

**Montessori in the South Bronx:
Considering Advantages for English Language Learners and
Examining Tensions in New York City's First and Only
Montessori Public School**

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Glossary of Terms

AMI – Association Montessori Internationale; founded in 1929 by Dr. Maria Montessori

AMS – American Montessori Society; established in 1958 by Dr. Nancy McCormick Rambusch in order to modify the Montessori Method for American students

CBT – Cognitive Behavioral Therapy; a short-term, goal-oriented type of psychotherapy (talk therapy) that teaches patients problem-solving skills, such as how to cope with negative situations and how to regulate their emotions

CCSS – Common Core State Standards; According to the Common Core State Standards Initiative, CCSS are “a set of high-quality academic standards in mathematics and English language arts/literacy (ELA)” that “outline what a student should know and be able to do at the end of each grade ... regardless of where they live” (corestandards.org).

CEC – Community Education Council; each CEC (there are 32 total in NYC) supervises a Community School District and is made up of 11 voting members, including parents, residents, and business owners

CMO – Charter Management Organization

ELA – English Language Arts

ELL – English Language Learner

ELL Newcomers – foreign-born students who have been admitted for the first time in a City school at some point during the last three years

ENL – English as a New Language; formerly known as ESL (English as a Second Language); the updated term reflects the experience of many ELLs who already speak two or more languages

ESL – English as a Second Language; commonly referred to today as English as a New Language or ENL

IDEA – Individuals with Disabilities Education Act; According to U.S. Department of Education, “IDEA is a law ensuring services to children with disabilities throughout the nation. IDEA governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education and related services to more than 6.5 million eligible infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities” (<http://idea.ed.gov/explore>).

IEP – Individualized Education Program; a legal document that describes the nature of a student’s disability/disabilities and the services that he or she is entitled to under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

LAP-D – Learning Accomplishment Profile-Diagnostic; According to the assessment’s creator, Kaplan Early Learning Company, the LAP-D is “a standardized and norm-referenced assessment instrument” that “generates a complete picture of a child’s developmental progress in 4 major domains of development: gross motor, fine motor, cognitive, and language.”
(<https://www.kaplanco.com/lap>)

NYC DOE – New York City Department of Education

NYCMCS – New York City Montessori Charter School

NYSED – New York State Education Department

SIFE – Students with Interrupted Formal Education; includes students who come from a home where a language other than English is spoken; have had at least two years less schooling than their peers; function at least two years below expected grade level in reading and mathematics; and may be pre-literate in their first language

SIOP Model – Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol Model; a research-based framework for planning and delivering lessons to ELLs

SPED – Special Education

WSMS – West Side Montessori School

Abstract

Located in the South Bronx, Community School District 7 has been cited as New York City's most impoverished and poorest-performing district (Ryley 2015). Despite this unfavorable ranking, District 7 boasts being home to the New York City Montessori Charter School (NYCMCS), the first and only Montessori public school in New York City. In this article, I examine the benefits of a Montessori-style education for NYCMCS's English Language Learners (ELLs). While the academic and disciplinary methods implemented by NYCMCS may provide an advantage to ELLs, tensions arise between the competing (and sometimes the conflicting) institutional demands placed upon the school's teachers and administrators by the New York State Education Department (NYSED) and the American Montessori Society (AMS). Observations of various classrooms, including repeated visits to the English as a New Language (ENL) classroom, gave me a greater understanding of the culture of NYCMCS as well as its overarching approach to education. In addition, interviews with various stakeholders within the school as well as outside experts offered greater insight into both the challenges and opportunities presented by a public Montessori education. Finally, a thorough examination of various documents from the NYSED provided me with a wealth of information about the history of NYCMCS, including its foundation and continued progress. I conclude that while fulfilling the obligations of both the NYSED and the AMS is a delicate balance, the New York City Montessori Charter School in particular as well as the concept of public Montessori schools in general offer ELLs the opportunity to successfully learn English in a humanistic environment.

Background Information

In order to contextualize a study analyzing appropriate pedagogical practices for ELLs, a brief discussion on immigration proves necessary. According to Pedro Noguera, Distinguished Professor of Education in the Graduate School of Education and Information Sciences at UCLA and Director of the Center for the Study of School Transformation, Latin Americans immigrate to the United States for a variety of reasons, including political violence, poverty, economic depression, natural disasters, war, persecution, and torture. For many people, immigration represents hope during times of despair (2006, p. 314). According to the New York City Department of City Planning's report *The Newest New Yorkers: Characteristics of the City's Foreign-born Population* (2013), the Immigration and Nationality Amendments of 1965¹ radically transformed New York City's immigrant population. Whereas European immigration to the city has generally been in decline since the 1970s (Lobo & Salvo, 2013, p. 9), immigration from Latin American countries has rapidly increased over the years, and as of 2011, Latin American immigrants comprised one-third of the city's foreign-born population (2013, p. 12).

Mott Haven, the neighborhood in the South Bronx in which New York City Montessori Charter School is located, has a high concentration of Latin American immigrants. Nearly 30% of the population of Mott Haven is foreign-born, with many residents hailing from the Dominican Republic, Mexico, and Ecuador (2013, p. 31-35). According to the NYCMCS Prospectus (2010), written the year before the school opened, 70.8% of Bronx Community Board 1, which comprises the South Bronx neighborhood in which NYCMCS is located, is of Hispanic

¹ Prior to the passage of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, preference for immigrant visas to the U.S. was given to persons originating from Northern and Western Europe. For more information, see Gjelten (2015).

origin. As a result, nearly two thirds of the residents in this area report that they speak Spanish in the home (2010, p. 3). Accordingly, Spanish is the most common home language of ELLs at NYCMCS (M. Levy, personal communication, Oct. 6, 2016). In addition, nearly half of the families from South Bronx's Congressional District 15² live below the poverty line, making the district the most impoverished in the nation (Prospectus, 2010, p. 3).

The New York City Montessori Charter School (NYCMCS) opened in the fall of 2011. At the request of Gina Sardi, the lead applicant for the school's charter, the New York State Education Department's Board of Regents approved and issued a provisional 5-year charter for NYCMCS (King, 2010, pp. 1-5). Unlike many "No Excuses" charter schools that are managed by Charter Management Organizations (CMOs), NYCMCS is independently managed by a principal and a Board of Trustees (2014, nycmcs.org). Still, the school maintains a partnership with the South Bronx Overall Economic Development Corp (SoBro), which provides the school with supportive services, such as assistance with community outreach and fundraising (King, 2010, p. 37).

