trophy case that has a display about famous African Americans in acknowledgement of African American history month.

534 students attend MMEL in first through eighth grade. 54% of the students are low-income based on free and reduced lunch statistics. 54% are White. 25% are Black, and 9% of students are multiracial. 7% are Native American. 3% are Asian, and 9% are Latino. These statistics closely mirror those of MMEC and the community at large.

Race plays a notable role in the admissions process of both of the schools. Initially the district created the program to encourage voluntary desegregation in a school district under court order to reduce segregation and resolve inequity. MMEC is in a low-income, African American neighborhood in the center of the city. The school is mandated to admit 25% “minority” students. As a result, two lotteries are held. One for African American identified students and one for all other racial/ethnic categories. Since families self-identify for race/ethnicity on application forms, MMEL’s principal reports that families that have multiracial children often

ask if they have a better chance in getting accepted in the lottery if they self-identify their children as African American, multiracial or Caucasian. Once children are accepted to the Montessori program, they have a seat through the eighth grade.

Defining and Labeling Race

The purposes that racial/ethnic categories serve in human cultures are historically complex. A closer look at the meaning and evolution of the term race reveals the nuanced and loaded uses of the concept. The definition of the word race has changed over time. The most recent of these are according to dictionary.com:

a group of persons related by common descent or heredity; a population so related;
Anthropology a. any of the traditional divisions of humankind, the commonest being the Caucasian, Mongoloid, and Negro, characterized by supposedly distinctive and universal physical characteristics: no longer in technical use. b. an arbitrary classification of modern humans, sometimes, especially formerly, based on any or a combination of various physical characteristics, as skin color, facial form, or eye shape, and now frequently based on such genetic markers as blood groups. c. a human population partially isolated reproductively from other populations, whose members share a greater degree of physical and genetic similarity with one another than with other humans; a group of tribes or peoples forming an ethnic stock: *the Slavic race*; any people united by common history, language, cultural traits, etc.: *the Dutch race*.

This term has many negative connotations as these labels for visual markers of genetic differences among humans have been used to rationalize the oppression and sometimes the ownership of one human subgroup by another. This is an essentialist definition of race that

implies that all people labeled in a particular way share identical characteristics. Historically, the term was initially used in describing a group of animals bred for a specific purpose described as a 'racial stock' (qtd. in Kaplan, 2010, p.1561). It was first applied to groups of people by Europeans colonizing other cultures to seize control of their natural resources (Hilliard, 1978). Multiple European countries subsequently used it as a marker to identify those that it was socially acceptable to oppress. European scientists of the time got behind this notion and created a number of systems that "scientifically" validated their view of the "Caucasian" race as superior. This science became a justification for oppression generated by colonization and the system of harnessing the labor of the dominated through slavery (p. 113). Now, Hilliard further asserts, race is used in contemporary American society as a coding system to deny that oppression. The concept of race has always been tied to political dominance.

There has been a debate between anthropologists and biologists about whether or not race, as it refers to subgroups of homo-sapiens, is exclusively a social construct or if it accurately describes biological differences (Kaplan, 2010). In biology, there has been a movement to refer to subgroups of homo-sapiens as populations as opposed to races because of the discomfort of some with the history and accuracy of the concept of race. For the purposes of this paper, I am going to use the word race to refer to subgroups of people that share both a series of genetic markers as well as language, history and culture. I will use the word ethnicity to refer to subgroups of people that may not or may not share genetic markers but share language, history and culture. For instance, the ethnic subgroup referred to as Latino may include people genetically primarily of African, European, Caribbean, North American or South American descent, though the dictionary defines ethnicity as inclusive of both as it does race. The multiple meanings of these words hint at their constructed rather than descriptive natures in political

contexts.

CRT looks to expose and critique the White supremacist nature of American society in order to strengthen its democracy by exposing the foundational concepts that gird ideas about race through its research methods and critical practices (Taylor, 2009). In particular, it looks at the concepts of “Blackness” and “Whiteness” as cultural constructs that are more stereotyped than ever before in American society and considers that they are no longer exclusively connected to skin color. Ladson-Billings (2009a) suggests that the categories look like the following: “Whiteness” equals school achievement, middle class, maleness, beauty, intelligent and science; and “Blackness” equals gangs, welfare recipients, basketball players and the underclass (p. 19). As a result, she sometimes finds herself having the social power of Whiteness that a Latino gardener in her community might not. The use of Black to mean poor and uneducated can be seen in the description of the classroom teacher at Maria Montessori magnet of the needs of her low income families when she describes them as Black and her middle class families as when, though this is a statistical impossibility. When critical race theory scholars discuss the power structures that are alluded to when Blackness and Whiteness are discussed, they capitalize the terms Black and White. I have chosen to do the same in this study.

The Interviewees

The parents that I interviewed are a Latino couple in their thirties. The father grew up with his Mexican parents and they spoke Spanish to him. He does not speak Spanish fluently himself. The mother has a European-American mother and a Mexican-American father. Spanish was not spoken in her home since her mother did not speak it. Both parent subjects have college degrees and self-report that they grew up in middle income homes and have maintained that socioeconomic status in their adulthood. They were educated in rural, Midwestern communities.

In childhood, the father was a member of one of the three Latino families in his community. They invited me over for dinner prior to their interview, and I spoke with them at their kitchen table while their children watched television.

The principal of MMEC is a middle-income White woman in her late forties. She holds a bachelor's degree in vocational economics and learning disabilities, as well as a master's degree in school administration. In addition she has a certificate in school administration from an American Montessori Society training program. She did her principal internship in a rural, low-income district that was all White. Her upbringing was in a rural, mono-cultural White area. Her bachelor's program and her master's program included training on working in low income communities and communities of color. She has sixteen years of classroom teaching experience and nine years in school administration.

The lead teacher I interviewed and observed MMEC is also a veteran educator. She has twelve years of classroom experience, nine of them in Montessori schools. She has a bachelor's degree in elementary education and did additional coursework in early child education to get state licensed. She is Montessori early childhood certified through the American Montessori Society (AMS), this certification includes three to six year olds. Her undergraduate coursework did include one class in diversity. She is a middle income White woman.

The assistant teacher interviewed at MMEC is in her first year of working in a Montessori school. She is also a middle-income White woman. She has a bachelor's degree in therapeutic recreation and attended public school through high school. She worked as a gym teacher in a private school for six years and as an assistant in a public middle school for three years. This is her fourth year of working with a diverse student population.

The principal of MMEL is a middle-income White woman in her early forties. She has a bachelor's degree in elementary education and a master's degree in elementary and middle school administration. Her teaching experience spans twelve years as does her administrative experience. In addition, she has a Montessori administrator's credential from an AMS training center. Her coursework did not include any formal training on working with diverse communities, though her principal internship and her first job were at Title 1 schools.⁵

The lead lower elementary teacher at MMEL has been in the classroom for twenty-one years, twenty of them at MMEL. She has a bachelor's degree in elementary education and is certified by the American Montessori Society in lower elementary or first through third grade. In addition, she is trained but not certified in the Montessori early childhood curriculum. None of her training included information on working with diverse populations.

The assistant teacher interviewed at MMEL has worked at the school for three years and has two years of prior assistant experience. She has a high school diploma and graduated from cosmetology school. She is a middle-income African American woman in her thirties. This is her fifth year of working in a school with a diverse student population.

The Blind Spot in Perceptions of Employee Demographics

Interviews with parents, teachers and administrators revealed some interesting information about the history and perceptions of faculty and staff demographics in the early childhood building. In its nine classrooms, all nine lead teachers are European American. The

⁵ Title 1 refers to a particular segment of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* called "Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged". Its intent is to give students with low-incomes, disabilities, who speak English as a second language, Native American, minority, neglected and abused as well as young children in need of reading assistance access to quality education.

assistant teachers are part-time employees. One of them is African American. This considerable absence of African American adults in the classroom is a relatively recent development. In 2010, the district made some budget cuts and the assistant positions became part-time, as attendance in the afternoon at the school is half of what it is in the morning. As a result, many of the long-time assistants left to go to full-time positions at other schools in the district. At MMEC, there are sixteen assistant teachers. Of those, four are African American. They include an assistant, a librarian, an administrative assistant, and a speech therapist. All the lead teachers at MMEC are White and budget cuts drastically reduced the number of African American assistants.

When I initially questioned the lead teacher and the principal at MMEC about the demographics of school employees, neither were clear on the total numbers of African American faculty and staff. The recent turnover may be a contributing factor to this lack of clarity. However, there may be some other issues at play. The White assistant teacher did not know numbers but said it was lopsided toward Caucasians. Initially, the lead teacher, who was European American, said there was only one African American member of the faculty and staff, and she identified her as an assistant. Later in the interview, she mentioned the speech therapist specifically in relation to this question, and a story about an African American administrative assistant emerged in relation to another prompt. The principal initially said she had two African American employees. Anecdotally, she mentioned the administrative assistant, and she remembered the librarian later in the interview. Without being asked, both the teacher and the administrator offered their knowledge of the male teachers on staff, a statistic that the principal stated was “just as important” as the number of teachers of color. There are eight men and they teach elective classes. The female parent also brought up the number of men at the school when I

inquired into her awareness of school employee demographics. Unconsciously, the presences appears to be more important to those interviewed than that of people of color.⁶ I had to talk to two different people and pull from anecdote to estimate the number of African American employees at MMEC.

At Maria Montessori Magnet School the White administrator and a lower elementary lead teacher each failed to include office staff when asked about faculty and staff demographics. At Maria Montessori Magnet School and MMEC, there were African Americans and European Americans working in the administrative offices that I had to walk through to interview the school principals. I interviewed a Latino couple at MMEC and the father had no idea what the school's employee demographics were. The mother was aware that there were only a few African American women in the building. It is fascinating most of these women are acutely aware of the presence and absence of men in the building -- a piece of information that I did not ask for -- and less aware about the presence of the women of color in the building. Also worthy of note is that the father interviewed only rarely entered the building and thus had little idea of the statistics. This hints at the ongoing gendering of who is responsible for the education of children, the mother. This finding affirms the CRT notion that race/ethnicity, gender, income level and orientation are inter-related. Once you begin to look at the social organization of one of these structures, their relationships to the others become apparent.

⁶The absence of men in early childhood and elementary education is a real issue that does negatively impact male students. However, it is not the subject of this research or the questions that were asked. Its insertion suggests a strong socialization in the participants to making males a focal point.

At MMEL, the response to questions about demographics were clearer but also revealed a lack of conscious awareness about the impact of structural racism on the teaching staff and a blind spot about all employees in traditional low income positions. When asked about “faculty and staff demographics”, the principal noted that she had forty-five certified staff and that two of them were African American and three were men. The way I asked her this question was more open-ended than the way I asked the principal of MMEC so the inclusion of gender statistics was not off topic. She went on to say that she had eighty employees total and that forty-five of them were certified teachers. When I asked her about the demographics of classroom assistants her response was, “Gosh, I’ve never broken it down that way.” Then she stated that seven out of twenty-five of the assistant teachers were African American. Additionally, the only people she considered worth counting in these numbers are those working in the classroom. She only accounts for the race, gender and ethnicity demographics of seventy of her employees. I can assume that the other 10 are office, cafeteria and maintenance staff. Of the seventy demographics were given for, nine were African American. 12% of teachers and assistants were people of color. People of color accounted for only 2% of certified teachers. At MMEC and MMEL, administrators had blind spots when it came to including people of color and low income employees in school demographics. The percentage of African Americans in the organization may actually be much higher due to these blind spots.

The lead elementary teacher at MMEL, a middle-income White woman, was unclear about the racial/ethnic demographics of the people in the building: “I really don’t know. I guess I said it was diverse, but it really isn’t that diverse. Uhm, I am trying to think. We have so many people coming and going. I mean, if you include our assistants and all; it is probably pretty

diverse.” Her assistant, who is a middle-income Black woman, did not know the exact numbers, but had a much more accurate sense of the situation:

It’s not equally balanced, but it’s enough where it works. We’ve always believed, say for instance, we’ve got our six to nine level. For every teacher there’s an assistant. It’s not a equal when you say Black, White or Hispanic; it’s not equal but we work together. I may be at a same, what I wanna put it. Say for instance, we got a group, a certain amount of us go to lunch at the same times with our classrooms. We got recess, and we have lunch and then we have a group where if we have a certain amount of kids that don’t get work done, they can go to and are where they can finish work. We alternate to go in there and work with those students.

The assistant teacher feels like the under-representation of non-dominant group members on the faculty does not have a negative impact on students because they are visible and interact with most of the student body. It is not unusual for African Americans to have a much greater awareness of race and ethnic demographics than European Americans that have the luxury of not having to be aware of this difference because it has much less impact on the quality of their daily life (Govan, 2011).