NYCMCS is a K-5 public elementary charter school that began with grades K-1 and added a grade each year (King, 2010, p. 34). Out of 277 students currently enrolled in Kindergarten through 5th grades at NYCMCS, 90% are considered to be economically disadvantaged, 18% are ELLs, and 16% have disabilities. (pp. 30, 34) According to the NYCMCS Prospectus (2010), which outlines the school's mission and instructional design, the school's founders were aware of the challenges of opening a school in the South Bronx, and they

² Before redistricting in 2012, the South Bronx was located in Congressional District 16. For more information, see White, Fessenden, and Ericson (2012).

were particularly interested in recruiting students with disabilities, English Language Learners, and students from immigrant families (2010, p. 4).

NYCMCS is located in Community School District 7 in the South Bronx, which is frequently labeled as “the city’s worst school district” due to the poverty, homelessness, low test scores, and low graduation rates of its students (Ryley 2015). On November 26, 2012, the Community Education Council (CEC) for Community School District 7 voted to un-zone all public elementary schools in the district in order to give parents greater school choice given the inadequate performance of many elementary schools in District 7 (“Proposed and Approved,” n.d.). In other words, traditional district schools and charter schools alike must now compete for student enrollment. As a result of the CEC’s decision, many families, including numerous immigrant parents that reside in the Bronx, now have access to a number of schools within District 7 that were formerly outside of their zone.³ However, an increase in choice does not necessarily mean an increase in quality: many public schools in District 7 have been labeled as poor-performing (Ryley, 2015) and a “No Excuses” model of urban, educational reform has swept the nation, resulting in a plethora of charter schools that reinforce inequalities through authoritarian behavioral codes (Golan, 2015; Ladd, Noguera, Reville & Starr, 2016). Thus, for many immigrant parents with limited financial resources, this increased school “choice” may seem illusory. Parents of minority ELLs, oftentimes a school district’s most vulnerable population of students (Ladd, Noguera, Reville & Starr, 2016), deserve the opportunity to send

³ Whereas “districts” are quite large and encompass multiple neighborhoods, “zones” are much smaller and determine which school a child must attend. Since District 7 has been un-zoned, parents may apply to send their students to any public school within that district. For more information, see (“Proposed and Approved,” n.d.).

their children to a progressive school. One such school in the South Bronx, the New York City Montessori Charter School, is attempting to offer parents that very thing – a free, innovative education that would normally cost between \$30,000 and \$40,000 in New York City.⁴

The New York City Montessori Charter School is the first and only Montessori public school in New York City. NYCMCS ensures that students master the Common Core State Standards as well as New York State Learning Standards while simultaneously utilizing a Montessori approach to education (“About NYCMCS,” 2014). A significant amount of existing research indicates that a Montessori educational model benefits all students, including ELLs and students with special needs. Yet, to date there has not been any academic research completed at NYCMCS, one of the many public school options in New York City. At 1.1 million students (38% of whom come from a Latin American or Caribbean background) the NYC DOE is the largest school district in the nation (Cortina, 2003, p. 62) and is home to many immigrant families hoping to obtain a quality education for their children (2003, p. 59). Thus, I hope that my research provides immigrant parents and guardians in the South Bronx with even more detailed information about the potential benefits of a Montessori education for ELLs so that they can make an informed decision when enrolling their children in school.

I begin this article with a review of the current literature pertinent to this topic. Afterwards, I discuss the methodology that I employed in completing this research project. In the

⁴ Tuition for the extended-day, 3-6 year-olds’ program that runs from September to June at West Side Montessori School, a private Montessori school mentioned in this article, costs \$38,060 without financial aid. For more information, see (“Tuition and Financial Aid,” 2017-2018).

following section, I present my findings: the potential advantages of a Montessori education for ELLs as well as the challenges of managing a school that must meet the dual demands of the New York State Education Department (as a public school) and the American Montessori Society (as a Montessori school). In the final section, I discuss the conclusions drawn from my research and denote areas for further exploration.

Literature Review

A great deal of research has been published on progressive education, especially as it compares to the quality of education available to Latino immigrant students in New York City. A plethora of research on effective teaching strategies and best practices for ELLs also exists. Additionally, there is a fair amount of scholarship concerning Montessori schools in the public sector. Yet, there has not been any research performed at the New York City Montessori Charter School, the site of my research project and the first and only Montessori public school in New York City.

Philosophies of Education

In years past many educational philosophers, such as John Dewey, Paulo Freire, and Carl Rogers, promoted radical educational theories that differed significantly from established, conservative views on education. Given that traditional pedagogical approaches have reemerged in certain educational contexts, such as in urban charter schools that enroll many Black and Latino students, and considering that the child-centered approach of the Montessori Method bears many similarities to the philosophies of Dewey, Freire, and Rogers, a closer examination of their progressive ideas proves useful.

A progressive vision. In his book *Democracy and Education* American philosopher John Dewey (1944) railed against “teaching by pouring in” (p. 38). Dewey instead promoted a

democratic education through increasing pupils' consciousness and collaboration in school by ensuring that they are actively engaged in the learning process (p. 40). Influenced by Dewey's theories, Brazilian educator Paulo Freire devoted his life to the literacy and conscientization of adult *campesinos* experiencing profound poverty and oppression in rural Brazil. Like Dewey, Freire (1996) condemned the "banking concept of education" which "turns them [students] into 'containers,' into 'receptacles' to be 'filled' by the teacher" (pp. 53-55). On the contrary, Freire favored a problem-posing education in which students – in dialogue with each other and their teacher – become conscious of their reality and search for methods to "critically intervene" in their society (p. 62). Humanistic psychologist Carl Rogers (1994) maintained views on education that in many instances aligned with those of Paulo Freire. In his book *Freedom to Learn* Rogers wrote, "Generally, classrooms can be divided into two categories: classes in which students are consumers of information or classes in which students are producers of ideas" (1994, p. 8). Rogers developed the terms "tourist" and "citizen/shareholder" to distinguish between students in each of these different types of classrooms (1994, pp. 9-10). As a result of his extensive research on both learning environments and brain development, Rogers advocated for a person-centered education based upon experiential- and problem-based learning. He also praised Maria Montessori's inquiry-based learning methods but bemoaned the fact that students of low socioeconomic status are effectively prevented from accessing most Montessori school programs due to high tuition costs, lack of transportation, and other obstacles (1994, pp. 263-64). Rogers was correct in pointing out that many Montessori programs today are not accessible to poor children, including children of immigrant parents. Thus, the project of public Montessori schools is exceedingly important.

A return to traditional teaching methods. Some of the educational options available to

students in New York City include public schools, private schools, and public charter schools. Since virtually all new immigrant families cannot afford to pay exorbitant private school tuition, some parents have turned to charter schools in hopes of obtaining a quality education for their child. The NYC Montessori Charter School will serve as the site of my research, and although this school is a public charter school, it follows the instructional methods of Dr. Maria Montessori and is the only one of its kind in New York City. In contrast, many other charter schools in New York City rely upon very traditional teaching techniques.

It is necessary to examine Charter Management Organization (CMO) schools because many Black and Latino parents choose these types of school for their children (91% and 76% respectively) (Goodman, 2013, p. 89). In her article “Charter Management Organizations and the Regulated Environment: Is It Worth the Price?” Joan Goodman (2013) describes the exceedingly rule-ordered environment of many urban CMO schools. While Goodman notes some positive attributes of these schools (e.g. high expectations for all students), she identifies some problematic practices within these “No Excuses” schools, so called because the schools accept no excuses for academic failure or noncompliance with their behavioral codes. Among many questionable practices, Goodman details the extreme vigilance that teachers must have over their students in order to monitor compliance, the punishments/rewards behavioral systems employed by the schools through “Choice Charts” and “character cards,” and even the practice of shaming students for infractions by requiring them to wear a special shirt or spend the day in complete silence (2013, pp. 89-91). Goodman argues, “Children’s initiative is suppressed in favor of conformity, autonomy in favor of heteronomy. The goal is to meet performance criteria, while internal interests remain unexpressed and unexplored” (2013, p. 91). Compared to progressive educators, such as Dewey, Freire, and Rogers, “No Excuses” charter schools – attended by many

Latino immigrant students – seem not only old-fashioned but some of their practices may, in fact, be harmful to a child’s development.

Ramon Griffin (2014) employs postcolonial theory in analyzing contemporary discipline policies and behavioral norms in “No Excuses” charter schools. Griffin reveals that his duties as a former Dean of Students at a New Orleans charter school involved policing young black and brown bodies to ensure compliance with the school’s strict uniform policy instead of focusing on issues related to teaching and learning. In a Montessori school, freedom to pursue individual interests motivates student learning. On the other hand, many “No Excuses” charter schools rely upon traditional teaching methods in order to prepare students for state tests. Therefore, student compliance, even when it seemingly has nothing to do with the school’s curriculum, must be enforced through highly regulated routines and systems. Likewise, after completing 18 months of fieldwork in one “No Excuses” charter school, sociologist and educational researcher Joanne W. Golann (2015) noted that administration and faculty in many of these types of charter schools (primarily young and White in the school that served as the site of Golann’s research) push for high academic performance on high-stakes testing while simultaneously reinforcing structural inequalities (2015, p. 115). Golann suggests that urban educators look into student-centered approaches to education and cites the Montessori Method as a model that could provide students with structure while still allowing them to have a voice within the classroom (2015, p. 116).

Quality of Public Education for Latino Immigrant Students

Many authors agree that the quality of education available to Latino immigrant students and ELLs in New York City is substandard. In “Welcome to New York, Now Go Home!” Noguera (2003) contends:

The hopeful imagery of the Statue of Liberty notwithstanding, New York City has always

been a cold, mean, and hard-hearted place, especially for recent immigrants ... nowhere is the harshness of the immigrant experience in New York more clearly observed than in the city's notorious public schools. (2003, p. 80)

Noguera delineates some of the problems that these students face: dilapidated facilities, unqualified teachers, and administrations that do not adequately address the multifaceted needs of their students (2003, p. 82). Likewise, Professor of Education at Columbia University's Teacher's College Regina Cortina (2003) notes that less-experienced, less-educated teachers teach some of New York City's poorest immigrant students (2003, p. 64). UCLA Professors Marcelo and Carola Suárez-Orozco (2008) concur that immigrant children usually attend "overcrowded, understaffed schools that have high rates of turnover" and that are "poorly resourced and maintain low academic expectations" (2008, p. 40-41). In their many observations of ENL classes, the researchers also "found a culture of 'goofing off'" and stated that in several classes "they saw only a quarter of the students, or fewer, working on task" (2008, p. 99-100). Furthermore, they also point out the threat of violence *inside* – not merely surrounding – many immigrants' schools in impoverished, urban areas (2008, p. 40-41).

Perhaps most disturbing is the fact that Latino ELLs are consistently referred for Special Education (SPED) at a higher rate than their White peers. While The National Center for Education Statistics (2015) reports that around 13% of public school children are identified as having learning disabilities, the NYC DOE Demographic Report (2013) states that 21.6% of ELLs citywide have been referred for Special Education. The figures are even higher for the Bronx (24.6%) and Staten Island (34.8%) (2013, p. 6). These numbers are significantly higher than English-speaking public schoolchildren who receive SPED services. Seemingly, school personnel have not been trained to distinguish between students with learning disabilities and

students who have not yet attained English proficiency. However, Cortina (2003) suggests an ominous motive for the discrepancy of these statistics. She warns that placing minority students and ELLs in SPED programs increases a school's overall performance, which ultimately increases funding for the school (2003, p. 60). In light of this assertion, the project of providing Latino immigrant students with progressive educational opportunities appears even more crucial.

Dr. Maria Montessori

Upon earning an M.D. from the University of Rome at 26 years of age, Dr. Maria Montessori (1870-1952) became the first female doctor in Italy. After practicing medicine for many years, she became interested in child development and child psychology (Montessori, 1961, p. ix). In 1907 Dr. Montessori was asked to start a day-care in San Lorenzo, Italy, for young, developmentally delayed children of impoverished families. Remarkably, the children in Dr. Montessori's *Casa dei Bambini* or "Children's House" achieved great progress, and many of them actually outperformed children without developmental delays on state educational exams (Yezbick, 2007, p. 6). In 1909 Dr. Montessori published *The Montessori Method*, an exposition on her theories of child development and pedagogical methods (Montessori, 1961, p. x).