This difference in perspective can be seen in comparing these administrator and teacher blind spot findings the with those from an interview with an African American administrator at a

majority African American school with both a Montessori and traditional program in it. She was able to state, without even having to think about it, exactly who in the building was not a member of the school's dominant population, including cafeteria workers. This difference in conscious awareness has several components. I think that the fact that administrative support staff as well as professionals like librarians and speech therapists were inconsistently included by people of European descent, both in leadership and teaching positions, in their demographic perceptions hints at both White and middle class privilege.

Webster's Dictionary (1993) defines privilege to be "a peculiar or personal advantage or right esp. when enjoyed in derogation of common right" (p. 1805). To have privileges based on the color of one's skin is called White privilege, to have privilege based on one's gender is referred to as male privilege, to have advantages based on one's socioeconomic status is socioeconomic or class privilege. Gender and feminist scholar Peggy McIntosh (1988) defines White privilege "... as an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was 'meant' to remain oblivious" (p. 3). White privilege means that majority members can live lives where they rarely are made consciously aware of difference because it has little or no impact on their daily experience. That may not be the case for an administrator of color sitting in the same position as the principal of MMEC or MMEL.

People of color are statistically less likely to have high status professional jobs than those of people of European descent because they do not have the same level of access to education due to the race class confluence in the US. "Embedded" or unconscious prejudices that still operate in American mind sets and social structures also contribute to this inequity (McIntosh, 2008). It costs money to go to school, and low income Americans of color are less likely than

their majority low income counterparts to have friends and family members that are college graduates to guide them on the path as the principal at Maria Montessori Magnet School noted. African Americans who come from low income backgrounds enter the university with a much slimmer chance of graduating than their White peers (hooks, 2003). Even when they do have an education, they are harder for members of the dominant population group to see, much less see as educational leaders. Furthermore, they have less access to social networks that may result in jobs (Royster, 2003). The fact that even before the budget crisis all the lead teachers at MMEC were European-American and the assistants were African-American speaks to the inequity of educational attainment in the candidate pool available to this school.

Anecdotally, I have also encountered private Montessori schools with a significant commitment to having a diverse staff that have this racial and/or ethnic division between lead teachers and assistants that I attribute to both systemic and unconscious bias. Finally, in the initial investigatory work done into the lawsuit in this district that led to the federally mandated creation magnet schools there, the lack of representation of people of color in district leadership was noted (author's name withheld to preserve school anonymity, 1977). The failure to embrace the importance of minority representation and the ability to manifest it in this district has been an issue for decades.

In both schools, people of European and African descent in lower income and status positions such as administrative assistants, food service, janitorial or part-time professional support positions are not included in counts of faculty and staff by middle income administrators and faculty members also hints that middle income positions are the only ones that count. This is middle class privilege at work. A school cannot function without its office and cleaning staff;

and, unconsciously, the people of European descent interviewed did not include them as working in the building or making their work with young people possible, except in anecdote. Just as White privilege and the socialization that goes along with it create a blind spot that does not allow the European American administrators, teachers and assistant to fully see the African Americans they share a building with; middle class privilege keeps them from seeing and valuing the low income people with whom they work, regardless of their race or ethnicity.

At MMEL, the administrator made an initial effort to network in the local colleges to recruit teachers of color but was not successful.

Well, when we first started, six years ago we did a big push at the university. We were looking for minority teachers. The building is named after a local minority doctor. So, my superintendent, who is a minority herself, is like, "We have to get minorities in as teachers." We tried and we tried and we tried. Well first of all on a teacher application it doesn't list whether you are minority or not, which is understandable. Uhm, it was, it was very challenging, and we weren't very successful. I do think that the training and the added school and coursework is a huge factor for anybody whether you are African American, Caucasian, whatever ethnicity. But I think that was a huge issue with trying to attract fresh college students. We went to several colleges trying to get some lines on who we could interview. Many of them, "I just got done with school. I don't want to go back. I just want to teach. And what is this Montessori thing?" And so the most success that we have had is we've really within the district, just word of mouth, but we've not had success getting very many minority teachers. And I don't know what the answer is to that. So if you find out, let me know please.

When I first started working at the school where I am now, all the lead teachers were white and two-thirds of the assistants were black. It has taken me three years to identify potential faculty members of color and begin to get them trained, without the additional requirement of state certification that a public program faces. In addition, I am in one of the largest cities in the country, so there are many more people of color with bachelor's degrees in the job market than in a mid-sized city. Using craigslist.com to advertise for openings has given me access to a diverse candidate pool that the websites of the Montessori professional organizations has not. This is a real challenge that requires long-term strategizing to resolve. If I were in this administrator's shoes, I might try to inspire the district to collaborate with some African American and Latino organizations in the community to create a scholarship program to send high achieving high school graduates of color to one of the education programs that give AMS certifications concurrent with bachelor's degrees in elementary education such as Xavier University or Lander University.

When the administrator at MMEC was asked how she recruits new teachers, she said she hadn't had to hire a teacher for several years but thinks she will need to in the year to come. People apply through the district, and they forward applicant information to the school. The requirement is that they have a bachelor's degree and qualify for state certification. The principal states that candidates of color do not apply. However, in the past, they clearly applied for assistant positions. Candidates who do not research Montessori education in advance of interviews and are not willing to take on the additional training and work required to individualize for students are eliminated in the interview process. At the early childhood center, no attempts are made or have been made to reach out to current or potential future educators of color in the community, despite their under-representation on the staff.

Perceptions about the Importance of Nondominant Group Faculty Representation

In the interviews, I asked school community members if they thought it was important to have people working in the classroom that looked like the nondominant students in the classroom and if they thought it had an impact on teaching and learning. The assistant in the early childhood classroom said:

I don't think so. I think that our, what I've seen in our classroom is the teacher working very hard to be sensitive to whatever different cultural differences there are. For instance, her presentation on Martin Luther King Day, I thought it was superb and, uhm, very educational for everyone in the classroom.

The lead teacher in the early childhood classroom thought it was valuable for the teacher's demographics to reflect the student demographics: "It's important to have someone that reflects themselves, and, uhm, unfortunately not having an African-American teacher on staff, you know, it's kind of nice to have that within a population." Then she went on to say, based on the presence of the other African-American employees, "they might not necessarily be getting it within their classroom, but they are getting it within the whole environment." I think that there is a point there. The librarian and the speech therapist are college educated, support staff showing that people of color are capable of not only assisting, but also of being in charge of things. However, the fact remains that 25% of the student population is African-American and at the early childhood center 8% of the assistant and lead teachers are Black. Of this, 0% are lead teachers. At the elementary school, 11% of the lead and assistant teachers are of African descent. Of this, 2% are lead teachers. Nationwide, Black teachers represent 9% of the teaching force (Ramirez, 2010). Employee demographics at both schools are not reflective of the student or city

population of people of color and the number of lead teachers of color is drastically below the national average.

The early childhood program principal thought that having people of color on staff did impact the classroom experience and the relationships that happen on campus. She largely gave examples of how her administrative assistant was able to have conversations on difficult topics with families. The principal and parents had a comfort level with the administrative assistant discussing children's grooming habits and parent wardrobe choices with parents of color as she was considered a respected member of the local African American community. She is reported to know everyone's uncle or cousin. This ability to know where one fits into or relates to another's extended family is an important way of relating and communicating social status and power and is a part of the cultural social systems that African Americans brought with them from West Africa (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008). The teacher and the principal have awareness that the administrative assistant has cultural knowledge and social capital that they do not have. The teacher also understands the importance of students of color having role models that are similar to themselves. These statements are in sharp contrast to the fact that neither of these people included the administrative assistant in their employee count.

In the elementary program, there is also an awareness of the fact that cross-income level and cross-cultural relationships between faculty, students and families create conflict and impact the experience of students. The early elementary lead teacher states that in monocultural communication, "We can be much more empathetic of the situations that they are going through and where they are coming from, and, uhm, relate better to them. Both the students and the

families, the parents . . . Oh, I think that they do learn better in that type of an environment then.”

The elementary program principal says:

. . . the majority of my staff, they come from middle to upper class homes, came from there and now they are trying to educate some children of poverty and they have really never experienced it themselves, myself included. You know, so I do think that that tends to, I don't want to say skew, but maybe gives them an unrealistic, uhm, expectation sometimes of what then they expect at home. We tell families we don't necessarily assign homework. It's classwork that's not completed that the student has to finish at home for the week, but sometimes that's still overwhelming for a single mom with four to five kids that can barely get food on the table at home and then the teacher is questioning why didn't they get homework done. So, trying to have that conversation with a teacher over and over and over, it can be challenging 'cuz I don't think they quite understand sometimes the, the hardships that they never had to go through. So, I do think for some it does effect, and then you also get the conversation with the parent of, uhm, you know, She doesn't understand my child; she's not African-American. You know, you get those. It doesn't happen very often, particularly if there is a behavior challenge. But, uhm, you know, you do get that reaction sometimes from parents.

This principal is aware of the cultural clash created by income level differences and the separate one around behavior challenges and the perception of African-American students, especially boys, and middle income female teachers. This persistent complaint about middle class teachers' excessive disciplining African American males has a research base and negatively impacts the schooling experiences of African-American males (Kunfuj, 2005; Noguera, 2008).

The Three-Year Cycle as a Tool to Build Strong Cross-Cultural Relationships

The assistant at MMEL is the only adult in the elementary program that states she does not think that cross-cultural relationships negatively impact the students. She is also the only school employee interviewed that is a person of color. She feels like the curriculum is inclusive of people with origins all over the world. In her view, the differences create a place for communication and relationship building to occur:

Uh, I wouldn't think so because part of our daily learning we have different cultural things that we are going over and learning. We have different continents that we are studying. So, that everybody a little bit of something to be involved in and then, even if you got a classroom of students where the majority may be Caucasian students; and you may have a Caucasian teacher and an assistant, well, they gotta figure out, ok, how am I going to relate to them. It's communication and a lot of times you may have a few Black students or Hispanic students may talk to the teacher and the assistant and say, "Well, my family does this, and we are not allowed to do . . ." "It's part of the communication

between the students, the parent and the teacher to find out why they don't do this and then it's accessible.

She describes the job of explaining cultural clashes as being the students' responsibility. It may be that her view reflects that of the current model of color blind cross-cultural teaching. It assumes that young people will be able to articulate cultural differences that are so unconscious that adult group members cannot explain them to other adults outside of their culture. As a result, the foundation that cross-cultural relationships are built on is shaky. However, the idea that relationships and trust built up over time in multi-aged classrooms make a way for schools and families to create strong cross-cultural ties has come up at almost every school where I have interviewed people, inclusive of parents.

The early childhood lead teacher at MMEC goes into detail about the dynamics of a cross-cultural relationship she built with a family over time:

. . . I have a family, they are currently in the area, and I've had the family for nine years. The first year that I had the first child, I was, this mom had a bad experience through school, just didn't like coming to the school. I was just that lady that didn't know what she was talking about, was very confrontational when she had a concern. Her child had been getting bumped into or touched in the coat area, just came in very frustrated, upset, and was taking it out on me. It took me those first three years to get a comfort established with that family that when their second one came in and needed to have some

special education testing done, as soon as I said that this was something that was important, "OK, fine, sign me up. "

Her third child was put into another classroom and had not established that comfort level with the children and with the mom and was having the same experiences that I had initially. Uhm, had asked that this child be moved into my classroom because I had built such a trusting relationship with her that now this child is happy to come to school every day. Mom is working. I, you know, she came in at conferences. I get a hug from her. It's important that we build and understand that everybody is coming with their own backgrounds and their own needs. I had to meet that parent's needs with me before I was every going to get anywhere with her child.

The conflict sometimes present in cross-cultural relationships is difficult and challenging. It can be overcome and having the same teacher for multiple years may make that process easier. The only people that do not think that cross-cultural relationships negatively impact teaching and learning are the assistant teachers. It is possible that this may be due to the fact that they do not interact with the parents as much as the teachers and administrators do. In addition, they have much less experience in the classroom and no training in cross-cultural and cross-income level teaching.

Teacher Perceptions, Cross-Cultural Teaching and Anti-bias Education

Other research into the impact of cross-cultural racial/ethnic relations on outcomes can give some insight into effective practices in cross-cultural teacher-child relationships. In her study entitled *Culture and Child Development in Early Childhood Programs*, Howes (2010) looked at twelve early childhood programs in rural North Carolina and in Los Angeles, California that were successful in academically preparing low income students and low income students of color. She found that sharing a heritage/community with the teacher assisted in creating a positive relationship. The nature of the relationship between the teacher and the child forms the foundation for learning, so it is a vital component of early education that can be measured by student outcomes.