The Montessori Method. Michelle Yezbick (2007), director of a tuition-free Montessori public school in California, explains that among the major themes that Dr. Montessori believed crucial to a child's successful development were a "prepared environment" and attention to "sensitive periods" and the "absorbent mind." Through scientific observation of children, Dr. Montessori became aware of the need to provide occasions for "auto-education" (2007, p. 7). She believed in giving children the autonomy to explore a prepared environment consisting of practical, child-sized household items (a broom, a dustpan, sponges, etc.); plants; animals; and specially-designed, manipulative learning materials. Yezbick views the freedom of movement

and the autonomy afforded by the prepared environment of many Montessori classrooms as dismantling traditional power structures normally found in classrooms and reflective of the ideas promoted by critical educators, such as Paulo Freire, Ira Shor, Peter McLaren, and Henry Giroux (2007, p. 20). In fact, Trevor Eissler (2009) even recognized the “freedom to fail” that exists in a Montessori classroom. Whereas a fear of failure (on behalf of both students and teachers) can permeate a traditional classroom, Eissler argued that failure is an integral part of the learning process in a Montessori classroom. Dr. Montessori was aware of the need to ensure the safety and well-being of all children and consequently advocated a “freedom within limits” for her students (2009, p. 33). Nevertheless, barring disrespect or harm to fellow students and misuse of learning materials, a student in a Montessori classroom is at liberty to choose his or her own path of learning, and in this regard Dr. Montessori urges educators to “follow the child and his interest” (Montessori, 1961, p. 103).

In addition to “following the child,” the Montessori Method also insists upon an understanding of the various periods of a child’s growth. In her research on child development, Dr. Montessori identified three periods of development: birth to six years, six years to puberty (usually around 12 years), and 12 to 18 years (Montessori, 1961, p. 23). Within these periods of development, Montessori observed “sensitive periods.” Eissler (2009) defined a sensitive period as “a length of time – ranging from days to weeks to months – when a child’s brain is urging him to focus like a laser on learning a particular skill, mastering a developmental milestone, or immersing himself in an experience” (2009, p. 64). Dr. Montessori believed that the period from birth to six years was particularly important in a child’s development and referred to children in this stage as having an “Absorbent Mind.” She wrote, “Impressions do not merely enter [a child’s] mind; they form it. They incarnate themselves in him. The child creates his own ‘mental

muscles,' using for this what he finds in the world about him (Eissler, 2009, p. 80). Yezbick (2007) maintained that Dr. Montessori believed that educators should carefully observe their students in order to introduce individualized lessons and materials at the appropriate time (2007, p. 19). Eissler (2009) has listed other hallmarks of Montessori schools, which include multi-age grouping of three years to promote learning through socialization (p. 99), a lack of extrinsic punishments and rewards as a means of controlling behavior (p. 105), and uninterrupted work cycles to foster students' attention spans (p. 137).

Public Montessori education. According to the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector, there are 439 public Montessori schools in the United States serving 112,486 students. The five states with the most public Montessori schools are South Carolina, California, Arizona, Texas, and Florida. Arlington, Virginia/Washington D.C. is the city with the most public Montessori programs. In the 1960s and 1970s, Nancy McCormick Rambusch, founder of the American Montessori Society (AMS), and John McDermott, a frontrunner in the American Montessori movement in the U.S.⁵, advocated for the implementation of Montessori programs into public schools. In her article "John McDermott and the Road to Montessori Public Schools," Education professor Phyllis Povell (2014) explains that Rambusch and McDermott hoped to

⁵ Dr. Maria Montessori founded the European-based Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) in 1929. Today, AMI schools meticulously follow Dr. Montessori's educational philosophy. Nancy McCormick Rambusch, an AMI-certified teacher, established the American Montessori Society (AMS) to adapt AMI for American students. AMS schools follow Dr. Montessori's approach to education while also allowing for greater flexibility in the curriculum. For more information, visit <http://www.montessorianswers.com/ami-or-ams.html>.

make public schooling a more egalitarian space, especially for students in poverty (2014, p. 48). Continued advocacy for and research on Montessori schools in the public arena has highlighted both the valuable nature as well as the challenging aspects of this work.

Challenges. The progressive nature of the Montessori Method contrasts sharply with many public schools and “No Excuses” charter schools that rely upon traditional teaching methods and teacher-centered approaches in order to meet testing requirements. Thus, when a public school endeavors to “follow the child” as Dr. Montessori advocated, tensions naturally arise. In their article “Public Montessori Elementary Schools: A Delicate Balance,” education researchers Angela Murray and Vicki Peyton (2008) analyzed the challenges of managing public Montessori schools and acknowledged the inherent difficulty of developing a child-centered curriculum while simultaneously meeting state and federal requirements for public schools. Murray and Peyton surveyed nearly one-third (32.3%) of the public Montessori elementary schools in the United States. A majority of respondents were school principals. About one-third of the schools that were surveyed reported that Students of Color made up a majority of their enrollment (2008, p. 26). When asked about concerns, the participants listed “budget cuts” and “federal and state requirements” as the biggest obstacles to implementing the Montessori Method (2008, p. 29).

Educational psychologist Almut Klara Zieher and educational anthropologist Jan Armstrong (2016) recently examined how a group of seven educators balanced their student-centered, pedagogical philosophies with the demands of teaching in a public school. During interviews with the teachers, the authors noted that some teachers likely engaged in emotion suppression, a reflection of an attempt to balance the quandaries that the public Montessori teachers encounter in their professional lives. While the authors acknowledge that

these teachers could perhaps be more effective if they did not have to engage in this process, the researchers concluded that for now, there seems to be no one “best way” of achieving such a balance (2016, p. 52).

Benefits. Although there are inherent challenges in creating a public Montessori school, there are benefits as well. Educational researchers, historians, and psychologists have all documented benefits to public Montessori programs, including reducing the impact of poverty on families in need, helping to increase Latino students’ pre-academic skills, giving students an advantage on college entrance exams, and aiding students suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Educational historian Keith Whitescarver (2012) recently reported on a revolutionary nonprofit organization called Crossway Community located in Kensington, Maryland, a suburb outside of Washington D.C. In their more than 20 years of existence, they have offered a variety of services to single mothers enduring abusive relationships, poverty, and homelessness. Crossway Community started a preschool, Crossway Montessori (3-6 years of age), in order to offer progressive education to the young children of these mothers. Originally opposed to the idea of charter schools, the school board in Kensington, Maryland, recently approved of Crossway’s charter application for a Montessori elementary school because of the success of their early-childhood Montessori program. They hope to use the Montessori school program as a way to promote peace and eliminate poverty (2012, p. 21).

Educational researcher Arya Ansari and applied developmental psychologist Adam Winsler (2014) recently conducted a study that measured the school-readiness gains of low-income Latino and Black students in two different pre-kindergarten programs in Miami: an early-childhood Montessori program as well as a more conventional Pre-K program. Through

their extensive research examining these educational programs, the authors concluded that Latino students, who often enter Pre-K programs at a strong disadvantage from their White peers, showed significant gains after attending a Montessori Pre-Kindergarten program. Specifically, the authors recorded that children in the Montessori classroom saw 25-30% gains in pre-academic skills on the LAP-D (Learning Accomplishment Profile-Diagnostic) versus 15-20% gains of children learning in conventional classrooms (2014, p. 1077). The authors speculate that Latino students and ELLs may benefit from Montessori programs because of the emphasis on phonics and because of many programs' incorporation of students' home cultures into the curriculum, allowing for an easier transition into the American educational system.