In this study, she discovered an additional nuance. Essentially, the sharing of home cultural communities made it easier for some adults to form positive relationships with students with some exceptions. The adults who were able to successfully form positive relationships across communities worked at schools that used anti-racism curricula. All the schools in the study that did this used the National Association for the Education of Young Children's *Anti-Bias Curriculum* (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2012). Howes cautions about generalizing this information due to the small size of her sample. She looked at twelve early childhood programs that served 647 students. The findings of this study are similar to those found in seminal ethnographic research with teachers who were successful in inspiring strong educational outcomes in African-American students from low income communities (Ladson-Billings, 2009). She found that successful teachers participated in and respected the student's home communities. They did not necessarily teach a specific anti-racism curriculum, but a critique of the status quo

that creates inequity in students' lives was a part of their classroom curriculum. In addition, teachers were aware of themselves as political beings.

Lisa Delpit (1995) theorizes in her work *Educating Other People's Children* that some African American teachers in monocultural settings engage in teaching practices due to their class socialization that can have just as negative an impact on student school esteem and achievement as those teaching cross-culturally without an anti-racism perspective. None of the aforementioned researchers or theorists look at Montessori programs or teachers. Research about the impact of a teacher having an informed "race consciousness", as opposed to functioning from a "color-blind" (Lieberman, 2011) perspective is in its infancy but does suggest, as logic does, that it will make bridging cultural differences and making classroom content "culturally relevant" to the learners in the room easier (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Types of Racial Bias

In a society where conscious racial bias has become socially unacceptable and most people believe in equity for members of all racial/ethnic groups, the only way a racial under class can continue to be sustained is through unconscious bias created by White and middle income privilege and other subtle types of racism. In order to determine if these more subtle forms of racism are present in Montessori classrooms, it is necessary to understand what they are. Racism is socialization that values the experience of the dominant group, in American society this is people of European descent, and gives them power over members of other groups. This oppression has gone on for hundreds of years and is deeply ingrained in the very systems and worldviews that form the basis of American society. Oppression of this nature also occurs within school institutions. Just as the term race has changed meaning over time, so too has the term

racism. As scholars have begun to study it on a deeper level, they have begun to create terms to distinguish its different facets. For instance, institutional racism is “the manner in which racist practices currently operate in institutions of American society (viz. business, education, politics, justice, health care) . . . and the use of race to determine the distribution of benefits in our society” (Barbarin, 1981a, p. 1-2). As a result of social systems being designed to give preference to dominant group members, a preponderance of people of color live in poverty and must cope with the stress and the strain of that. Over time, this system has created a cycle of poverty centered in, but not exclusive to, communities of color (Barbarin, 1981a).

Barbarin (1981b) notes that Feagin (1975) is the first to articulate the difference between direct and indirect institutional racism. The direct form of this racism can be seen in the passing of laws such as Jim Crow and the practices of realtors and mortgage brokers to only sell and finance homes to people of color in segregated neighborhoods. The goal of this type of racism is to discriminate. Indirect institutional racism can be seen in practices that were not created to discriminate but have outcomes that have the same impact on people of color, such as using verbal referrals in hiring. It can also be the result of direct institutional racism. For instance, red lining (the practice of denying people of color home loans in traditionally White neighborhoods) will result in segregated schools because all the people of color end up living in the same neighborhood, but the result is indirect. Institutional racism has a significant and ongoing impact on the lives of people of color in the United States. Barbarin (1981a) provides a succinct overview of the racism present in American institutions:

Table 1

Institutional Racism in American Society

"HOUSING

- Redlining, concentration of low-income housing in central cities/refusal by major companies to insure inner-city area, exclusionary zoning
- Restriction of nonwhites to specific neighborhoods; exclusion by informal real estate practice
- Significantly fewer minority homeowners
- Minority homes values less than homes of whites
- Black owned homes older
- Minority renters live in older homes and pay a larger percentage of their gross income for housing
- Smaller percentage of minority housing had full plumbing that did whites
- Minorities experience greater overcrowding
- Ingrained patterns of racial segregation

EMPLOYMENT IN BUSINESS AND
INDUSTRY

- Discrimination in selection, retention, promotion
- Use of test for selection on which nonwhite peoples do poorly
- Lack of incentives for those on public welfare to work
- Emphasis is given to seniority in job promotions
- Concentration of nonwhites in low-paying, unskilled jobs

EDUCATION

- Inferior, substandard education provided to nonwhites
- Concentration of nonwhites in special education
- Low performance on standardized achievement tests
- Failure to reflect contributions and culture of nonwhites in curriculum
- Lower admission and retention rates of minorities than whites in higher education

GOVERNMENT

- Inadequate resources for minority related programs—EEO, SBA
- Failure to enforce EEO guidelines
- Minorities concentrated in low-paying jobs
- Lack of job mobility for minorities
- Failure to use minority contract firms in procurement of goods or services

HEALTH

- Maldistribution of health care resources
- Two times as many black babies die in the first month of life as whites
- Minorities considered poor candidates for psychotherapy
- Black psychiatric patients are less likely than whites to receive treatment in the early stages of mental illness

- Unemployment rates for nonwhites double those of whites
- Income of minorities is 57 percent of whites
- Minorities with equal education get lower status/lower income jobs than whites
- The conduct of important business through the 'club' or 'Ole Boy' network which is the bailiwick of white males

CRIMINAL JUSTICE-LAW ENFORCEMENT

- Proportionally more minority males than white males incarcerated
- Frequent run-ins with police lead to negative attitudes toward police
- Few minority personnel in criminal justice system"

Unfortunately, Barbarin's chart is over thirty years old and these inequities still exist, and some of them have become even more extreme. The fundamental institutions in American society are structured to disadvantage people of color. This structure has huge impacts on their health and well being, as well as the health and well being of their children.

Dominant Group Failure to Understand the Depth of Racism in American Society

Dominant group members with good intentions unconsciously discriminate against non-dominant group members and "... greatly underestimate the existence of racial disparities" (Dovidio et al, 2002). An example of this underestimation can be seen in the perception of the administrator of MMEC when she was asked what she learned from working with families of color:

I don't know that there's anything on diversity as much than on just family situations, and being an urban school, and having the huge diversity that we do have, so poverty and, uhm, you know. So, we have moms that are in jail, and how do you deal with that? The actual piece, and I don't know that it's something that you have to just . . . I know that it doesn't have to do with what ethnicity you are.

As the interviewer, I responded with some information about the disproportionate number of people of color in jail in the United States and suggested that it might have something to do with race and ethnicity. She agreed with that. This principal initially underestimates the impact of racism in the lives of the incarcerated members of families of color she serves. Scholars such as Asa Hilliard (1978) articulate that this failure to fully comprehend the depth of the damage caused by racism in the lives of people of color means that issues in cross-cultural education never really get addressed or resolved. He states, “. . . no attention is paid to the dynamics of racism and other forms of oppression and to the design of interventions to prevent racist behavior, since racism is not recognized consciously as part of the problem“ (p. 116). The education system is an institution largely run by dominant group members who do not understand the extent of the problem of racism and the ways that schools and individuals participate in indirect racism and discrimination. Data collected in this case study also shows this shallow understanding is present in a Montessori magnet program.

Cultural Racism in Montessori Schools

Cultural racism is another type of systematic racism, and I would argue that it is also a kind of institutional racism that has both direct and indirect forms. It occurs when a dominant group defines what is normal, standard, valuable and necessary to participate in society (Agoustinis, 2010). These ideas permeate all aspects of a culture such as media, education, etc., and members of non-dominant groups are often required to adopt them in order to succeed. Schools, as a microcosm of society, are institutional sites where cultural racism can be observed closely. Sears' (1988) notion of “symbolic racism” falls into this category. The term was created to describe the white response in the post-civil rights/post-race riots political arena and can be

defined as a blend of negative feelings toward blacks and American values, with a special focus on individualism and the Protestant work ethic. Cultural racism is defining the culture of the dominant group as American and normal, thus implying that the cultures of non-dominant groups are inferior.

Placing a high value on independence and individualism is a cultural norm that is distinctly European in origin (Sears, 1988). As an educational model that originated in Italy, Montessori education places a huge focus on individualism and independence. The theme of cultural clash around the Montessori valuing of independence mentioned in the literature review is also present in this case study. It can be seen in the elementary lead teacher's comments about what she has learned from working with diverse families:

Respondent : Well, I'll tell you what I have learned is that you can get them in here, explain to them the difficulties that their child is having, give them, uhm, things that they can be doing at home and ways that they can be working with me. They want their kids to do well and, uhm, and you just have to keep on 'em, but they will be consistent with you.

Interviewer: How did you get there? How did you arrive at that?

Respondent: Just out of real frustration out of having these minority kids in our classroom who just, I hate to say this, that so interrupt the flow of everything. They just are so dependent on us and are just so unmotivated and undisciplined, you know all the things that we need them to be in here and so they, you know, they were just taking up so much

of our time. And as a matter of fact, I am getting ready to send out a letter to my parents; and when I look at it, it's mostly minority parents. Their parents do nothing and expect us to find their workbook pages for them and find them their stuff to take home, and I'm gonna start kind of not making but highly encouraging these minority parents to come in then and help me and help their child on Friday afternoons, just because the assistant and I just can't spend any more time than we are spending on these kids that are just so dependent on us.

The teacher is experiencing the cultural clash created by having kids raised in home settings that do not value independence around motor planning and executive functioning skills in the same way that the dominant culture institutionalized in the school does, and she finds it incredibly frustrating. She appreciated that her Black students were much more emotionally independent than her White students. However, she has set up a structure to teach parents what independent behavior at school should look like by having them come in and see what self-management skills are valued by the teacher so they can help students practice them. This has the potential to decrease the difference between the home and school environment and improve student achievement as a result. Developing the understanding that a culture clash is taking place has the ability to reduce frustration and speed up the learning curve of dominant teachers in finding ways to build bridges between home and school cultures.

This teacher also expresses frustration that many of the students of color that struggle with internal motivation came through the early childhood program, where there is parent

education about Montessori but no parent training in behavior management techniques to support optimal learning outcomes. In Montessori schools, authoritative behavior management styles are considered to result in more optimal educational outcomes (Lillard, 2005). Parent education around Montessori school classroom culture is a practice many Montessori schools engage in that reduces the cultural conflict between home and the Montessori environment,⁷ though neither school in this study utilize this practice.

Many cultures value cooperative group behavior much more so than the independent/individualistic one that many people in American and European cultures prefer. The conflict that this can create in Montessori schools where teachers are largely White and middle income and rarely are able to define what they mean by independence sometimes results in families of color leaving Montessori schools (Yezbick, 2007). The inability of some schools and practitioners to mediate this significant cultural difference without denigrating people from communities of color can be a form of cultural racism. In Montessori schools, individualism is diluted with a focus on cooperation that is very different than traditional education. It is possible the balance dilutes the Euro-centrism of this particular value. A way to determine this would be to find out if there is less culturally based flight from Montessori schools than traditional schools through exit interviews.

⁷ The focus on self-reliance and cooperation in Montessori schools is also uncomfortable for some people of European descent. Within the dominant community, there is clash between those that would socialize students through authoritarian means and those that would do so through authoritative means.

Discrimination: Racism on the Individual Level

At the individual level, direct racism is distinguished from prejudice/institutional racism by being called discrimination. However, many scholars use prejudice interchangeably with discrimination, especially in psychological research (Augoustinos, 2010). What distinguishes prejudice at the individual level from structural and cultural racism is the lack of ability of an individual with a discriminatory attitude to exert power over an entire group of people. Despite the drastic legal and social changes that have occurred in America after the Civil Rights movements of the 1960's, individual prejudice and institutional racism persist (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal & Esquilin, 2007). Sue et al. present evidence that the majority of Americans believe that in a democratic society, all people regardless of race or ethnicity should have equal access to resources and that the amount of overt/direct racism exhibited in the culture is on the decline. They maintain that this is the case but that indirect and unconscious discrimination remain in place, contributing to an inequitable society.

Psychological researchers have begun to articulate what this indirect discriminatory behavior looks like in an effort to help practitioners in their field who are largely White and have a middle or upper range socioeconomic status become better able to serve their clients of color and avoid the relational damage to trust and the therapeutic relationship caused by individual prejudice (Barbarin, 1981; Dovidio et al., 2002; Siskind, 1981; Sue, Arredondo & McDavis, 1992). These behaviors are referred to as "racial microaggressions" (Pierce, 1970). There are three types of microaggressions according to Sue et al (2007, p. 274): "microassault, microinsult and microinvalidation". Microassault is direct and explicit verbal or non-verbal attack that is meant to hurt its target. Displaying a Confederate flag, name calling around

race/ethnicity and serving members of the dominant group before those of non-dominant groups are examples. Microinsults are unconscious, subtle statements that put down an aspect of a person's identity by calling their skills in to question. An example would be an employer stating, "I believe the most qualified person should get the job, regardless of race" (p. 274). This suggests that people of color lack the qualifications for the position. Failure to make eye contact when talking to an employee of color or a white teacher not calling on students of color may be nonverbal microinsults. Microinvalidations are communications that insinuate that the thoughts, feelings and ideas of people of color are not important such as telling a person of color who attributes poor service to their race or ethnic identity to "lighten up" (p. 274).

Sue et al. (2007) specifically identify nine types of microaggressions that interfere with esteem, positive affect and trust building by people of color. They also interfere with cross-cultural relationships and limit the ability of people of European descent to understand differing racial perspectives. They are: "alien in one's own land, ascription of intelligence, color blindness, criminality, assumption of criminal status, denial of individual racism, myth of meritocracy, pathologizing cultural values/communication styles, second-class status, and environmental invalidation" (p. 275). Their table of examples of microaggressions links this indirect discrimination to the subordinating messages they communicate to people of color (p. 276):

Table 2

Types and Examples of Microaggressions

"Theme	Microaggression	Message
Alien in own land	'Where are you from?'	You are not American.

When Asian Americans and Latinos are assumed to be foreign-born	<p>'Where were you born?'</p> <p>'You speak good English.'</p> <p>A person asking an Asian American to teach them words in their native language</p>	You are a foreigner.
Ascription of intelligence	'You are a credit to your race.'	People of color are generally not as intelligent as Whites.
Assigning intelligence to a person of color on the basis of their race	<p>'You are so articulate.'</p> <p>Asking an Asian person to help with a math or a science problem</p>	<p>It is unusual for someone of your race to be intelligent.</p> <p>All Asians are intelligent and good in math/sciences.</p>
Color blindness	'When I look at you, I don't see color.'	Denying a person of color's racial/ethnic experiences.
Statements that indicate that a White person does not want to acknowledge race	<p>'America is a melting pot.'</p> <p>'There is only one race, the human race.'</p>	<p>Assimilate/acclurate to the dominant culture.</p> <p>Denying the individual as a racial/cultural being</p>
Criminality/assumption of criminal status	A White man or woman clutching their purse or checking their wallet as a Black or Latino approaches or passes	You are a criminal.
A person of color is presumed to be dangerous, criminal or deviant of the basis of their race	A store owner following a customer of color around the store	You are going to steal/You are poor/You do not belong.
	A White person waits to ride the next elevator when a person of color is on it	You are dangerous.
Denial of individual racism	<p>'I'm not a racist. I have several Black friends.'</p> <p>'As a woman, I know what you go through as a racial minority.'</p>	<p>I am immune to racism because I have friends of color.</p> <p>Your racial oppression is no different than my gender oppression. I can't be a racist. I'm like you.</p>

Myth of meritocracy	'I believe the most qualified person should get the job.'	People of color are given extra unfair benefits because of their race.
Statements which assert that race does not play a role in life successes	'Everyone can succeed in this society, if they work hard enough.'	People of color are lazy and/or incompetent and need to work harder.
Pathologizing cultural values/communication styles	Asking a Black person: 'Why do you have to be so loud/animate? Just calm down.'	Assimilate to the dominant culture.
The notion that the communication styles of the dominant/White culture are ideal	To an Asian or Latino person: 'Why are you so quiet? We want to know what you think. Be more verbal.' 'Speak up more.'	
	Dismissing a person who brings up race/culture in work/school setting	Leave your cultural baggage outside.
Second-class citizen	Person of color mistaken for a service worker	People of color are servants to Whites. They couldn't possibly occupy high-status positions.
Occurs when a White person is given preferential treatment as a consumer over a person of color	Having a taxi cab pass a person of color and pick up a White passenger	You are likely to cause trouble and/or travel to a dangerous neighborhood.
	Being ignored at a store counter as attention is given to the White customer behind you	Whites are more valued customers than people of color.
	'You people . . .'	You don't belong. You are a lesser being.
Environmental microaggressions	A college or a university with buildings that are named after White heterosexual upper class males.	You don't belong/ You won't succeed here. There is only so far you can go.
Macro-level microaggressions, which are more apparent on systemic and environmental levels	Television shows and movies that feature predominantly White people, without representation of people of color	You are an outsider/ You don't exist.
		People of color don't/shouldn't

Overcrowding of public value education.
schools in communities of
color

Overabundance of liquor People of color are deviant."
stores in communities of
color

This chart articulates the mechanisms of individual discrimination. Analyzing the practices and beliefs shared by participants in this study through the lens of racial micro-aggressions sheds a startling light on cross-cultural teaching in a Montessori magnet school.

Environmental Microaggressions and Culturally Relevant Teaching

Some White privileges in education are being sure that one's children are taught curriculum that includes them and have the ability to turn on the television or open a magazine and see people that look like them (McIntosh, 2008). When learning about American culture or history, it is assumed that dominant children will be shown pictures of people that look like them and stories with cultural actors from their group. Sue et. al (2007) refer to the absence of people of color in the places they frequent as environmental microaggressions. Some environmental microaggressions are present at MMEC and MMEL. However, there are a variety of inclusive practices in the structure of the formal Montessori curriculum and in ancillary practices as well.

The issue of presenting the White image and experience to the exclusion of others in curriculum are pretty essential areas of White privilege in schools that Montessori education addresses indirectly in some ways and structurally through the curriculum. In some traditional education environments, multicultural studies are add on programs fit in and around existing curriculum and educational goals. In Montessori schools, cultural studies are a cornerstone of the history and geography curriculum. However, at the early childhood and elementary levels, the cultures are pursued and to what depth they are studied are at the discretion of the teacher and the

individual school. This is a place where discrimination sometimes asserts itself. Sometimes I cultures not represented in an individual school get equal or greater instructional time than those present in the school building. At MMEC and MMEL, they study a different continent each year. In addition, families are invited in to share religious and cultural practices associated with holidays as they arise on the calendar. The classroom teacher describes her implementation of family inclusion in the cultural studies curriculum as follows:

As far as, like, studies and academic things, we are doing in the classroom, I think that anytime we are doing or studying something, a different country, a different culture, we always invite the parents to come in and share. We've had Jewish families and Indian families come in. They will dress in their, uhm, different costumes, talk about their different foods. They'll come in and cook sometimes for us. Uhm, so in that way, I try to make sure during the holidays that we address all the holidays in the different countries as part of our cultural studies because it ties right into that, and the kids don't feel like, gosh, we are just talking about this specific family. We are talking about all different kinds of studies from all over.

Latino, African American and Burmese culture get different levels of exploration over time without a particular focus on inclusion despite the fact that students from these cultures are in the classroom and their parents are members of the larger community. However, a parent from the subculture that gets the most amount of consistent instructional time (Hispanic language and

culture) does not feel weekly Spanish class amounts to cultural integration. At Maria Montessori Magnet School, the district sponsored a Black history quiz bowl in which the school participated, and the school sponsored an annual Soul Food Luncheon. There are ways to provide more culturally relevant and integrated experiences for students of color than are explored at these schools.

This continent of study a year practice is carried on at MMEL as well. If students start when they are three and stay in the school until they are thirteen, they will be exposed to some continents twice and some only once. That means Burmese students may only study Asia in depth during one school year in addition to their not being any people from their culture working at the school. There are more culturally relevant opportunities for culturally relevant studies for students of color at MMEL because they are more independent learners due to their more abstract cognitive abilities. However, having the freedom to pursue one's cultural interests is not the same thing as having the study of one's culture woven into the structure of the classroom. In the elementary program when studying countries or famous people, students are usually given the option of what country or what person to study so there is room for them to pursue their own history and interests. The Latino father from MMEC was looking forward to this opportunity for his son as he aged up into MMEL.

At both schools, parents are invited in to come in for a VIP Day to share about their child and their family with the class. Depending on the family presenting, sharing about the child's culture may be the topic of discussion. The cultural knowledge of adults from a variety of cultures is incorporated into the curriculum and they are valued as teachers. This is a common

practice in most Montessori schools and contributes to mitigating European ethnocentricity in the cultural curriculum.

At MMEC, Latino students get far more direct instruction about their culture from the Spanish teacher who is knowledgeable person of European descent, according to the Latino parents that participated in the focus group. They get Spanish once a week which includes information about the arts and history of a variety of Spanish speaking countries. African American students, who are by far the largest minority group in the school, get to see themselves reflected in adults of various socioeconomic statuses at the school. However, there is little direct instruction at MMEC in the history and culture of the African-American community, despite the fact that in the interview the principal said, "We do a lot of direct instruction about the African-American community." The only example she was able to give was a week-long study of the life of Martin Luther King.

A Parent Perspective on Cultural Integration

At MMEC, 10% of the student body is Latino, and there are no Latinos working at the school at all. The mother I interviewed noticed the lack of Latinos in the faculty and staff. "Other than that, I don't think that they have in school, other than in Spanish class, I don't think they have a whole lot of Hispanic integration." Students get an hour of Spanish a week. The Spanish teacher has her own classroom, and it has materials in Spanish that include cultural objects. The mother makes a link between the ability to integrate Hispanic culture into daily instruction with inclusion. It is much easier to teach something you have lived or studied with intention for years, than if you have to learn it from scratch. The classroom teachers who have not studied Hispanic culture in the way that the Spanish teacher has are not integrating it in the classroom because it is

not part of their culture, and they have no training to do so. This mother at MMEC does not perceive daily instruction in her child's classroom to be culturally relevant.

The mother finds "Hispanic integration" important because the difficulty she experienced in establishing a cultural identity for herself coming from a mixed ethnic background. She says:

. . . I know when I grew up, my dad never really talked about his family, never really talked about his culture, and so everything that I learned was in college because I made a point to learn it, and I really struggled with that. I really, when I was in my early twenties, I really, really wanted to know and understand Hispanic culture and heritage. And, uhm, I don't really feel like my husband and I give that to our kids. I feel like his parents, I am very, very thankful that his parents are alive and very present in their lives because my grandparents weren't, and I think they have, you know, that, uhm, going for them.

This issue of struggling with ethnic identity formation for first-generation children of immigrant parents as they become adolescents and young adults is an important one to understand in order to support bicultural students in developing healthy cultural identities and consequently self-esteem.

Nondominant Group Images on the Classroom Shelves

Other curriculum integrations of culture that were mentioned by the principal were inclusion of images of diverse people in classroom materials. Community cards that are a matching work of pictures of the children in the classroom and cultural boxes with images of people from different continents in them are materials where nondominant groups members are depicted. Books in the classroom that show people from all over the world as well as their homes

and their contents were also mentioned as culturally relevant curriculum materials. There is some cultural representation of the students in classroom materials in addition to Martin Luther King studies at MMEC.

Significant initiative in providing representation of diverse people has been taken at MMEL. When asked if she thinks that materials or extensions of the materials should be modified, the principal of that school responded:

I think we try to include, if we are using, uhm, any of the three part cards, any of the nomenclature cards. We try to include pictures of cultural families, and I think that, uhm, I think we have grown in that in the last 10 to 15 years from the materials that we had. You know you go in and you see the typical 60s family. I think we've moved away from those materials and we have tried to include the more multicultural materials. So kind of keeping updated on things, so. . .

It is noteworthy that the typical 60s family is not described as White. There were typical Black families in the 60s as well that were not depicted in Montessori materials because of the White privilege of the people making Montessori materials and the perceived audience for whom they were producing them. Students from a variety of cultural backgrounds are depicted in realistic murals on the walls of the school and there is a "Diversity" hallway. MMEL has shifted in its 20-year history to be more representational in the materials provided and in its building decor .

Lack of Language Study Inclusion as an Environmental Microaggression

There is no conscious awareness that reading is a special area of challenge for students of color or ability to articulate strategies for addressing that fact (Delpit, 1995). According to the standardized language achievement tests used by the school, DIBELS, there is no racial or ethnic achievement gap in the early childhood program. There is, however, one in the elementary program. It varies in size depending upon the year, but the principal of MMEC does not mention it if she has knowledge of the gap at the upper level. However, effects for teacher bias may be cumulative (Ferguson, 2003). The achievement gap in the elementary program may be related to curriculum and instructional methods in the early childhood program.

When asked if she felt like the Montessori curriculum should be modified when working with students of color the lead teacher at MMEC replied “absolutely not” and gave the following reason:

I know that when we look at when Maria Montessori developed her materials she was working with children that needed to have those experiences of hands on connection, and I think when you look at children that typically come from a lower socioeconomic home that don't necessarily have those experiences, you know, we give those key experiences to the children here, and we are meeting those needs for that hands on touch, that concrete understanding, uhm, which many of our more affluent children come to us with those experiences already because mom and dad are taking them to the Children's Museum. Mom and dad are traveling, giving them those experiences. Typically speaking with them, their vocabulary is so much more advanced as they enter into the classroom, so when you look at Maria Montessori's philosophy and the materials, what the children

can grasp with those materials provide a key experience. Talking with the children, letting them explore, I wouldn't change anything to do with the Montessori.

Here again the needs of low socioeconomic status learners are considered the same as the needs of students from historically and contemporarily discriminated against groups. Due to the conflation of race and class in this country, low income children may also be students of color. If that is the case, it means they have additional educational needs as compared to White low socioeconomic status students. As Yzbeck (2007) concludes in her participatory research study with teachers, "Taking the Montessori curriculum as it comes from Europe without augmentation cannot be considered culturally responsive pedagogy" (p.23). Failing to account for the needs of students of color, regardless of their income level, to see themselves represented consistently in the curriculum is a racial microaggression which interferes with their ability to achieve their optimal potential, a major goal of Montessori education.