Likewise, in her report *Outcomes for Students in a Montessori Program: A Longitudinal Study of the Experience in the Milwaukee Public Schools*, Kathryn Dohrmann (2003) describes a study that compared two groups of students attending traditional high schools. One group of students had attended a public Montessori program for their K-5 education whereas the other group (controlled for gender, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status) had never attended a Montessori program. Students who had attended the public, elementary Montessori program performed significantly higher on the Math and Science sections of the ACT and WKCE (Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examination) (2003, p. 3).

In addition to improving academic skills, Jacqueline Cossentino, Ed.D. (2015) has recognized that the nature of a Montessori program can reduce the negative effects of students who have experienced trauma. In her position as principal of a large, urban public Montessori school, Cossentino has had students who have experienced either household dysfunction, such as domestic violence, substance abuse, or imprisonment of family members, or other severe forms of abuse, such as physical, emotional, or sexual abuse (2015, p. 2). From her experience and

research, Cossentino concludes, “With their emphasis on movement, purposeful exploration, self-correction, and mindfulness, Montessori environments turn out to be ideal settings for developing long-term capacities for resilience and self-reliance” (2015, p. 1). Clearly, there are many reasons for supporting public Montessori programs, and my project will hopefully add to the existing body of research by determining whether or not a Montessori educational model, especially as it is carried out at NYCMCS, is helpful to ELLs.

Methodology

I conducted research for this article over eight weeks at the New York City Montessori Charter School during the fall of 2016. My research at the school consisted of twice-weekly observations of various classrooms and interviews with faculty and staff. For the first two weeks, I observed several regular-education classrooms to gain a general understanding of the Montessori Method as implemented by NYCMCS. Beginning in early October, I began regular observations of the ENL classroom. In addition, interviews with the principal and several faculty members gave me a range of perspectives on the tensions inherent in a Montessori public school and the ways in which different actors collaborate to benefit ELLs. An examination of numerous documents on the NYCMCS website as well as NYSED documents pertaining to the school complemented my research.

In order to supplement my observations, interviews, and review of government documents, I also conducted research outside of NYCMCS. For example, I observed a class at West Side Montessori School (WSMS), a private Montessori school and teacher training center in the Upper West Side of Manhattan in New York City. The Principal at NYCMCS had suggested that I visit WSMS in order to gain a greater understanding of Montessori in its “true” form (i.e. WSMS’s precise implementation of the Montessori Method as a private school not

beholden to various requirements of the state). At WSMS, I interviewed a long-time educator, former public school teacher, and teacher trainer who was able to discuss the tensions characteristic of public Montessori schools. Finally, I interviewed two key stakeholders affiliated with the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector, one of whom who has had extensive experience teaching English as a New Language.

Montessori Teaching Methods

During my eight weeks of observations at NYCMCS, I was able to identify several progressive teaching methods. For example, one of the differences that I first noticed between traditional classrooms and classrooms at NYCMCS was the freedom of movement afforded all students, who are allowed to learn in the location and position that best suits them. If they need to get up and stretch or take a bathroom break, they do not need to notify a teacher. Student bodies are not policed in the same way that Ramon Griffin bemoaned in his former role at a “No Excuses” charter school in New Orleans, Louisiana. Furthermore, students do not wear uniforms but abide by a flexible, age-appropriate dress-code (NYCMCS Family Handbook, 2011). As other authors mentioned in this article have pointed out, these approaches may provide benefits to all students. Thus, I would like to focus on three hallmarks of the Montessori Method that I identified through observations and interviews with faculty, staff, and outside experts that seem particularly valuable to the academic development of ELLs: the process of differentiation; the use of manipulatives, referred to as Montessori materials; and the many opportunities provided for student conversation.

Differentiation

According to Carol Ann Tomlinson (2000), differentiation refers to the modification of four classroom elements (the instructional content, the learning process/activities, the finished

products, or the learning environment) in order to meet individual student's needs. Today's typical classroom, especially in the elementary grades, contains a diverse group of learners, and educators must address their students' different learning styles, interests, and abilities in order to foster academic growth and curiosity in their students (2000, p. 1). As a teacher in traditional schools, including charter schools, I was encouraged to occasionally provide my students with differentiated instruction. In contrast, Dr. Montessori insisted that educators follow the child. Thus, a Montessori approach is, by its very nature, a differentiated approach to teaching and learning – not something that happens for 30-45 minutes each day. In her seminal work *The Montessori Method*, Dr. Montessori spoke about her educational methods, which inherently suit the individual child:

The directress [teacher] is a diagnostician of each child's educational profile. She notes the child's physical development, previous learning, and readiness for new learning experiences; and she is aware of each child's special interests and needs. She is to ensure that the learning environment contains the materials and opportunities that excite children's desire to learn and become independent. She then guides, but does not push, each child to the appropriate activity, material, or apparatus (2004, p. 49).

NYCMCS 4th and 5th Grade Teacher Jessica Haas explains how Dr. Montessori's concept of following the child (i.e. differentiation) functions at NYCMCS:

Here, there is a lot of space for differentiation. I never deliver a lesson with all of the children sitting at a desk looking up at the board. We do a lot of small group instruction. Even two students at a lesson is common. We meet children where they are" (J. Haas, personal communication, December 6, 2016).

My personal observations confirmed that this is the case at NYCMCS. Each classroom has two

teachers, which I believe aids the process of differentiation. Many times, I observed the lead teacher delivering a lesson to a small group of students while the assistant teacher circulated throughout the room, offering assistance to individual students and small, cooperative groups.

The concept of differentiation or allowing students to choose their learning path, does not mean that students have free rein to do *anything* that they want. Dr. Montessori (2004) advocated a freedom within limits for students. In other words, she wanted students to be autonomous and to have a voice within the classroom; however, she believed that it was the teacher's responsibility to place some necessary limits upon this freedom by requiring the child to work cooperatively within the prepared environment (i.e. a classroom with many manipulatives and opportunities in which to learn) in order to progress academically and socially (2004, p. 45). At NYCMCS, students complete a "Weekly Work Plan" each Monday morning. When they fill out their plan, they have the freedom to choose from a variety of age appropriate activities and tasks to complete for the week. The day that I observed students completing their "Weekly Work Plans," all students were engaged in the activity and took it seriously, which confirms Dr. Montessori's belief that there is a positive correlation between a student's input in his or her own learning and a student's motivation for learning (2004, p. 49).