The MMEC assistant also thought that the curriculum should not be modified when working with students of color. She stated, "I think they can do it and figure it out, even when they come from a background where they haven't been read to since they were a baby. They can be, they can learn and have that desire, and I think they need that." Her perspective on modification is that it means making the curriculum easier, not necessarily more relevant to learners of color. Work by Levin (1994) supports both her and the lead teacher's ideas that students who come to school with less preparation need more exposure and accelerated instruction than those that arrive at school fully prepared by their home experiences.

At MMEL, the understanding of the lower elementary teacher about the academic needs of students of color is more in alignment with Lisa Delpit's ideas. She reports that on an as

needed basis, curriculum creation has occurred to address the needs of some African American students who grow up speaking a different dialect of English than their peers of European descent to have specific grammar and writing instruction to help them with their written and spoken expression of standard English. In her own words, she states:

A lot of times in the writing and the grammar they really struggle with that because of what they are hearing at home and what language they have been brought up with, and I think that you do have to consider that when you are doing grammar and writing with them . . . I think I spend more time with them. I have, in the past, actually made up works to help them hear the correct verb usage and the helping verbs where they want to use the “he has been” kind of stuff to address that . . .

This awareness that students of color sometimes have different needs in regards to the language curriculum resulted in more culturally relevant teaching practices and expansion of the grammar curriculum when needed. There were no reports of similar grammar instruction for Burmese or Spanish speaking students. Neither the teacher nor the principal are aware of the fact that correcting for diction in read-a-loud practice can negatively impact the reading achievement of students of color (Delpit, 1994). During my observation, students went off in pairs to read to each other. For struggling readers, group reading can actually generate anxiety that reduces reading achievement (Fulan, 2010). The teacher informed me that paired reading was a component of the district mandated reading program. At MMEL, some instructional practices and strategies in language are culturally relevant.

The principal at MMEL does not perceive that the curriculum is being modified for students of color in the same way that the classroom teacher does. “No, I don’t think anything

specific for minority students. We look at the individual child that has needs and if we need to modify it according to the child of need but not according to any cultural diversity.”

She also mentioned getting representational and interesting literature into the hands of students of color:

The biggest thing we’ve tried to do is trying to get books at different levels about people that look like them. We either have too many low books and not enough high books for our excelled kids or vice versa. You need high interest for those kids that can’t read. You need high interest that’s going to keep their attention, and it can’t all be a basketball player book. You can’t. You are not all going to be an NBA basketball star. I’m sorry. So you need to find some high interest books about African Americans or people that look like you.

Altering the types of books available for language arts study is definitely a curriculum alteration, though the principal does not describe it as such. The school has also altered the hidden curriculum by providing a club to support the academic health of middle school African-American boys. The principal states:

Respondent: . . . We do a book study or have a discussion and then we do talk about it every year when these reports come out. I mean like this year we’ve been talking about African-American boys. That’s where we knew we didn’t make AYP. That’s where we knew especially middle school African American boys. So my counselor and my assistant principal have what’s called a Boys to Men Group. So every other Friday, they are having speakers from the community come in and speak to them. They have gone to

colleges and they are visiting local colleges. They went to a college basketball game.

Giving them some exposure beyond just the community. Last night they took twelve kids to that Red Tales movie about the Muskegan airfighters. The African American. . .

Interviewer: Oh, oh the Tuskegee Airmen.

Respondent: . . . and so they took the boys to that trying to get them beyond just their home and their personal environment. So we are trying to hit those demographics that we know are challenging and where we haven't seen success. And so we are working with individuals on that.

At MMEL, the curriculum and materials have been altered to individualize grammar and writing instruction for some African American students, to include more images of families of color, to incorporate culturally relevant literature for African American middle schools students, to provide a club to support the development of healthy esteem in African American males to boost their academic achievement. However, intervening to support healthy identity development of Black males in middle school may be too little too late. Identity development and the internalization of environmental bias begins in early childhood (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010), and the Montessori magnet program is far less culturally relevant for African Americans at that level according to the data collected for this study.

The Montessori schools studied had some culturally relevant practices in the cultural curriculum area that bring in nondominant members of a variety of subgroups and incorporated studies of nondominant cultures and had worked to diversify classroom materials and literature. However, these practices stopped short of holistically integrating the cultures of the major

nondominant groups at the school. There was only one interviewee that was aware of culturally appropriate practices for valuing the dialects and native languages of nondominant groups in early childhood and elementary language arts instruction and had used them. For the communication style of one's culture to be absent from the classroom is also an environmental microaggression.

Teacher Perceptions and Second Class Citizen Microaggressions

Not surprisingly, the perceptions that teachers have of students' abilities influence their behavior toward those students. In some situations, that behavior has a disproportionate impact on the achievement of African American males. The Black teaching assistant in the elementary classroom shared her understanding of how teachers that shared their discriminatory beliefs about student potential negatively impact those students achievement. She begins:

. . . now from me having, uhm, kids in school a lot of it comes from some negative feedback that teachers give off and that kind of makes it stretch out a little bit more. . . So, like, I've had experiences with my daughters when they were in high school. Some of the teachers would be like, "Oh, you're not gonna get this." When they act out and the teacher snaps off they may say something like that, or they may hear of a teacher saying something to one of the male students, "This is all you're gonna do. You are never gonna amount to anything 'cuz you do this all the time." Give an example to the student in front of everybody else, but what that student don't realize is, just because that teacher said something, that should be your challenge to prove him wrong. But if that started at home, it's gonna carry.

It is her opinion that some teachers negatively impact the self-esteem of students of color, especially male ones, through direct communication that sort of shows that adults don't believe that students have potential. The experience she describes happened at a local high school, which was not a Montessori school. She was not able to give any examples from the Montessori school where she worked. Her analysis of the powerful impact of students' perceptions of teacher expectations on their academic performance is supported by a significant body of research.

The Pygmalion⁸ Hypothesis and the Second Class Citizen Microaggression

In the late sixties, a behavioral sciences researcher by the name of Roger Rosenthal (1994) began to notice that when scientists had expectations about the outcomes of their research, it impacted the ability of rats to perform more challenging tasks in mazes. If the researcher believed that the rats could learn the new tasks, they were able to more effectively than those taught by a researcher that did not believe the rats could learn the new task. He labeled this researcher belief effect the Pygmalion Hypothesis. He began to wonder if teacher expectations had the same effect on children in classrooms. His initial findings spawned dozens of studies over the next thirty years. What those studies exhaustively revealed was that teachers' expectations subconsciously impact their verbal and non-verbal interactions with students in the classroom. This results in greater learning outcomes for students educators believe should have significant knowledge creation and lower achievement for those they feel should not have major growth. There are four factors that lead to different outcomes based on teacher expectations. The first of these is climate or teacher affect. Those teachers perceive to be "special" get more

⁸ Pygmalion is a character in Greek mythology that falls in love with a sculpture that comes to life. It is also the name of a play by George Bernard Shaw in which a professor attempts to pass off a low income peddler as a duchess at a garden party largely by improving her diction.

warmth verbally and non-verbally (p. 178). The second of these is input or teacher effort. Those that teachers perceive to be more capable get more and a higher degree of challenge in educational instruction. The third is student output. The students that teachers see as highly competent get more response chances both verbally and non-verbally. The final factor is teacher feedback. Students in the “special” category get more informative interactions about their performance, which greatly improves their learning outcomes. Basically, teacher expectations influence student outcomes due to the way they talk to and instruct “special” students and the emotional and verbal space that they give those students to respond to them. In a cross-cultural teaching situation, these interactions may be perceived by students of color to be discriminatory, a second class citizen microaggression.

Teacher Perceptions and Discrimination in the Classroom

The extent to which teacher prejudice based on racial or ethnic stereotypes negatively impacts student achievement is unclear. Rothstein (2004) posits that only half of the gap in student achievement is a result of the education system, and the other half is due to extra school influences such as access to health care, opportunities for learning outside of formal schooling, living conditions and family socioeconomic status. Most middle and upper income students spend their summers engaged in education related activities whereas their lower income peers are not in educational settings during that time. Over their PK-12 schooling, this alone results in approximately two additional years of education (Gladwell, 2008). More and more, schools that serve non-dominant groups such as low income students, Latinos, and African-Americans are attempting to find ways to address these challenges within the school structure, such as having health clinics on site and providing year-round instruction. However, schools may be able to

impact how teachers perceive the capabilities of their students of color if they can understand what factors from the teacher expectations research are at play in cross-cultural student-teacher relationships, and how unconscious prejudice and institutional racism manifest in the classroom (Rogers, 2003).

Rogers did a meta-analysis of teacher expectation studies and race. He discovered that there were actually three different types of bias being researched and that different types of bias had different types of impact for students associated with race. The three types of bias that are explored across studies are “unconditionally race neutral”, “conditionally race neutral”, and “unobserved potential neutrality” (p. 462-466). Unconditional race neutrality studies attempt to determine when teachers stray from the idea of a race neutral benchmark where they have equal expectations for both Black and White students. These studies in large part find that teachers have different expectations for students from different racial groups. However, these expectations were based on their actual experience with students and not on an abstract belief or stereotype about Black students’ performance. They perceived black students to be weaker, and research also shows that Black students arrive at school with fewer skills and less of the knowledge that is valued by schools. As a result, these studies do not necessarily show bias in their results.

Conditionally race neutral studies create experimental situations where Black and White students have the same academic achievement history and determine if teacher expectations remain the same over time for both groups. Teachers that exhibit unconditional race neutrality look at actual measurements such as test scores, prior grades, and student beliefs about abilities and use them to form their ideas about what they can expect from students. This can be

considered an unbiased position only if past grades and test scores are not influenced by bias. There is a considerable critique of standardized testing that it was created by the dominant group in American culture with the intent to exclude members of nondominant groups from entry into educational institutions that would give them more cultural capital (Hilliard, 1978; Darder, 2005). However, these studies are good for analyzing bias in tracking. In studies where the Pygmalion effect does not manifest, teachers fail to believe initial misinformation about a student, they don't act out their bias in ways students notice or students don't act in ways that validate the stereotype. Actions on behalf of either of the participants in the teacher-student interaction can alter the trend toward bias impacting achievement.

Unobserved potential neutrality as a benchmark to measure bias is difficult to calculate. The essential idea is that all have the same potential from birth. The bias is in the assessment of what that means. For example, fidgeting behaviors by students of European descent were considered to be a sign that the teacher was not presenting interesting enough lessons, the same behaviors in students of African descent were considered to mean that students had a limited attention span (Kufunju, 2005). It is difficult to measure human potential so it is difficult to measure how much of it is wasted. In a survey in the 1980s, half of all American academics surveyed stated that they believed that the achievement gap was due to genetic differences (Rogers, 2003). The inferiority conversation started to rationalize slavery is still present in American society, though it is lower than a tipping point percentage, which means it may be in the process of fading away. However, this conversation contributes to sustaining the trend of low expectations and, subsequently, low achievement.

There are several interesting facts about the Pygmalion hypothesis when viewed across studies. The effects are greater for reading than for math. Ferguson (2003) hypothesizes that this is because math instruction is less flexible. Delpit's (1995) interpretations about why reading is more problematic for some nondominant groups, especially for people of African descent, offers some context for this. The history of it being illegal for enslaved people of African descent to learn to read in the United States, and the correction for dialect that commonly occurs in reading instruction, regardless of comprehension, make receiving reading instruction a much more vulnerable and frustrating experience than similar interactions with math lessons for students of color. Expectation effects seem to have a small impact when looked at over the course of one school year. However, they may compound over time to amplify the achievement gap (Ferguson, 2003).

Students' perceptions of teacher bias had a much greater impact on members of nondominant groups than White male students. The impact of teacher perceptions was three times as great for students of African descent than those of European descent. It also disproportionately impacted females and low-income students. For students who belonged to multiple non-dominant categories, the impact was magnified. It did not seem to impact standardized test scores in this particular study as it did grades, which did not reflect student reports of effort (Jussim, Eccles, & Madon, 1996).

Ferguson has several ideas about why teacher perception is so much more impactful on students of African descent. One possible reason is that teacher expectations for this group are so much more rigid than they are for White males. Consider the interpretation of fidgeting behaviors mentioned earlier. The other is that students are more impacted by what the teacher

thinks because of mixed messages they are getting from home. Research bears out that students of European descent are more concerned with pleasing their parents, and students of African descent look to please their teachers (Casteel, 1997; Entwisle & Alexander, 1988; Kleinfield, 1972; Irvine 1990). African American students' parents may be producing their own Pygmalion effect by telling their children that they want them to take challenging courses but not to expect to do as well as their European-American peers might, to insulate them against the possible consequences of structural racism.

Furthermore, the research does bear out that teachers in a variety of situations treat African American students differently than European American students, though there is some research that shows environments where no bias is present. In experiments from the seventies laboratory findings can be summarized as follows: students of color received less positive and shorter feedback, as well as less coaching on how to improve skills and expand comprehension (Coates, 1972; Feldman & Orchowsky, 1979; Rubovits & Maehr, 1973; Taylor, 1979). In classroom settings, a variety of studies found preferential treatment for Whites and no preference at all. Ferguson speculates that the reasons for preferential treatment when it shows up are several. African American students come to school with fewer school readiness skills that teachers notice intensely in elementary school, and this may cause them to withdraw from low achieving African American students because they are thought of as being more challenging. Also, the responsiveness of teachers to White males as compared to other students may be perceived as unjust by students of color, causing them to withdraw resulting in teachers subsequently further avoiding them. The responsiveness of the teacher in the Montessori elementary classroom observed to her White male students was different than for all her other

students. Thus, it is possible that the disengagement observed in students of color in this Montessori classroom is related to the Pygmalion hypothesis

Teachers in integrated schools can be “biased” in ways as simple as reinforcing a propensity of White children to speak more often in class (e.g., see Katz as cited in Brophy & Good, 1974; Irvine, 1990). Black students may assume that this means teachers think Whites are “smarter” or like the White students more. Ways that teachers communicate about academic ability, especially in integrated schools where the performance of Whites is superior due to the environment being designed for their backgrounds, can affect the degree to which Black students disengage from the pursuit of excellence or stay engaged and aim for mastery (Ferguson, p. 482).

The amplification of the importance of teacher perceptions on the achievement of students of color due to lower parent performance expectations about school performance due to their experience of systematic racism may be one of the reasons the Pygmalion effect has a disproportionate impact on students of color. Teacher perceptions that low-achieving students of color may be more difficult to work with based on actual or stereotyped beliefs in school deficits, combined with student perceptions that teachers care more for the skills and achievement of White students may work together to contribute to the achievement gap for low-achieving African American students. This dynamic may be at play in the MMEL classroom observed.

Interrupting White Boy: Evidence of Student Perception of a Second Class Citizen

Microaggression?

The lead teacher in the elementary program was unable to think of specific practices in a Montessori school that might be indirectly teaching students that some groups of people are

entitled to privileges that others are not. I shared with her that during my observation in her classroom I observed three different reading groups and that in every one of those reading groups one demographic consistently interrupted the lesson, White male students. I also observed this dynamic at Maria Montessori Magnet School.

The lead teacher had some really thoughtful responses. Initially she wondered about her practice: “. . . to be honest with you, most of my behavior issues come from my minority students than the white males. Now I’m thinking in my head, am I ignoring that behavior of the white male and focusing on the minority student?” Based on my observation during group reading lessons, most of her behavior issues were interruptions from White males and females. Some of the interruptions were topical and conversational and received no redirection as a result. I did not focus on whom the teacher called on specifically or rate the quality of the interactions, though those would be nuances to analyze in the future to get a clearer picture of the presence or lack of teacher bias. I spent two hours in the classroom during which I observed three reading groups. Each student attended at least one of these lessons. The White female and multiracial female rate of interruption were representative of their percentages in the classroom population. The White male rate of interruption was nearly twice their percentage of the student body. The Black female interruption rate was 5%, and they represent 17% of the class. Neither of the two Latino students (a male and a female) or the multiracial or African American male student interrupted at all.

Table 3

Interruptions by Gender and Race/Ethnicity

Subgroup	White Males	White Females	Black Females	Multiracial Females
Total Number in Class	8	6	4	1
Total Percentage of Class	34%	26%	17%	4%
Number/ Percentage of the Total Interruptions	11/61%	5/25%	1/5%	1/5%
Number/Percentage of Times Redirected by the Teacher	6/54%	2/40%	0/0%	0/0%

I did not notice avoidant behavior in this observation by Latina and multiracial females as I did in the pilot study. Their failure to interrupt may also be communicating disengagement or that they have been disciplined in ways that have taught them that their input has a different value than other students. The fact that when they interrupt they are not redirected may be interpreted by students of color as a lack of concern on the part of the teacher. As I mentioned before, many of the interruptions were topical, conversational and energetic. It is notable that White males interrupt almost twice their percentage presence in the classroom and get redirected by the teacher significantly more than all other interrupting groups. This phenomenon deserves further attention and analysis. I did not directly observe a second class citizen microaggression toward any students of color, though I did notice gender discrimination in girls being redirected faster than boys. This observation serves as an excellent window on the presence of White and male privilege in the classroom.

As a follow up to this observation, I asked the teacher where and how she thought White students learned that interrupting others is socially acceptable. She responded as follows:

I think that in the majority households, sometimes we are too accommodating to our children. I can think of two, and probably the two white girls you are talking about who interrupt me constantly. They can't walk by me without them trying to talk to me. I mean they are needy. They constantly need to be talking to me. In my mind, these parents must stop and listen to every single thing they say. Whereas, with your majority parents, I mean your minority parents who may not be around or are too busy with their own selves kind of sloughing off their kids, "I'm not gonna listen right now. Go play. Go watch TV, whatever." They aren't as needy in that way. Does that make sense?

In describing one of her female students that regularly interrupts she had the following to say:

I just do a lot of the typical things of ignoring this child. I've had her, she's a third year, and she just, sometimes I want to jump out of my skin. "Ms. XXX, Ms. XXX, Ms. XXX." I don't wanna walk back to the back of the room because it's always, "Ms. XXX, Ms. XXX," and, and . . . ; it's interesting you know we have student live conferences. So you know I get to see her in a different situation with her parents. And, uhm, they do sit and listen to every word she says, and her dad's a stay at home dad, and I just imagine that she has his complete attention at all times, and she always expects that here.

I shared with her some research that I had read that girls who had fathers that were actively involved in their education achieved at higher rates than those that did not. She responded with

further information about the father of the other female student that she perceived to be interrupting and demanding, "I don't think he's a stay at home dad, but I think he is a lot more involved in her education than mom is. Mom is busier working than he is, and I've always heard that dad was always in the building, always checking on things. That kind of thing." It is possible that these White girls with academically involved fathers got socialized to behave more like White boys in learning situations. The expression of the male privilege of interruption by male and female White students is highly aggravating to the teacher and that the speed of redirection is greater for White girls. That may be why they interrupt less. However, the group of students who hardly participate and are rarely redirected when they interrupt are perceived to be "my main behavior or academic issues." This issue bears further exploration in order to understand the relationship between the volition to interrupt others in group activities and gender and race/ethnicity. Also meriting further research is the speed at which female students are redirected as compared to males and how students of color perceive teachers. Looking at classroom interactions from a CRT perspective reveals additional questions about the dynamics of students of color's classroom disengagement and gender discrimination.

The principal had some interesting insights into the White male domination of interrupting behavior in these reading lessons. "Someone may be quiet enough that they might not want to interrupt because they don't want to have the attention brought to themselves . . . If they're a low reader, they want to fly under the radar . . . You have so many layers to think about just beyond the color. However, the fact that students of color are more likely to be lower achieving in reading has deep roots in both history and culture. She also mentions the cultures in students' homes:

I think that that maybe comes from their environment at home. At home, what kind of family are you? Are you the kind that constantly talks about everything? Are you the kind that is constantly sitting at the table talking or are you the type that comes home and everybody does their little thing and then we meet for dinner and then. . . ? See I don't know.

In my own kitchen table experience, everyone in my White family interrupts each other all the time. Additionally, I have been in a cross-cultural relationship where this habit was interpreted by a person of color to mean I thought their ideas and opinions were not important. Even if interrupting behavior is not intended to be disrespectful, interpretation is what creates a person's reality. It is powerful enough to significantly reduce student achievement.

The principal also speaks to gender as a factor in interpreting the interruption data:

I think there is a skew more towards girls than toward race. I guess I never thought about it in that sense. Yeah, hum . . . you've still got that little girl or that little guy that just works their heart out. They may never be that excelled student that gets all A's or A+'s. I think that they're the ones that then get, I don't wanna say most attention, but they get maybe asked to do the little favors for the teacher. They get asked to participate in this little special program more than that student that maybe questions things.

There is some research about African American styles of communication that suggests that arguing is culturally valued if one disagrees and that silence is considered to be agreement

(Aiken & Barbarin, 2008). This cultural conflict could possibly be contributing to the perception that students of color misbehave more than White students. This theme of the gendered nature of classroom behavior also came up in Yezbick's (2010) study.

Several members had noticed that some cultural groups seemed to be more lenient in disciplining their male children, even as they held their female children to rigid standards for behavior. This manifested in the classroom as more behavior from boys that needed redirection from teachers to maintain the learning environment and the need to encourage girls to assert themselves and feel comfortable participating. It was noted that the dominant culture of the United States does also play into this gender dynamic (p. 46).

Social norms about gender and behavior as well as race and behavior present themselves in this early elementary Montessori classroom. Whether those norms are taught and reinforced exclusively at home or if Montessori classroom plays a part in that socialization is a subject that deserves close consideration. No firm conclusions can be drawn from this single classroom study. A study of multiple Montessori classrooms that looks at the quality of teacher interactions across gender, race and ethnicity would be more conclusive about the presence of bias on the part of a teacher than these observations about interruption and disengagement.

Teacher and Administrator Perceptions of Parents: Moving Beyond the Pathologizing Cultural Values Microaggression

Perceptions of parents of color vary widely across interviewees. When I asked the elementary assistant teacher why she thought there was an achievement gap at her school, her

insider knowledge of the African American community backed up a concept brought up in the Pygmalion hypothesis research. As previously stated, that body of work suggests that African American parents do not have high expectations for their children to be successful at school because of institutionalized racism. The assistant confirms:

It's still going back to that low self-esteem, thinking that they can't do. And then too, some of it, I believe, is a stereotype where some of the parents are teaching some of the kids, "Well, you are not going to work as good doing some of this as someone else." A lot of them put that negativity in their mind before they even get going in school, and they listen. Them students listen at everything that's being said and done and what's being put in front of them; and so if they got negative parents, they are going to portray a negative feeling within themselves when the parents should be teaching them positive.

She does not come out and say why she thinks students of colors' parents would think that they would not be as good at school as someone else, and I did not follow up to get a deeper understanding. In the thirteen interviews for the pilot and for this paper, the word racism is not mentioned once in relation to students of color and their educational experience in Montessori schools. I intentionally avoided using it because I wanted to see if the concept would emerge without me broaching it directly. I wonder if I probed interviewees about their definition of racism, if they would then use it. It is possible that White privilege has dominant group members avoid it and politeness in a cross-cultural situation has nondominant group members stay away from it. It is also possible the word is considered to be taboo in professional situations. A Black interviewer might get different responses than I did asking the same questions.

The early childhood lead teacher shares some views garnered from her work with diverse families that center on seeing the family and the child in front of you:

...I have learned that every day is going to be new. Different needs are going to need to have attention too, whether they are socio-economical, whether they are emotional, whether they are physical. Basically, I think just making sure overall that you look at each child as an individual, and each day is going to be a new adventure with them. Some days they are ready to go. Some days they come in they're not. I guess it's the same with all my families. Whether they are white, brown, green, purple, it's so important to make sure you get to know that individual child, that individual family and what their needs are.

Notice that she has a conscious awareness that she can articulate about socio-economical needs and in the interview she revealed that she had some training in her undergraduate program about working with diverse families and that there has been district training on communication challenges in cross-income level parent-teacher relationships. Teacher education is emerging as a theme in helping teachers see parent relationships from a viewpoint other than their own upbringing.

The administrator at MMEL speaks to the importance of moving beyond stereotypical beliefs about parents of color, in particular the notion that they do not care about education. Using stereotypes as the basis of interacting with a person from a different culture can be a racial microaggression because stereotypes often focus on what is different from and therefore wrong about a nondominant group, pathologizing cultural values or communication styles. When asked about things she has learned from working with parents of color, the administrator of MMEL

made specifically made mention of her learning about the limiting effects of stereotypes in being effective with families of color, essentially her process in leaving this racial microaggression behind:

I just think everybody has just a different story, and you can't you can't lump everybody together, and you can't stereotype a parent that walks through the door. You can't automatically think in your head that that parent is not going to be involved, or because this mother is the mother of four that she's not going to be at every activity. So I think just making sure that you're not stereotyping in your mind when you deal with parents. I think that that's the best thing you can do as an administrator, as the teacher, as a human, but I think that you've just and you've got to greet them every day just the way you would every other parent. They may have missed the last four meetings that you expected them to be at, but they came to this one, that's important and you can't keep putting that story back on them 'cuz some of them want to change, and some won't change. But you've still gotta, you know; you've still gotta not put that mindset back on that parent.