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
Language (pick 1)	Reading for Meaning	Reading for Meaning	Reading for Meaning	Reading for Meaning
	Language Workbook	Language Workbook	Language Workbook	Language Workbook
	Word Study: Antonyms	Word Study: Antonyms	Word Study: Antonyms	Word Study: Antonyms
Math (pick 1)	Operation: Stamp Game addition	Operation: Stamp Game addition	Operation: Stamp Game addition	Operation: Stamp Game addition
	Facts: Object Subtraction	Facts: Object Subtraction	Facts: Object Subtraction	Facts: Object Subtraction
	Money Cards: Like Coins \$ Long Chain	Money Cards: Like Coins \$ Long Chain	Money Cards: Like Coins \$ Long Chain	Money Cards: Like Coins \$ Long Chain
Lesson				
Culture				
Other	Copy Spelling Words ABC Order			

Figure 1. Each Monday, students at NYCMCS complete a “Weekly Work Plan” to organize their learning activities for the week. Photo from Insideschools.org (2017)

Montessori Materials

One tangible difference that distinguishes a Montessori school from a traditional school is the extensive use of manipulatives, referred to as Montessori materials. Each classroom in a Montessori school – including NYCMCS – is equipped with a variety of Montessori materials that have been created by AMS-approved vendors. These manipulatives are aesthetically pleasing, appealing to the senses, grouped by subject (art, language, math, science, etc.), and arranged on shelves throughout the room. Pamela Sailsman, 4th and 5th grade teacher at NYCMCS, appreciates the Montessori materials for allowing her to offer remedial lessons to the ELLs in her classroom. For example, she especially likes the moveable alphabet, a common

fixture in many Montessori classrooms, that allows her to review blends and digraphs with her students. She argues that students learn better when complex, abstract content can be made more concrete (P. Sailsman, personal communication, Dec. 15, 2016).



Figure 2. A child works with a moveable alphabet. Photo from LivingMontessoriNow.com (2017)

During my visits to NYCMCS, I witnessed the frequent use of Montessori materials. In fact, it is hard to imagine a lesson in the Montessori classroom that doesn't rely upon manipulatives of some sort. For instance, I observed students using a wide variety of math materials, such as a checkerboard cloth, number tiles, and math beads to learn about place value, multiplication, and division. Students also enjoyed using several different types of cards to practice language arts concepts, such as homophones, vocabulary words, and reading

comprehension, and they also used manipulatives to learn about historical events. In many cases, I witnessed ELLs working with a native English-speaking peer to complete an activity using these manipulatives.



Figure 3. A child works with math beads from his classroom's "Bead Wall" at NYCMCS. Photo from Insideschools.org (2017)

The NYCMCS Prospectus (2010) outlines the school's mission and instructional design. The Prospectus states, "An important Montessori tenet is: 'The way to the brain is through the hands'" (2010, "Prospectus," p. 1). This quote demonstrates the importance of manipulatives, especially for ELLs or children with special needs, and establishes NYCMCS as a school that intends to uphold this research-based hallmark of the Montessori Method. In addition, it is written in the Prospectus (2010) and was confirmed by the ENL teacher (M. Levy, personal

communication, November 17, 2016) that NYCMCS uses the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) Model to support the English proficiency of ELLs. The SIOP Model (2017) is a research-based framework for planning and delivering lessons to ELLs. Many components of the SIOP Model, such as the use of visuals and manipulatives, blend well with the principles of the Montessori Method, creating a hybrid instructional approach beneficial to students learning a new language.

Student Conversation

Having worked in and visited a variety of school settings, I can attest that the Montessori Method naturally encourages conversation among students, a practice that is exceptionally important for students learning a new language. Greater student autonomy in conjunction with multi-age classrooms in Montessori schools stimulate student discussions on a daily basis. On multiple occasions in the regular education classrooms at NYCMCS, I witnessed older students assisting younger students with their school work and other routine tasks, such as completing their “Weekly Work Plan” or tending to the plants and animals in the classroom. According to Sara Suchman, a former ENL teacher in both independent and public schools and the current Director of Coaching and School Services at The National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector⁶, Montessori classrooms provide ELLs numerous opportunities to experiment with language. She argued that “teacher-centered classrooms have more teacher-talk, whereas Montessori classrooms allow for more peer collaboration,” which fosters “students’ speaking and listening skills” (S. Suchman, personal communication, Dec. 5, 2016). Moreover, Suchman

⁶ For more information on the work of the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector, see <http://www.public-montessori.org/>.

noted that beginner ELLs usually go through a “silent period,” a phase in which they do not orally communicate in the new language. Yet, as she pointed out, this is an accepted way of learning in a Montessori classroom. Indeed, during my observations, I witnessed a student move from a “silent period,” which was respected by the faculty, to a phase in which he began to produce short sentences.

Within the ENL classroom itself, ENL teacher Melissa Levy provides her students with ample opportunities to communicate with each other. I observed a variety of Ms. Levy’s classes during my time at the school. Most of the classes I observed were pull-out classes⁷ that consisted of small groups of students (2-8 students per class), and a majority of the students that I observed were in grades K-3. Ms. Levy usually begins each class, which lasts approximately 20 minutes, with a conversation starter. On different occasions, Ms. Levy’s small groups discussed their learning goals for the year, their plans for the weekend, and upcoming holidays among many other topics. At times, students worked together to complete an interactive “Weather Club” poster. Student discussions about the correct date, the weather outside, and appropriate clothing for the child on the poster guided this activity. Additionally, Ms. Levy regularly incorporates games into her lessons that foster conversation among students. On multiple occasions, I

⁷ A pull-out model involves removing ELLs from the mainstream classroom for ENL instruction. Students may be grouped heterogeneously or by proficiency. Alternatively, a push-in model refers to a teacher providing assistance to ELLs in their regular education classroom. The model of instruction and the number of minutes per week each ELL receives is governed by the NYSED’s Commissioner’s Regulations 154 (CR Part 154). For more information, see Baez, De Jesus, and Bellis (2015).

witnessed students playing a bingo game and a listening skills game. During these activities, all students were engaged and held energetic conversations about the topic at hand. Finally, Ms. Levy stated that the school has implemented certain aspects of the Responsive Classroom program,⁸ including daily “Morning Meetings.” She believes that these meetings, which include greetings, sharing stories or information, group activities, and a morning message (“Morning Meeting,” 2017), support ELLs’ conversation skills. “Community Meetings” that are held once or twice a year and include skits or songs also teach ELLs a specific set of vocabulary (M. Levy, personal communication, January 18, 2017).

⁸ According to the developers of the program, “*Responsive Classroom* is a research-based approach to K-8 teaching that focuses on the strong link between academic success and social-emotional learning (SEL).” For more information, visit <https://www.responsiveclassroom.org/>.



Figure 4. A typical work period at NYCMCS includes independent work, partner work, cooperative groups, and numerous student conversations. Photo from Insideschools.org (2017)

Montessori Disciplinary Methods

Research has shown that immigrant students are at a greater risk of developing posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Bal and Perzigan 2013) and multiple studies focusing on the mental health of Latino immigrant youth (Kataoka et al. 2003; Kataoka et al. 2009) conclude that these students are at a greater risk of witnessing as well as experiencing community violence. As a result, Latino immigrant children often need specialized mental health care, such

as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)⁹, but oftentimes they do not receive these services for a variety of reasons, including lack of health insurance and cultural norms. Kataoka et al. (2003) states that “schools have long been identified as an ideal entry point for improving access to mental health services for children” (2003, p. 311). However, Director of Research at the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector, Jacqueline Cossentino, Ed.D., argues that many traditional schools are not prepared to offer the necessary social and emotional support that many Latino immigrant youth need. Nevertheless, the nature of Montessori schools makes them more suited to managing these concerns. She contends:

Schools, in general, aren't as effective at responding to chronic stress as they are to acute events. Montessori schools, however, are, by design, more likely to meet the needs of families who have experienced trauma because they view children holistically and because Montessori naturally incorporates activities that are similar to the practice of mindfulness, which research has shown increases wellbeing. (p. 3).

In my visits to NYCMCS I saw evidence that a Montessori approach to discipline has the potential to benefit immigrant students.

There are many differences between the approach to discipline typically found in a traditional school and that in a Montessori school. During my observations, I noticed that in nearly all classrooms, “calm down” areas offered students a safe space to help them regulate their emotions. What I did *not* see were any “Choice Charts” or character cards to coerce

⁹ Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is a short-term, goal-oriented type of psychotherapy (talk therapy) that teaches patients problem-solving skills, such as how to cope with negative situations and how to regulate their emotions.

students into exhibiting positive behavior like Goodman (2013) described in her research. In NYCMCS (and all Montessori schools) rewards and punishments do not exist. In fact, Dr. Montessori (2004) stated that “punishment as commonly understood is always a form of *repression*” (2004, p. 78). Instead, there are *natural consequences* to misbehavior. For example, if a student breaks the crayons in his or her classroom, the natural consequence is for the student to resolve the situation by repairing the broken crayons or procuring some new ones. Indeed, the NYC School Survey Report for the 2015-2016 school year indicates that 67% of teachers believe that a majority of adults at NYCMCS “recognize disruptive behavior as social-emotional learning opportunities” (2016, p. 12). Additionally, 75% of teachers specified that a majority of adults at the school teach students “the skills they need to regulate their behavior (i.e. by focusing their attention, controlling their emotions, or managing their thinking, behavior, and feelings)” (2016, p. 12).

NYCMCS faculty as well as staff members from the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector reiterated the belief that students respond better to positive discipline. NYCMCS ENL Teacher Melissa Levy explained that Principal Abeku Hayes has been instrumental in bringing about positive changes to school culture in recent years. The school also employs a Director of School Culture and has created a Behavior Management Committee that works with faculty and students to maintain positive, fair, and consistent disciplinary practices school-wide. Additionally, Levy reports that the NYCMCS counselor has begun using a social-emotional learning program called *Second Step* to teach students how to recognize and handle their emotions and how to positively resolve disagreements. Teachers are able to reinforce *Second Step* lessons in the classroom as well. Referring to her classroom management style, Levy says, “My personal philosophy is not authoritarian. I think if you can work out the

behavioral issues with positive discipline, then that is better for the children psychologically ... Kids need to be supported and nurtured. They do better that way” (M. Levy, personal communication, November 17, 2016). Pamela Sailsman, NYCMCS 4th and 5th grade teacher, echoed this sentiment. Sailsman believes that a Montessori approach benefits her students because there is a focus on developing the whole child, and students are comfortable with being “different” from everyone else because they understand that everyone is on a different level. She also believes that the core components of the Montessori Method, including freedom of movement, greater academic autonomy, small groups and one-on-one instruction, etc. reduces misbehaviors. Sara Suchman of the National Center for Montessori in the Public Center stated that there is “a radical focus on meeting the child’s needs” in a Montessori school. For example, when misbehaviors occur, teachers help students self-regulate instead of meting out harsh punishments that may lead to an escalation of behaviors. In a Montessori school, she explains, there is a “respect and awe for the child” (S. Suchman, personal communication, December 5, 2016).



Figure 5. A small-group lesson at NYCMCS; small group and one-on-one instruction as well as greater freedoms afforded to students have been shown to support social and emotional wellbeing. Photo from Insideschools.org (2017)

Areas of Tension within the Project of Public Montessori Schools

Nearly everyone I spoke with about public Montessori schools acknowledged the inherent challenges found in this approach to education. In short, the entities governing public Montessori schools in New York, the New York State Education Department (NYSED) and the American Montessori Society (AMS), maintain different philosophies of education. Although charter schools enjoy greater autonomy than traditional district schools, a public Montessori school, such as NYCMCS, must still adhere to state and federal requirements, especially testing

requirements, while also ensuring that tenets of the Montessori Method are followed. At times, this may seem like an impossible task. For example, in order to determine whether or not a student is ready for the next grade level, a Montessori-trained teacher will rely upon formative assessments¹⁰, students' self-assessments, and portfolios of student work whereas the NYSED favors using the results of high-stakes, standardized assessments for the purpose of student promotion ("Students at the Center," n.d.).

When a traditional district school adopts a Montessori educational model without garnering support for the transition from all faculty and staff, tensions naturally arise, explains Beverly Smith, Assistant Head of School at West Side Montessori School, a private Montessori school in Manhattan's Upper West Side. Smith began her career as a public school teacher but explained that she became interested in Montessori education after having some students in her class who were formerly enrolled in a Montessori program. These students regularly exhibited creativity, inquisitiveness, and a high degree of independence, so she resolved to explore the Montessori Method in greater detail. She has trained public school teachers in the Montessori Method and has found that while some faculty are ready for it, others are not. Such a divide in a

¹⁰ According to the West Virginia Department of Education, "the formative assessment process provides information needed to adjust teaching and learning while they are still happening. The process serves as practice for the student and a check for understanding during the learning process. The formative assessment process guides teachers in making decisions about future instruction." Examples of formative assessment are observations, questioning, discussions, exit tickets, graphic organizers, kinesthetic assessments, etc. For more information, visit <https://wvde.state.wv.us/teach21/ExamplesofFormativeAssessment.html>.

school over educational philosophies inevitably causes problems. In addition, some public school teachers who completed Smith's Montessori training have been unwillingly transferred by their districts to non-Montessori public schools after a few short years in the Montessori public school. This, of course, does not provide teachers and students with consistency nor is it good for the general morale of the school (B. Smith, personal communication, November 7, 2016).