This also echoes the statement that the elementary lead teacher made about her realization over the course of her career that parents of color care about what happens for their kids at school.

Upon further probing, the teacher also shared that though she felt they required more communication and follow through than White families, they required about the same as dominant low income families. Kunfuju (2005) echoes this idea that income level differences and their interrelation with race impact parents school involvement. This impact may be greater in the Black community because of structural racism funneling people of color into low income employment situations. Middle class African American and European American families are

more able to afford for one parent, usually the mother, who is far more likely to have a college degree in White families due to institutional racism, to stay at home. This allows them to supplement the education that happens at school, as well as advocate for their children in that setting in ways that low income parents simply do not have the time to. Parent involvement levels are more influenced by income levels than cultural values.

The dominant group assistant had a different perspective than more experienced administrators and teachers about parents of color's educational attitudes. This teacher felt that African American parents in traditional neighborhood school settings value education less:

Uhm, I don't know I *clears throat*. I guess, in my opinion, and it sounds so terrible, it just seems like that's not important to the whole, I'm thinking primarily of the African American community. It just doesn't seem like education is very important in the home and, like for instance, last year I was working at a middle school, and I mean no one cares about those kids, not all of them, a large majority, nobody cares about those kids school work; and so if a teacher calls home and says, "Hey, I'm having this problem with your child," then they get this same kind of mouthing off attitude from the parent that they got from the child. You know it just doesn't seem like there is really much, in some of those instances, more often in the Black community, it seems like to me. That's my limited experience . . .

She also related that she found the experience of working with African American parents in a Montessori magnet program where they had to show involvement and interest in academics to get their children enrolled into the school via the lottery to be significantly different. When asked why she thought African-American parents might care less, she shared the following.

Huhm, uh, I don't know. It's probably linked. It does seem like sometimes there is a, uh, sense of entitlement to being taken care of, and I don't know if that is actually a trend in the, uhm, Black community or not but that they are just entitled to being taken care of. I know from my own children if you continually just do everything for them, they kind of lose their motivation to do anything for themselves. I don't know if that's it.

This response really reiterates Hilliard's statement earlier that it is impossible to address racism (I would also add classism to his notion) in school and intervene around it if we do not know or acknowledge it is part of the dynamic in American education (1978). The parents of color in the focus group shared their own experiences with boredom at school and their awareness that they were being socialized as opposed to getting an education. The Pygmalion hypothesis research also gets at parents of color having lower achievement expectations of their students because of their perception of the racism inherent in the educational system. A White teacher with four years of experience (similar to the experience level of the assistant) I interviewed as part of the pilot shared that she felt like parents of color and low income parents were not comfortable with school because of their own negative experiences there. I have noticed that White middle income lead teachers (because I have yet to find a school interested in participating in this research that has an African-American lead teacher) that have been exposed to training on communication

challenges in working with low income families seem to share this perception of why low income and parents of color might need extra support to feel comfortable being involved with their children's education. It is my understanding from interviews that assistants at MMEC do not get exposed to the same amount of professional development as the lead teachers. It happens in the afternoons when they are not working. Professional development appears to help some teachers move past their middle income view of schooling, their stereotyped beliefs about parent motivations and see that there may be multiple views on schooling by people with a different experience of American society than theirs.

CHAPTER V: Conclusion

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of administrators and teachers in implementing the Montessori method with families of color and the actualities of parents of color in Montessori schools. I wanted to know if the perceptions of these different groups of people impacts teaching and learning for students of color in Montessori schools. Most notably, I was interested in finding out if public Montessori schools participate in the reproduction of a racial underclass in American society. If that is the case, I wanted to get a sense of what the mechanisms that create a raced and classed Montessori learning environment.

Conclusions about Issues, Problems and Questions Raised in the Study

Issues in Monocultural and Cross Cultural Teaching

A finding of this study that reflected a theme discovered in the pilot is that the White teachers and administrators interviewed here inconsistently or completely failed to include support staff and people of color that were not employed in the classroom when asked about the demographics of the people employed at the school. Assistants gave more vague but accurate descriptions of their perceptions of the schools' employee demographics. The mother interviewed had the same perception as the assistants, and the father had no awareness of the demographics at all. White, male and class privilege may shed some light on the mistaken perceptions on the part of administrators and teachers and the lack of awareness on the part of the father.

The institutional racism present in the American educational system has impacts on the ability of these schools to recruit lead teachers of color. Neither school had a single lead teacher of color. There are fewer people of color who graduate from college to recruit for those jobs and those with bachelor's degrees choose other fields over education because they pay better. Both programs had assistant teachers of color, but only African-American ones. There were no Latina or Burmese ones, the two largest ethnic groups at the schools after African-Americans. The national average for teachers of African descent is 9%. In these Montessori magnet schools, the percentage is 0%. However, the percentage of assistant teachers is close to the national average for teachers. This is partly due to the challenges of requiring teachers to get a Montessori certificate after they have already completed bachelor's degrees in education. Essentially, Montessori teachers in public programs have to be double trained in traditional and Montessori education. Overcoming this barrier is going to require both long-term planning and a willingness to invest financial resources.

More experienced White administrators and teachers that have some training in working with diverse populations think that when the teacher is from a different cultural group than the students that it has a negative impact on students. The assistants, one of whom was Black and one of whom was White, thought it did not impact teaching and learning, though the Black teacher thought it would require some explanation on the part of the student to help the teacher understand how the values of school might differ from home. The power of having the same teacher for three years to build effective cross-cultural relationships is a theme that was present in the pilot and emerged in this study as well. The assistants who had worked for several years in traditional schools before entering the Montessori schools shared examples of behaviors by parents and teachers that they did not feel were supportive of schooling or students of color, but

they were not able to give any examples from their work in the Montessori program. This insinuates that parents of color and teachers in cross-cultural relationships in the Montessori program are engaged in a different dynamic than in traditional schools.

Scholars in the psychology field have begun to define some of the issues in contemporary racism and develop categories of different types of racism. They note that White Americans consistently underestimate the impacts of racism on people of color though most of them believe in an egalitarian society. In the interview, there were examples of an absence of awareness about the impacts of racism on people of color, notably when it came to the excessive imprisonment African Americans. The belief in an egalitarian society has resulted in a radical reduction in direct racism consciously designed to express discrimination. However, a variety of forms of indirect racism persist and are often perpetrated by well-intentioned people that do not understand that their behaviors are an expression of bias. In addition, many White Americans with that egalitarian belief unconsciously participate in racist behavior which they define as racial micro-aggressions. Several of these types of indirect discrimination were revealed in the data analysis of interviews and observations at MMEC and MMEL: color blindness in the delivery of the cultural and language curricula to different degrees in the different programs, environmental micro-aggressions in building décor at MMEC, and cultural racism around the Montessori educational value of independence in work habits.

In research fueled by the study to understand the dynamics of the place of classrooms in the recreation of a racialized underclass in American society, issues around discrimination in teacher's perceptions of students of color and student perceptions of that bias emerged as factors. Black parents' attempt to prepare their children for institutionalized racism of American

schooling creates a situation where the student of color's desire to please the teacher has a much greater impact on their educational outcomes than it does for White students who seek to please their parents. If a student of color perceives that the teacher is biased toward White students, this damages their relationship resulting in a decreased desire to please the teacher and a reduction in achievement, triple the impact as for dominant group students. In the classroom observation, a disconnect between teacher perceptions of which students misbehaved the most and actual observed misbehavior suggested that some unconscious discrimination may be present in the classroom. White males were observed to interrupt at a much greater rate than their female peers and most males and females other ethnicities and races. Male students from the dominant group were not redirected as promptly or frequently as female White, multi-racial and African-American students. White and multi-racial females interrupted as often as their percentage of representation in the classroom. African-American girls interrupted a third of their percentage in the classroom. Latina and Latino students, as well as multi-racial males and African-American males did not interrupt at all. Teacher and administrators perceptions of why this trend exists ranged from students being uncomfortable with reading lessons and English not being their primary language, to cultural and gender communication styles taught and reinforced in the home. In the course of having the data placed before her, the lead lower elementary teacher began to consider for the first time that her behavior could be creating racist and sexist experiences in the classroom.

There are several mitigating factors that seem to create a different dynamic between parents of color and Montessori schools than are present in traditional educational programs. Due to the schools' stated goal of creating life-long learners by having an interesting and engaging curriculum, parents of color are supportive of the classroom in ways that they are not in

traditional education which has as one of its goals to socialize students to their place in the social order. If you are a person of color, that goal is a racist one because it socializes your child to be at the bottom of the economic system regardless of their potential. The goals of Montessori education are not as structurally racist and classist as are traditional education, and parents of color interviewed are consciously aware of that difference. Additionally, Montessori schools tend to engage in much more parent education and consider them to be partners in schooling. Their cultures are also considered part of the curriculum, specifically the cultural curriculum.

Conclusions about the Purpose of the Research

The perceptions of a child's learning team in dealing with cross-cultural relationships seems to impact the educational experiences of students of color in the Midwestern Montessori magnet program studied. Students of color in the early childhood program do not exhibit an achievement gap and by the time they are in upper elementary and middle school the gap is present, depending on the year. The recreation of segregated learning communities through the unconscious expression of teacher bias through discriminatory discipline practices within a classroom may be a component of this. However, this expression of bias is a component of institutional racism imbedded throughout society and there is an inconsistent awareness of the impact of this racism on education on the part of dominant group teachers and administrators. There is a failure in this program to individualize for nondominant groups at the schools observed in the areas of providing monocultural teacher student relationships representative of the student population, consciously creating an environment and curriculum for positive identity development and esteem during early childhood when the personality is developing this awareness, providing school-wide inclusion of the languages and dialects spoken by students in

grammar studies to make reading and writing activities culturally relevant for students of color. There is significant evidence that unconscious racism is present in this Montessori magnet program to different degrees in different classrooms and buildings and that teacher discipline practices in one classroom may shed some light on how students of color and White female students may get a different quality of education than White male students in the same classroom.

Implications for Educational Theory, Practice and Policy

Limitations of the Research

This is a limited study that includes two schools and eight interviews. On its own, it does not provide the generalizability to state that Montessori schools and organizations all engage in racial microaggressions. It is not conclusive, though it does reinforce the themes of cultural clash in Montessori schools revealed in the work of Yezbick (2007) and Schonleber (2007). Neither of these find inherent mitigating elements for reducing cultural clash in the structure of Montessori schools. The mechanisms of how bias is taught and recreated in classrooms and society in general are incredibly complex and this is an attempt to add to the growing body of research in Montessori education that is beginning to reveal what the educational equity issues are in Montessori schools.

The Impact of the Researcher's Identity on the Study

Throughout this project, it became clear that I was just as challenged as the other people I was interviewing when it came to my own comfort with getting respondents to talk about racism. The way that the dominant group avoids this topic and has the luxury to pretend it does not exist

contributes to the persistence of institutional and unconscious racism in our society. Initially, I was coached by a White professor in a qualitative research methods course not to include the word racism in the protocols to allow it to come forth of its own accord. As a result, in refining my protocol to help me unearth the mechanisms of privilege and discrimination in the classroom, I developed a question that asked how and where teachers and administrators felt that the White male privilege I observed in the elementary classroom was taught. The realization that White people have little understanding about the impact of racism through the ongoing literature review I did for the project as issues emerged now has me realize that a more direct question about what perceptions of respondents were about racism in American society and in their own schools might have been more revealing, though the limited awareness of the impacts of racism on people of color by dominant interviewees were revealed in the interview and unconscious discriminatory behavior management on the part of one teacher was observed.

As mentioned in the discussion of the theoretical framework of this paper, the ability of dominant group members to be as effective in their critique and analysis of race issues as people of color is a clearly articulated component of critical race theory. The reality is that I do not have insider knowledge of communities of color as would a person of color. However, the dearth of people of color in the Montessori movement, including its classrooms and research community, means that there are statistically fewer people of color to emerge with the interest to pursue such a study. The studies earlier mentioned were done by Yezbick (2007), a woman of Arab descent who self-describes as presenting Caucasian, and Schonleber (2008) who describes herself as a Montessori insider but a Hawaiian Language and Culture Based program outsider. She may also be a dominant group member. I look forward to researchers of color stepping forward to add to

this body of work. Though I may not have the most effective lens for analyzing racial issues in Montessori schools, my own is impacted by other aspects of my identity.

My own experiences as an LGBT teacher in Montessori independent, charter and traditional independent schools were distinctly different than the indirect racial discrimination observed in these Montessori schools. It was direct discrimination, heterosexism to be exact. At a traditional independent school, I was instructed that I did not have the same right to share information about my significant other with members of the school community as heterosexual teachers did as proactive communication, not in reaction to anything that was said or done. When I shared with my administrator that I had an opportunity to be interviewed for an article about LGBT commitment ceremonies in the local paper that I declined, he thanked me. Another example of direct heterosexism I experienced at a Montessori school was when my heterosexual co-teacher made a controversial attempt to teach a story that included same sex couples in preparation for a student with homosexual parents entering the program. Two heterosexual families left the school as a result of the inclusion of LGBT topics in the middle school curriculum. After the fact, the administrator said to us both, "Let's never do that again." My own feelings of injustice at being directly discriminated against and watching the LGBT experience be silenced in the classroom in Montessori and independent schools fuels my interest in the experiences of groups of people who do not have the choice to hide their difference in the way that LGBT educators sometimes do.