Fortunately, NYCMCS was established as a public Montessori school since its inception. Thus, teachers and staff that apply to work for the school should theoretically be committed to the project of public Montessori schools.

Faculty members at NYCMCS also feel pressured to meet the conflicting demands of both the NYSED and the AMS. Jessica Haas, 4th and 5th grade teacher at NYCMCS, explains the challenges of teaching in a public Montessori school, "My students must take state tests, so we have to make sure that we are touching every standard for every child. In a nonpublic school, there would be more time for remedial work. Instead, here I push them to do more challenging work" (J. Haas, personal communication, December 6, 2016). In my personal observations, I noticed many students working with Montessori materials while others were engaged in creative projects; however, students in some classes that I observed were completing test-prep materials either independently or in small groups. This is likely a reflection of the school's need to achieve growth on state tests in order to be eligible for a renewal of their charter.

Pamela Sailsman, also a 4th and 5th grade teacher at NYCMCS, explains that public Montessori schools can also experience difficulties when students transfer to the school in the upper elementary grades without having prior exposure to the Montessori Method. This can present challenges for both students and teachers as Montessori students are generally expected to be self-motivated, which can be a difficult adjustment for students coming from teacher-

centered schools. Perhaps summer workshops could address this dilemma by providing struggling students with remediation as well as offering transfer students more exposure to the Montessori Method before beginning school in the fall.

Sailsman also remarked that the key to achieving “the very delicate balance” of a public Montessori school is having leadership that understands both components. In order to be a successful Montessori public charter school, the principal must recognize the importance of meeting the requirements of the NYSED while simultaneously implementing a Montessori approach. She explained that she feels the school is on the right track under the leadership of the current Principal, Mr. Abeku Hayes, as he is able to effectively navigate both of these worlds (P. Sailsman, personal communication, December 15, 2016).

In their article “Public Montessori Elementary Schools: A Delicate Balance,” Angela Murray and Vicki Peyton (2008) highlighted public Montessori elementary school principals’ greatest concerns: budget cuts (2008, p. 29). Indeed, funding is an issue with which charter school administrators must contend as they receive their funding from government sources unlike private Montessori schools which receive a majority of their funding from tuition and fees. According to the New York City Charter School Center (2016), charter schools receive less funding than traditional district schools, and before 2014 (which would have affected NYCMCS in its first 3 years of existence), charter schools did not receive financial assistance for facilities. Not surprisingly, NYCMCS has had to deal with funding issues with regards to their Pre-Kindergarten program. According to a *Politico* report by Eliza Shapiro (2015), former NYCMCS principal and co-founder, Gina Sardi, stated that the school had not received all of the bridge loans necessary to fund the Pre-Kindergarten program that year (2015, p. 3). In my personal observations, I noticed that each regular education classroom was equipped with a vast array of

Montessori materials. To be sure, a school cannot faithfully carry out the Montessori Method without these materials because the Montessori educational approach heavily relies upon a variety of manipulatives to meet the needs of diverse learners. The American Montessori Society (AMS) School Accreditation Commission and the AMS Teacher Education Action Commission (2017) suggest a lengthy list of Montessori materials for each grade band, which of course can be costly for a school.

Funding also comes into play within the ENL classroom itself. 18% of the of 277 students enrolled in grades K-5 at NYCMCS have been identified as English Language Learners. Thus, the one ENL teacher employed by the school is responsible for the acquisition of English of approximately 50 students. As a result of such a high caseload of students, the ENL lessons are unavoidably short (about 20 minutes per lesson during my observations) in order to meet the needs of all ELLs within the school. If the school were financially able to hire a second ENL teacher or an ENL teacher assistant, ELLs would likely be able to receive more extensive services. This unfortunately may not be possible for a public charter school that must make difficult financial decisions each day.

As has been demonstrated in this article, meeting the demands of the state and fulfilling the requirements of the AMS simultaneously is not an easy feat. A report issued on May 9, 2016, by the NYSED highlights some areas of growth at NYCMCS as well as some areas that need improvement. The school was given a 3-year renewal with the stipulation that corrective action be taken in order to resolve some of the issues that the New York State Education Department's Board of Regents identified as problems, such as lower than average test scores. Although the school's state test scores were lower than the district average for the past two years, the 2014-2015 academic year saw significant gains in Math scores and slight gains for English Language

Arts (ELA) scores (2016, Ebert, p. 32). The school has also made improvements from the 2013-2014 school year to the 2014-2015 school year in enrolling more economically-disadvantaged students, more ELLs, and more students with disabilities (2016, p. 34).

Conclusion

In this article, I have examined the advantages that a Montessori approach to education can provide to English Language Learners. Specifically, I examined the project of public Montessori schools, which are more accessible to families of immigrant ELLs than private Montessori institutions. With an interest in public Montessori schools in mind, I based my research on the New York City Montessori Charter School, a public charter school located in Community School District 7 in the South Bronx. I focused on several aspects of the Montessori Method that have the potential to benefit ELLs, many of whom are from a Latin American and Caribbean background. For example, the differentiated nature of Montessori schools, the manipulatives incorporated into nearly all aspects of the Montessori curriculum, and the many opportunities for students to practice conversation are all ways in which a Montessori approach to education can foster the academic achievement of English Language Learners.

I was also particularly interested in how a unique school, such as NYCMCS, negotiates the tensions of operating in two distinct educational spaces. This led to my realization that in a school that is both public (subject to the policies and requirements of the New York State Education Department) and Montessori (responsible for delivering content according to the educational theories of Dr. Maria Montessori), tensions naturally rise. However, these tensions do not necessarily negate the positive aspects of radical approaches to education for vulnerable students, such as immigrant ELLs. Rather, competent faculty and staff that are able to negotiate the two entities (NYSED and AMS) have the potential to provide their students with an

education that is both high-quality and progressive.

Finally, I would be interested in learning the ways in which other types of progressive public education, such as public Reggio Emilia schools and project-based learning initiatives incorporated into traditional, district schools, are serving minority students, immigrant students, ELLs, and students with disabilities. Other areas of research could include progressive, public education for economically-disadvantaged students and indigenous students in Latin American countries.

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