This does beg the question why I am not doing research in the community with which I identify. When I think about that, I realize that I have been socialized to be invisible about my difference in particular in private schools because it might be bad for enrollment. In each

instance of this socialization, it was incredibly painful to receive instruction from people that I really admired and respected to disappear parts of myself. The discomfort that I had with how the controversial LGBT curriculum issue was handled was so profound to me that I left education for a while to go work in the LGBT community. Neither the principal, who I greatly admire to this day, nor I, had the skills, education or support to transcend the discomfort created by the market reality of running a small Montessori school in a Southern suburban area. I think I did not choose to do research in this area because it is much more confronting and unsafe to me. My desire to avoid my own alienating feelings about Montessori education and my identity may offer some insight into why initial research in this area is primarily being done by outsider researchers, though it may simply be an example of my cultural lens in which some people of European descent tend to avoid conflict and discomfort.

Challenges to Recruiting a Culturally Diverse Faculty

Due to the challenges created by cross-cultural relationships, having a diverse teaching force that represents people of color and those with lower socioeconomic backgrounds is in students' best interests and thus, the best interest of Montessori education. Nationwide, fewer and fewer people of color are going into the educational field because of the low pay (Ramirez, 2010). They can go into other entry-level careers and make \$3,000 to \$10,000 more to start. Since desegregation opened up more and more professional fields to African Americans and women, there has been a brain drain from education (hooks, 2003). America has gone from employing the best and the brightest of its discriminated against categories of people due to the limited career fields racism and sexism allowed them to enter, to largely employing the average and below average members of those, with average and below average results. Research shows

that student achievement on standardized tests reflects teacher achievement on teacher certification tests (Clotfelder, C., Ladad, H., & Vigdor J., 2006).

Due to the fact that Montessori education has largely been a white-middle class movement in the United States until recently, fewer people of color have experienced it directly themselves. The national and international associations do not collect racial and ethnic demographics on those it certifies, so there is no way to know if the percentage of Montessori educators of color is greater or less than the national average. However, the American Montessori Society's new National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector has begun data collection on that population of schools that will include teacher demographics, though the data collection has only just begun and will not be available for analysis until the collection is complete. Additionally, private Montessori schools are often small and are not able to offer salaries that are competitive with the public schools. Educators of color entering education that are more motivated by financial issues are more likely to enter the public sector. I would speculate that the percentage of African-American teachers in Montessori education is significantly less than the national average.

One school, in a large Midwestern urban school district, where I interviewed an administrator as part of the pilot study, she revealed that her primary mode of recruitment had become the word of mouth of her largely European American, middle-class teaching staff. As a result, she did not have a diverse teaching staff and probably will not anytime in the future. These positions were posted on district job boards, but the preference given to candidates referred by word of mouth is an indirect form of racism because it results in the exclusion of people of color who are on the job market (Barbarin, 1981a). An understanding of behaviors and

practices like hiring primarily through word of mouth that directly and indirectly result in discrimination is vital to creating more just and equitable Montessori schools.

The Need for Quality Professional Development about Effective Practices in Cross Cultural Education

Ongoing training on the perspectives of low income families and the barriers in working in partnership with them seem to have made an impact on the awareness and practices of classroom teachers in dealing with cross-income level teaching. However, professional development and awareness of best practices for providing an optimal learning environment for students of color have barely been broached in the program. Initial inroads are being made at the middle school level to enrich the education of black boys. However this is being done without a human development focus. Cultural identity formation and internalization of bias happen in early childhood. Individualizing and using development as the foundation for education are central to the Montessori method and its effectiveness in mono-cultural teaching settings across cultures. These tried and true cornerstones of the method should be the foundation for educating students of color in cross-cultural settings. Training in cultural identity formation and the needs of students of color should be a central focus of developing effective cross-cultural teachers.

The Importance of Instructional Supervision in Creating Schools that Value and Practice Educational Equity

It is crucial for administrators become skilled in supporting teachers in internalizing and applying best practices in cross cultural teaching:

Students from diverse cultures do not underachieve because they are less intelligent or less interested in learning than students from the dominant culture but because of the incompatibility between their culture and traditional schooling in US society. If we need to change schools and the way we teach to close the achievement gap, then addressing diversity should be a task of instructional supervision (Glickman, Gordon & Ross-Gordon, 2010, p. 434).

This is difficult for administrators to do if they did not receive any training in the complexities of working with diverse populations. Furthermore, if the training they did receive was lacking a both a big picture understanding of the mechanisms of race and class in education for a capitalist social order. Additionally, if they do not have a nuanced understanding of the situation their minority families face and/or the ability to articulate an understanding of it, they are not going to be able to assist middle class white teachers in moving through the limitations their White privilege and unconscious racism creates for students of color. Administrators have to seek ways to bridge the cultural gaps between home and school and train teachers to do this as well.

The Need for Top Down Leadership by National Organizations and Montessori Training Programs to Support Culturally Relevant Implementation of the Method

Both the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) have nationwide structures to support and create more equitable work environments for nondominant teachers and students. NAIS has publications on recruiting teachers of color and they hold a separate conference each year called the People of Color Conference so that practitioners and students have a forum for support within the larger organization. NAEYC has caucus groups for teachers from

nondominant groups to give a place for their voices to be heard within the organization and to get support from peers. As mentioned earlier, AMS and AMI have only begun to provide education at conferences on the needs of nondominant groups and that is done outside of the umbrella of any organizational goals around inclusion or equity. The national Montessori organizations are not providing leadership in this area to the detriment of optimal learning outcomes (a core goal of Montessori education) for all students. In direct conversations I have had with leadership in AMS, there is a lack of awareness about the educational equity issues in cross-cultural teaching. In addition, their publications in general are not inclusive of people of color. Color blindness and White privilege are also present at the national level in Montessori education.

When I interviewed teachers for this project, none of them received any training in diversity issues in their Montessori teacher training programs. Several of them had a single course in diversity education in their traditional teacher education, but they were the exception. For Montessori teacher training programs to incorporate education on these topics into Montessori teacher training would be a proactive move that would help make the implementation of Montessori education more equitable in cross-cultural settings. The national organization may have the ability to influence the curriculum of these programs and leadership on their part might include a shift in teacher training curriculum.

Remaining “Radically Open” in a “Nice Field Like Education” When Racism is Called Out

The educators interviewed for this study were highly experienced, hard working people that are palpably passionate about what they do. To analyze the practices in their school around students of color and offer a judgment about which practices are effective and which ones are

perpetuating structural racism feels harsh. Shining a light into this blind spot is painful. I do worry that labeling some of their educational practices and perspectives as racist and privileged will cause them to shut down about the issue as I have in my own practice when my own and other people's difference has become a topic of discord. In my own practice and research, I have found little coaching and few resources on how to remain present in the face of the intense feelings that emerge around cultural dominance and subordination.

Shame scholar Brene Brown (2007) in her lecture *Defining Shame* comes closest to describing these feelings. When confronted with the reality that our society has racism woven into its structure and that they directly benefit from it in ways they may have never considered, people from the dominant group often experience a deep sense of shame. "You cannot talk about race without talking about privilege and when people talk about privilege, they get paralyzed by shame (Brown, 2012)." Brown defines shame as, the perception of oneself for being "a bad person for having that thought" (Brown, 2007). In the case of the shame brought on by race and class privilege it would be more like, "I am a bad person for having this ethnic identity and/or social class as a part of my identity." Shame personalizes these inequities and overwhelms majority people with so much discomfort that they often just avoid conversations on these topics or situations that bring it to their awareness.

Bell hooks (2003) offers some coaching for moving through these feelings in order to transform educational practice into a more just activity. She provides a warning to people when these topics come up that intense and uncomfortable feelings often arise on these topics and then she coaches folks to remain "radically open" (hooks, 48) in the face of them. The only way out of the cycle of injustice that avoiding these shame feelings helps to perpetuate is to learn how to

move through these feelings and into the unknown space beyond, which is the place where conscious anti-bias education, culturally relevant teaching practice and eventually social transformation occurs.

That cultural transformation is not a small task because it begins at the individual and local level with teachers and in classrooms, but there is a need for it to move out of the school house and into the statehouse to remedy the structural inequities that have unconscious racism persist. Glickman et. al (2010) state it clearly in their work on best practices in instructional supervision.

It is our own position that PK-12 educators need to take a two-tiered approach to the issue of inequitable treatment of diverse groups. First, supervisors and teachers need to examine their own cultural identities, develop competencies for working with cultures different than their own, and create culturally responsive classrooms and schools. Second, supervisors and teachers need to become directly involved in efforts to change public policy that works against lower socioeconomic status and racial/ethnic minority children. Educators in PK-12 should become involved in local and national efforts to ensure that all families have access to living wages, adequate housing, and basic health care. Moreover, supervisors and teachers need to work to end segregation, inequitable school funding, and state and national education policies that hurt lower socioeconomic status and racial/ethnic minority children. Supervisors and teachers will not be able to do it alone: rather, they will need to become part of a coalition of PK-12 educators, university educators, parents, businesspersons, and policy makers who recognize the critical need for changes. Members of this coalition will need to help education the

general public, the corporate world and politicians on the need for change and to push for new legislation at the state and federal levels. (p. 437)

It is a tall order for educators to deal with their own unconscious racism and classism. To embrace the need for social change and then to work to make it happen is a much larger task that is much more likely to occur if people become conscious about racist educational practice so that they can replace it with anti-bias education, including grappling with the shortcomings of the larger social order.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol Teacher Version

1. What is your general education training? Did it include any training in working with students of color? What is your Montessori training and affiliation Did it include any training in working with students of color? How long have you been teaching? How long have your been in your current position? How long have you been working with a sizable student of color population?
2. How would you describe the Montessori method and philosophy?
3. What are the race/ethnicity/income demographics of the school's faculty and staff?
4. What impact, if any, does having a faculty and staff with these demographics have on students and families?
5. What are the race/ethnicity demographics of your classroom including the adults? What about the socio-economic demographics? Do they have any impact on the dynamics of teaching and learning?
6. Have students of color and/or their parents presented any unique academic or social needs in your classroom?
7. Do you address the cultural backgrounds of the students and families in any ways in your classroom? How? Does the school do anything above and beyond that?
8. Do you think the Montessori method should be modified in working with students of color? Why or why not? Do you create specialized curriculum or utilize particular instructional strategies in working with students of color?
9. Do you use any specific strategies to engage parents of color in their children's education as distinct from strategies you use with majority population families?
10. What have you learned from working with diverse families and their children?
11. Do students of color achieve at the same rate as their majority peers in your classroom? Why do you think this is?
12. Is there anything else on these topics that has come into mind while we've been talking that you would like to share?

Appendix B

Interview Protocol Administrator Version

1. What is your general education training? Did it include any training in working in low income communities of color? What is your Montessori training and affiliation? Did it include info about working in income communities of color?
2. How would you describe the Montessori philosophy and method?
3. What are the race/ethnicity demographics of the school's administration, faculty and staff, and student population?
4. Do you think that the faculty/staff demographics have any impact on what happens in the classroom and on relationships with students and families? If so, why?
5. How do you recruit new teachers?
6. Have students of color and/or their families presented any unique academic and/or social needs?
7. Does the school address the cultural backgrounds of the students and families in any ways?
8. Does the school modify the Montessori method in working with students of color and/or low income students at all? What about the materials or extensions of the materials?
9. How does the school engage parents in their children's education? Does it make any particular efforts to reach out to parents of color?
10. What have you learned from working with diverse students and their families?
11. How does the achievement of students of color at the school compare to majority students? Why do you think this is?
12. Is there anything else on these topics that you have not already mentioned?

Appendix C

Parent Interview Protocol

1. What is your educational background?
2. How do you feel about your child's Montessori school?
3. How would you describe the Montessori philosophy and method?
4. Is your child's school different or similar to the one you went to? What do you think about that?
5. How would you identify your race or ethnicity? How would you identify your socio-economic status?
6. What is the race/ethnic makeup of the school's faculty and staff, and what impact, if any, does having a faculty and staff with this makeup have on you and your child?
7. What values do you wish to teach to your children? What values do you think your child's school hopes to teach to your children?
8. Do you think your family has presented any unique academic or social needs in your classroom or school?
9. Does the school address your cultural background in any ways? How?
10. How does the school engage you in your children's education?
11. How does the school address differences in learning styles if they are present?
12. Is there anything else on these topics that has come into mind while we've been talking that you would like to add?